

## **West Berkshire Council Consultation on spending proposals for 2024/25:**

### **Comments by Thatcham Town Council**

#### **1 Introduction**

Thatcham Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on West Berkshire Council's proposals for 'Balancing our budget for 2024/25'. The Town Council understands the financial pressures that all Councils are under. These comments therefore suggest refinements of the proposals, which we envisage will not have significant financial impact.

Due to the timing of the consultation, these comments only address aspects of the proposals that have some connection to highways.

#### **2 Restructure parking fees and charges**

##### **2.1 Thatcham Station**

West Berkshire Council has recently consulted on its draft parking Strategy. It is important that any changes in parking fees and charges are implemented as part of an integrated strategy, and not independently.

In its response to the consultation on the draft Parking Strategy, Thatcham Town Council said:

"There is no evening bus service from Thatcham to Reading. Residents who wish to travel to Reading for the evening must either drive or go by train – and much of Thatcham is too far from the station for residents to walk home on their return. West Berkshire Council should encourage travel by public transport where possible.

The roads adjacent to Thatcham Station is the only location in Thatcham for which there is an on-street parking charge. We assume that the justification for this charge is to manage demand for parking by commuters using the station – who need to park for the whole day, but only on Monday to Friday.

The Town Council does not believe that there is justification, according to the criteria in the Statutory Guidelines, for charging at evenings and weekends on these roads.

PROPOSAL: The chargeable period for parking on-street at Thatcham Station should be reduced to 8AM to Midday, with this four-hour period having the same charge as the current daily rate."

This rationale is equally valid for the Council car park at Thatcham Station. We therefore suggest that any reduction in chargeable hours for parking in the vicinity of Thatcham Station should be applied to both on-street and off-street parking. It is likely that the number of drivers who start parking sessions in the afternoon or evening is low, so the loss in revenue would be small. The payment machines presumably record the time at which a session starts, so this loss could be readily quantified.

##### **2.2 EN2. School Streets enforcement: School Streets Permit**

Page 18 of the consultation document 'Parking Fees & Charges 2024/25 – Proposals' states:

"Whilst the number of schemes are low, it is not proposed to charge for these permits. If introduction and enforcement costs increase and income from Penalty Charge Notices is low, it may become necessary to charge in the future."

The permits for residents under the School Streets scheme are different to other types of charge. The scheme is implemented for the benefit of pupils, with a negative impact on the residents of the affected streets. The school streets permits merely reduce this negative impact.

A low income from penalty charge notices would reflect the success of the scheme in benefiting school pupils, but would give no benefit to local residents. We therefore believe that it would be unfair to penalise residents for this success by charging them for a school streets permit. Instead, any shortfall should be made up from the general fund for parking charges and penalty notices, which is ring-fenced for this type of purpose.

### 3 Reduce litter bins and dog waste bins

A large number of Thatcham residents own dogs, and the provision of dog waste bins is a valued service to them. Dog waste is one of the most frequent reasons for residents to complain to Councillors. We understand that some bins on popular dog walking routes need to be emptied three times a week. Thatcham Town Council has some dog waste bins of its own, so we understand the cost of emptying them.

One of our Councillors saw a standard domestic waste bin being used as a combined bin for dog waste and litter – see attached photos<sup>1</sup>. This is attached to a post, with a lock, which can be opened for emptying. It is likely that this bin is emptied by the refuse contractor, as part of the collection of general domestic refuse.

The volume of a standard ‘wheelie bin’ is 240 litres, which is around six times the volume of a typical dog waste bin. If this bin is emptied once a fortnight with domestic refuse, it would provide the same capacity as a dog waste bin emptied three times a week – but the cost of emptying is likely to be lower.

If these bins are emptied as part of the domestic waste collection, they will need to be adjacent to a highway, on a waste collection round. Some of the most ‘popular’ dog waste bins in Thatcham are in such locations.

We therefore suggest that West Berkshire Council investigates whether moving to emptying dog waste bins together with domestic waste collections could reduce the cost of providing this service, which might enable a greater number of dog waste bins to be retained.

If West Berkshire Council is minded to conduct a trial, we can suggest suitable locations in Thatcham.



<sup>1</sup> This is located in Exton, in the area of Winchester City Council.