

**Date:** Friday 7 December 2001  
**Time:** 10.30am to 1.00pm  
**Venue:** Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon

## **CAR PARKS IN POWYS**

Local authorities are empowered under sections 32 – 35 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to provide off-street parking places and charge for their use.

Local government authorities have a duty to maximise the use of all their resources to benefit their ratepayers and, if one issue unifies local government, it is that it could do better if it had more cash.

Predecessor authorities in Powys have consistently managed car parks as a resource for both a resource for the communities they serve and as a management tool for regulating traffic flows. Since local government reorganisation in 1996 Powys has unified the management of car parks across the county and introduced policies which are implemented at local level through the Shire committees. The three main objectives governing the provision of car parks in Powys are:-

- Provision of a safe, convenient and secure off road parking service to support the local economy of towns in Powys and provide a facility for both residents and visitors.
- The service should be self financing and able to contribute financially to other local amenity services including public conveniences and street cleansing.
- The off street parking facility should be located so that it does not have a negative impact on traffic movements on the road network particularly in urban areas.

Recently the Audit Commission researched a range of council charges made for discretionary public services. It should be noted that service charges for these services represent a significant source of income for local authorities in the United Kingdom raising £6 billion as compared with the £9 billion raised by Council tax. The research was carried out in 13 authorities, Powys County Council being one of those chosen in Wales.

In September 1999, the Commission published a document called "The Price is Right" which considered charges made for Council services such as car parks. The report was challenging in its conclusions and pointed to the fact that local authorities, generally, did not get the best from their

resources and that they did not apply charges geared to service objectives or introduce concessions aimed at different sectors of the public. In Powys these principles are understood and underlines many of the reasons why it charges for a range of services such as car parks; cattle markets; produce markets; fairs and a variety of highway permissions and licenses. These charges generate some £1.2million which is used to support other services such as street cleansing, public conveniences, litter collection, bus shelter maintenance and waste recycling.

In Powys, car parking charges, in addition to being a valuable source of income, influence parking behaviour and control parking demand. The regulation of parking in town centres through the introduction of parking orders and restrictions combined with strategically set car park charges can influence the traffic flows experienced in the town. The introduction of tariffs geared to one or two hour periods, with restrictions over these bands, can generate a turn over of four or more cars per space a day. These short-term car parks are always located in a town centre and offer parking for those wishing to make use of the town's facilities for up to two hours. Similarly, a car park managed as a long stay facility will offer discounts against the short term charges and will invariably allow all day parking and the use of season tickets. These are located further away from the town centre.

**The receipts from car parks in Powys in 2000/2001 (after deductions for their operation) enabled £351,200 to be allocated to other local services.**

Last year the County Council undertook a Best Value Review of the car parking service which included a survey of consumers. The results showed that across the County :-

- 79% were satisfied with the quality of car parks;
- 83% thought the Authority should pursue people who did not "pay and display";
- 72% thought car parking capacity was "about right";
- 78% of visitors thought that charges were reasonable.

Following the review the Council's parking services were inspected by the Audit Commission who awarded it two stars meaning that it was "Good" and "Likely to Improve". In the coming months a further review of the charging strategy will focus on the charges between the three Shires and will consider any competition which exists between towns. Car parking charges have often been the basis of complaints from Chambers of Trade who see them as detracting from the local offer. A number of National Studies have indicated, however, that this is not the case and this is borne out by Powys' own Customer Survey. In Welshpool these concerns lead the shopkeepers to introduce a 'cash back' scheme which was aimed at increasing the town's competitiveness. The statistics show, however, that there has been no real increase in the numbers of people using the car parks despite the scheme being in operation for some six months. People are far more influenced by cleanliness, safety and well maintained car parks which, preferably, contain other amenities such as toilets, waste recycling facilities or tourist information centres. The best car parks provide all of

these features whilst being conveniently positioned to allow easy access to shops and commerce.

Powys will continue to review its car parking policies to ensure that it meets the needs of its ratepayers and tourists. The Council will also ensure that the service contributes to other local services which would otherwise require funding from local taxation or cuts in other services.