

SURVEY OF LEWES CAR PARKS

Comments of the Friends of Lewes Society

- 1) The Friends of Lewes Society is the civic society for the town of Lewes and has been in existence since 1952. Currently it has over 500 members. Its objectives include protecting and enhancing the townscape of Lewes. Since the parking of vehicles in the town and the ability of their drivers to find a vacant space can have a major effect on the street scene the Society therefore has a strong interest in this survey.
- 2) In the Society's view it is unfortunate that there is a split responsibility for car parking in the town in that the District Council is concerned with off street car parks whilst the County Council is concerned with on street parking. This is further exacerbated by the fact that not all the off street car parks are owned by the District Council. Since the County Council will shortly be consulting about the on-street parking regime in the town it is to be hoped that any decisions proposed as a result of this survey will not be implemented until the two local authorities have together considered how the town is best served by both on and off street parking provision.
- 3) Whilst this car park report is very bulky and contains much factual information, not all of this is entirely accurate. In addition few of the surveys carried out were in the evening when it can be equally as difficult to find car parking places in the centre of the town when an event is taking place. Town centre residents want to park close to their homes at night irrespective of whether it is on or off street and although it would be difficult to find sites the possibility of more off street parking for residents on primary traffic routes should be considered.
- 4) The Society appreciates that one of the purposes of the study is to inform the emerging Local Development Framework as to what land should be allocated for off-street parking. In its view there is insufficient off street car parking at present. It notes the recommendation that 125 new spaces should be provided and, whilst it is difficult to assess the number really needed, considers that a further moderate expansion should be made possibly by decking two of the existing car parks. Whilst it agrees with the concept that some of the smaller car parks could be closed so as to improve the street scene the loss that this would represent plus the loss of the temporary Aldi car park must be added to the number needed and, as far as possible, alternative provision made in reasonable distance of the car parks to be closed.
- 5) The suggestion that additional parking provision could be made by decking one or more of the existing car parks is to be commended as there is no significant brown field land within easy walking distance of the town centre that could be utilised. It is noted that the report recommends the decking of the Brook Street car park but whilst this may be more easily achieved since it is owned by LDC, sites which are closer to the town centre are to be preferred. In any event any decked car park in this area of the town should only be done in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Phoenix area rather than in isolation. The Society's preference for decking would be the Phoenix and Waitrose/Wenban Smith car parks as both are close to one of the principal entries to the town as well as being close to the hub of commercial activity. In addition the possibility of decking or providing an underground facility in West Street should be considered as that car park is the only significant one serving the area of the town near the Town Hall and Crown Court.
- 6) The charges imposed in car parks also need careful consideration. Those nearest the town centre should be short stay of up to 4 hours, with charging on a 30 minute interval basis, so

that shoppers and tourists have convenient access to it. Those further away should be long term car parks. The charges should also be lower than the charges imposed in nearby streets for on-street parking so as to discourage street parking.

- 7) It is unfortunate that the study did not look closely at permit holder parking or the use of Private Non-Residential (PNR) parking. One of the difficulties in Lewes at present is that large employers such as the County Council and Police do not provide sufficient parking for their employees and visitors with the result that the surrounding streets are filled with cars associated with them. Although it may not be for the District Council to provide further car parks for these bodies it may need to allocate land adjacent to their premises for them to provide their own facility.
- 8) The potential for expanding car parking in both the station and Mountfield Road areas is noted, but the access to this part of the town is poor and already overloaded and so in practice only a very modest expansion in this area would be desirable. The railway station car park is one where the existing space could be better used if the District Council were to persuade Network Rail and/or Southern Railway to have a lower charge after say 10am by which time the commuters have parked.
- 9) If decking is introduced in any car park it is preferable that it is hidden by other more architecturally sensitive buildings along the façades. In addition greater attention needs to be given to making both existing and new surface level car parks more attractive by having appropriate planting in and around them. Although signing to car parks has improved in recent years more clarity is needed as to whether a car park is short or long term whilst the charges levied should be clearly visible at the entry point.

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