

ESCC's CONSULTATION CONCERNING ON STREET PARKING IN LEWES

Response of Friends of Lewes Society

1. The Friends of Lewes Society is the civic society for the town of Lewes. It has over 500 members and has been in existence since 1952. It is concerned with conserving the natural and built environment of the historic town and the surrounding countryside. It has responded to previous consultations about parking in Lewes and, in general, considers that the introduction of a controlled scheme has been of benefit to the town.
2. The Society considers it is timely to have a review of the current scheme. In so doing it considers that the County Council's objectives should include having regard to economic and other changes that have occurred since its introduction. It is also necessary to co-ordinate any changes with those that may be made by Lewes District Council following its review of off-street parking provision in the town. This is particularly important in relation to pricing policy where the fees charged in off-street car parks should be lower than those in the surrounding streets so as to discourage use of the latter.
3. Whilst the Society is in favour of improving and encouraging people to use public transport so as to reduce the need for car park provision in the town, it recognises that for many people in its rural hinterland they have no choice but to use the car as a means of transport. The Society has therefore supported the concept of increasing the off-street parking in the town, especially as a large number of off-street spaces were lost in the grounds of Lewes House. In the Society's opinion this is best achieved by tiering an existing car park, its preference being for those closest to the river and commercial centre of the town. It also considers that large employers in the town such as the County Council and Sussex Police should make a greater effort to provide more off-street parking for their employees as well better inducements for them to use public transport.
4. In relation to the on-street controlled scheme the Society considers that the coverage is about right although it realises that difficulties are created just outside the boundaries. Some of these difficulties, such as in Church Lane, Malling, could be relieved by an appropriate application of yellow lines so that traffic flow, which in this location includes a bus service, was not impeded so much. The need to balance parking provision with traffic flow, the speed of vehicles, and the effect on the street ambience is something that also needs to be given careful consideration in through roads such as Prince Edward's Road and Southover High Street. Another specific issue for consideration is verge parking; as it is allowed in some areas a misapprehension has developed that it is permitted everywhere. In the Society's view it should not be permitted and this needs to be made clear.
5. The use of a number of zones in the current scheme can give rise to difficulties for residents who live close to the edge of a zone and may impede social impact where friends or relatives live in a different zone and someone with a permit for one zone has to pay to park in another. More flexibility is therefore needed to deal with these issues.
6. As far as the days and times when the scheme is operational the Society has a firm view that Bank Holidays should be treated in the same way as Sundays with no charges being levied. Beyond that there is a need to review whether controls are needed on Saturdays in the residential areas whilst the times of operation need to be considered so that they only apply where necessary. Large or regular events like auctions or weddings (at Southover Grange) can cause particular difficulties and need to be taken into account in reaching decisions on both days and times when controls are in operation.

7. As for pricing the Society considers that there is a need for more short term parking, particularly in the central area, and that an escalating scale of charges should apply where the parking is short term. This means that if it costs 20p for the first period it would then cost 40p for the next similar period, 80p for the third subsequent period and so on in order to deter long term parking in such spaces.
8. The Society's main objection to the current scheme is the way in which it is very rigidly enforced. Although there is a need for enforcement, a number of the minor transgressions that occur, particularly when they have been caused by human error, could be dealt with in a more friendly way. For example where a vehicle is just outside the permitted bay but does not cause an obstruction, or where a visitors permit has been completed incorrectly, a note to this effect could be left on the windscreen. Another problem that needs more considerate handling is where there is a slight overrun of the time for which a parking ticket has been bought. An excess charge rather than a fine would be more appropriate in these situations. However current enforcement is not adequate near the entrance to the Maltings car park where parked vehicles often block the pedestrian route nor on school zig-zag lines at times when the school pupils are arriving or departing. Indeed as an education authority the County Council should make better provision for off street parking on its school premises.
9. The publicity given to the scheme could be improved so that visitors to the town are made more aware of it. Whilst cheap leaflets showing prices and duration allowed in various streets is one way of achieving this the Society considers that use could be made of the latest technology so that sat-nav systems show it. On the ground there is a clear need for residents only zones to be more clearly marked, particularly where there is also shared parking in the same street, so that visitors do not park in the former by mistake, obtain a ticket from nearby machine but still receive a fine.
10. The Society has been disappointed that, despite several requests, the accounts for the scheme are not easily available. Indeed the present consultation paper would have been better received if they had included a brief summary of where the proceeds from the scheme had been spent. At the outset promises were made that these proceeds would be hypothecated for transport improvements in Lewes but it is far from clear that this has been the case. This Society has long campaigned for improvements to be made to Station Street whilst other ways to spend the net proceeds on improving pedestrian and cycling facilities could be suggested.
11. A number of other issues need to be mentioned. These are that there needs to be more flexibility over the provision made for tradesmen and the charging for skips; the temporary notices used to close a parking place should be taken down in their entirety afterwards and not allowed to litter the town; and better provision needs to be made for road sweepers to pick up litter by either switching parking to the other side of the street on cleaning days, as used to be the case many years ago, or having specific days when it is not permitted in order to allow the road sweepers access. An example of where this is needed is in the first part of Old Malling Way where the accumulation of leaf debris made the pavement dangerous due to parked cars preventing the road sweeper from working. Indeed in this particular case it would help the situation and improve visibility if the yellow lines were switched to the other side of the road.