

# Executive Summary – Dursley Parking Behaviour and Needs

## The need for the Parking Study

A comprehensive parking survey was carried out by Harris Ethical on behalf of Dursley Town Council in October 2014, with some sites revalidated in January 2015 to ensure that they reflected the actual behaviours observed.

This series of surveys was set up in response to:

- The need for further intelligence to support and validate Dursley Town Council's (DTC) emerging strategies and policy vision for the town centre and the surrounding area, driven by its current Neighbourhood Planning process.
- The need for a sound evidence base around need and public opinion to inform Stroud District Council's potential changes to parking arrangements, including the potential perceived 'loss' of car park assets in the town (i.e. the expiry of previous temporary longer stay parking arrangements in the town centre).
- The way in which parking needs to fit into the wider transport and placemaking strategy embodied in the Neighbourhood Plan, to ensure that there is enough balance of parking provision between short (i.e. under 3 hours) and longer stay parking (i.e. for businesses and employers) in the town.
- The need to be able to justify new schemes and initiatives as part of the Local Transport Review process which is currently under way, led by Gloucestershire County Council.

The results have been presented factually in a slide deck to aid interpretation and presentation, and were discussed at meeting between DTC and Stroud DC representatives on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

Constructive feedback was received from Nick Stewart and Alison Fisk at Stroud DC on the content of the presentation and the findings, and as a result this summary report and the slide deck results have been adjusted to make the issues clear surrounding this issue of balance between short and long stay parking. It also addresses the need, as the town expands its population, to ensure that businesses can still continue to function sustainably into the future.

It should be noted that the majority of the points raised in the feedback email from Nick Stewart at SDC have been accommodated in this revised report.

Finally, it should be noted that the scope of this report did not extend to consideration of the nature and operational merits of private off-road parking, nor quantifying this. However, it may be possible to include this in follow up work to support the Neighbourhood Plan

process, as part of the scope that Harris Ethical are currently investigating with Rednock School

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### **How the Parking Study was carried out**

The parking study was broken down into a series of individual components, each focusing on different aspects of parking need and demand.

The surveys were carried out on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014 (as a sample weekday avoid any early closing) and Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2014 (as a sample Saturday) over an 8 hour period on each day. A further follow up survey was carried out on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to resurvey Long Street long-stay car park and also to carry out further Dursley Transport surveys based at Sainsbury's. This was also conducted from 0800 – 1600 hours

The study covered the following scope

- Capacity and condition of car parks in Dursley town centre
- Counting car park occupancy and space turnover
- Observing parking behaviour (i.e. any bad parking practice, use of double yellows etc)
- Assessment of pavement parking and any blocking of pedestrian routes
- Quick face to face survey of people leaving/arriving at their cars asking basic questions about length of stay etc.

All Stroud District Council car parks were included plus Sainsbury's (with permission from the manager on the basis that results are shared). Dursley Town Council will take responsibility for passing on the datasets and results to Sainsbury's but this should take place as part of a coordinated approach to negotiating an improved balance in parking provision in the town centre.

## What the study showed

The key headline results are as follows:

- Out of all the car parks in Dursley, the most popular are Sainsbury's, Dursley Pool, Castle Street/Parsonage Street and May Lane car parks – less so for other sites
- Length of stay is not really an issue in the bigger car parks, with only a relatively small percentage of cars overstaying their waiting time; this relates to Sainsbury's (5.7 % of all those parked staying over 3 hrs) and Dursley Pool (6.7%).
- For Castle St/Parsonage Street the overstay percentage goes up to 14.7% and for Water Street this goes up to 31% but the latter may be more to do with its location and local needs for access/residential parking.
- The general public opinion about car parking relates to longer stay parking (12.5% of respondents raised this as an issue, and the need for more parking (again 12.5% of respondents. The 'temporary' Long Street car park was at least 80%-85% full on weekday survey days and we also know from further anecdotal evidence that it does operate to capacity level
- Of those that did mention longer term parking needs, long term parking for work and other purposes was significant but it should be noted that long stay demand also came from users who were undertaking shopping and amenity trips into Dursley
- There were specific comments around the need for more disabled and mobility parking in the town and the Castle Street 'small' car park which is a key asset close to the town centre and which was identified as a key resource within the wider Dursley transport survey.
- 80% of respondents felt strongly that the free parking was an important factor and would not be prepared to pay; this was an important consideration in choosing to shop locally.
- Proximity to the end destinations for work and shopping was seen as critical and was seen as important by 95% of all the respondents; hence the concentration of shorter parking demand in four of the central car parks.
- There were specific comments raised about car park management and circulation and how the car parks could operate more efficiently.

- There is an element of 'park and walk' car parking outside the town centre but it is not significant. A more significant impact arises from poorly parked vehicles where people are 'popping in' to visit specific shops and services causing localised issues

### **What the datasets tell us**

It is important to remember that the data collected is only a 'snapshot' in terms of parking turnover and behaviour, and whilst the survey dates were deliberately chosen to reflect a 'standard' weekday and Saturday demand, within term-time, the limited resources available meant that a longer audit period as not possible.

Due to timing the survey was carried out to the lead-up to Christmas which may have provided some 'skew' in relation to on-street demand and for short-stay shopper parking, but we are comfortable that in terms of longer stay parking demand the figures are normalised.

The survey was constructed on the basis of the more generalised feedback given through the independent Dursley transport survey (conducted as part of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process). Therefore the questions were carefully constructed to reflect the feedback already provided through that overall survey, and these results are provided as part of the dataset to support this study.

The datasets have been summarised into a series of spreadsheets which should be used on ongoing discussion and planning with Stroud District Council planning and property officers, to ensure that any rebalancing of parking provision takes into account the future spatial growth patterns within the town, and the effect of an 'short-hop' trips by car into the town centre from nearby developments (i.e. within 1- 2 miles) for shopping or other utility trips.

The results show that there will be an impact on the availability of long stay parking, although it is clearly accepted that the Long Street 'temporary' solution was always proposed historically as a valve to address displacement from the Sainsbury's scheme and latterly the Littlecombe redevelopment site. The key question is whether there is enough capacity within the existing car park provision to absorb any displacement and any further accrual of longer stay parking demand triggered by new development.

The results point to three key issues in the short to medium term, i.e. over the next 5 years

- **Key Issue 1** – Sainsbury's car park is seen by the majority of the public as a 'public' car park, although in reality it is a private car park with permission to stay for up to 3 hours. It is only 'full' at peak periods such as Christmas and there is spare capacity towards the rear of the site.

It is likely that over the short/medium term, there is capacity to allow for longer term parking within an element of the car park, if some arrangement could be reached as 'team' approach between Sainsbury's, Stroud DC and Dursley TC.

This would provide a 'valve' for longer stay parking for existing displaced spaces (from March 2015 onwards when the Long Street car park is 'taken back') and to cater for any internal demand generated from new development.

- **Key Issue 2** – Castle Street car park. The Castle Street small car park is a key asset and is centrally located. In the short term its future as a parking resource needs to be safeguarded, but it also provides a strong basis for consolidating mobility parking, motorcycle parking, secure cycle parking and community transport/taxi drop off right in the heart of the town.

This specific asset improvement would reflect many of the key findings of the transport consultation for the neighbourhood Plan some of strategic solutions currently being presented.

- **Key Issue 3** – Relocation of longer stay spaces to Water Street. The finding of the survey clearly show that Water Street actually acts informally as a longer stay car park which is not enforced.

A pragmatic solution would be to allow this car park to formally become longer stay to benefit the local residents and businesses along Silver Street, and would also allow a 'park and walk' car park for other businesses in the central area. This may only be needed as a measure if the number of spaces Sainsbury's may be willing to 'convert is limited.

For the longer term there is a much more strategic issues to be addressed which whether the town should 'predict and provide' for parking at the same level and ratios currently in place (e.g. per capita population for short stay and per capita employees for longer stay) or whether there should be much tighter controls and restraint placed on residential development generating 'short hop' trips into both short or longer stay parking.

Specifically for the Littlecombe site, DTC have consistently reiterated the importance of permeability and connectivity between the site and the town centre by foot and cycle, and therefore the future planning of Dursley should not need to cater for parking demand from a development so close to the town centre.

A further stage of work is needed to strategically examine the low-medium-high parking demand impact from Littlecombe and other proposed development sites in the Cam and Dursley area, and to assess at which point the 'tip point' for additional parking provision occurs.

## Key Recommendations

As a result of the quantitative and qualitative evidence collected, detailed recommendations will be available shortly, but the overriding issues appear to be:

- Strong support for free parking to continue to support the economic wellbeing of the town
- Need for specific improvements to car park management and circulation etc to maximise the use of what we have already
- Access and mobility parking provision levels need further attention,, especially to aid movement around the central area
- There is scope to relevance the mix of longer and short stay car parking on an incremental basis, partixcyrlrly focused on Sainsbury's as a valve with capacity to support such a scheme
- There is a considerable opportunity around the Castle Street car park and its potential use a mobility/community transport 'hub' car parks
- Long stay parking is an essential component of the parking demographic and is required to sustain future spend/tourism and amenity visitors, as well as to benefit employers in the town centre – the loss of Long Street as a temporary provision will require some immediate action in FY15/16 but needs to be followed by examination of the use of other sites, such as Water Street
- A long term strategic view on how car use from nearby new development can be discouraged and managed to avoid a 'predict and provide' approach being adopted within a constrained town centre environment, which the NP consultation has told us needs to focus on people and their access needs rather than physical parking needs.