

Hornbeam Road Car Park, North Walsham

Summary: The provision of a new car park at Hornbeam Road, North Walsham has been secured as part of the wider mixed use development of the former HL Foods factory site by Hopkins Homes. It was intended as an infrastructure investment to support the future growth of the town in the medium to longer-terms, rather than be a facility which would be heavily used in the short-term. Following completion during 2018-19, responsibility passed from the developers, Hopkins Homes, to the District Council and it was agreed that a different charging regime would need to be agreed beyond the Standard, Resort and Coastal classifications used by the authority as per adopted Council policy and the agreed Car Park Order.

The new Car Park Order will not be operational until early July and no formal decisions have yet been taken about the charging regime to be applied at the Hornbeam Road Car Park such that they can be included in the Car Park Order. Cabinet however has considered the impact of the place-making works to be taken forward in North Walsham Market Place during this summer under the Heritage Action Zone project which is going to restrict access to some areas of the town centre for residential and commercial property owners, which in terms of project management it is considered would be made easier if some alternative long-stay free parking could be provided in the town in support of these works.

Options considered: To keep the car park closed until the Car Park Order comes into effect in July 2021. This option is not preferable as car parking in the town will be limited due to the place-making works.

To use the Hornbeam Road car park as a free long-term car park for the duration of the place-making works, to provide additional parking and to assess demand for the car park ahead of introducing a charging structure.

Conclusions: Cabinet has considered the impact of the place-making works to be taken forward in North Walsham Market Place during the summer of 2022 under the Heritage Action Zone project which is going to restrict access to some areas of the town centre for residential and commercial property owners, which in terms of project management it is considered would be made easier if some alternative long-stay free parking could be provided in the town in support of these works. Cabinet consider that the Hornbeam Road Car Park could meet

this need at no significant cost to the Council (given that the car park hasn't existed / been operated until now) and that an initial six-month period of use without charges would be helpful in establishing and understanding future levels of demand.

Recommendations: That the Hornbeam Road Car Park, North Walsham is operated on a without charge basis for a period of 9 months from 1st April 2022, during which time a longer term charging and management strategy will be developed for this car park asset

Reasons for Recommendations: To provide alternative, free parking to minimise the impact of the place-making works on parking provision in North Walsham, during which time a longer term charging and management strategy will be developed for this car park asset.

Cabinet Member(s) Cllr R Kershaw	Ward(s) affected: North Walsham
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The provision of a new car park at Hornbeam Road, North Walsham has been secured as part of the wider mixed use development of the former HL Foods factory site by Hopkins Homes. The site lies immediately to the west of the Norwich to Sheringham railway line, adjacent to Platform 2 on North Walsham Railway station, which serves trains travelling from Norwich towards Cromer and Sheringham.

2. Background

- 2.1 As a former employment site (long-term brownfield site) the potential of the former HL Foods site to accommodate new development, which was well-related to the town centre and many services and amenities, was recognised and consent therefore granted in 2014 for a mixed use redevelopment scheme. However, the eastern part of the site lies within a Health and Safety Executive designated restricted zone of development because of its close proximity to the British Pipeline Agency gas condensate storage facility and railfreight terminal, where tanker freight trains collect condensate by-product from the Bacton Gas Terminal site, for onward use in chemical and paint production, two or three times a week.
- 2.2 The eastern part of the former HL Foods site was not able to accommodate residential development and this part of the site has therefore accommodated commercial units and a 50 space public car park, which is intended to serve anticipated increasing numbers of rail passengers into the future as North Walsham sees further large-scale population growth through the new Local Plan. In this respect the provision of the car park as part of the Hopkins Homes wider development is seen as good planning as it is intended as an infrastructure investment to support the future growth of the town in the

medium to longer-terms, rather than be a facility which would be heavily used in the short-term.

- 2.3 The car park was completed during 2018/19 and thereafter responsibility passed from the developers, Hopkins Homes, to the District Council. At this time discussions took place between officers and members about the future charging and management regime which would apply to the car park, with there being an acknowledgement that a different charging regime would need to be agreed beyond the Standard, Resort and Coastal classifications used by the authority as per adopted Council policy and the agreed Car Park Order.
- 2.4 The discussions reflected corporate policy that charging for parking would be made at the Hornbeam Road car park (i.e. the authority did not provide “free” parking anywhere in the District) as the Council incurred costs of provision, maintenance, management and insurance of car parks, but that charges should be at a level that they didn’t deter use by rail passengers and potentially students attending Paston College which it was felt the car park might also be attractive to. Elsewhere on the rail network nationally operators generated significant income from station parking and it was recognised that as part of the Council’s need to broaden its income base through a Commercialisation Strategy this offered a potential future source of new income for the authority even if in the short-term receipts were small and would grow over time.
- 2.5 Whilst these discussions were progressed during 2019 against a wider proposed review of car parking charges levied by the Council to better reflect the principle of the user pays and seeking to strike a balance between the charges paid by local residents and Council Tax payers relative to tourists, and the need to consult on a new or revised Car Park Order; events were somewhat overtaken by the COVID pandemic meaning that with national lockdowns rail passenger numbers nationally and locally reduced significantly.
- 2.6 In this respect the car park has remained fenced off and not available for use until early February of this year when it has been used two or three days a week for the mobile COVID testing facility. Whilst it is anticipated that this operation will end at the end of this month as part of the national withdrawal of testing facilities, questions have been asked by local residents and businesses which have established on the estate – Westover Vets, Screwfix etc as to the future opening of the car park given that some of their customers are now understood to be parking on the highway. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there is increasing public expectation that the car park should not remain closed once the COVID testing operation ends.
- 2.7 This then presents some challenge to the Council in the short-term as the new Car Park Order will not be operational until early July and no formal decisions have yet been taken about the charging regime to be applied at the Hornbeam Road Car Park such that they can be included in the Car Park Order. Officers accept that use of the car park might initially be slow but corporate policy confirms charges should be introduced as the Council does not operate free parking. Officer advice therefore is that some charging policy needs to be agreed for the car park.

3. North Walsham Heritage Action Zone Project

- 3.1 Cabinet however has considered the impact of the place-making works to be taken forward in North Walsham Market Place during this summer under the Heritage Action Zone project which is going to restrict access to some areas of the town centre for residential and commercial property owners, which in terms of project management it is considered would be made easier if some alternative long-stay free parking could be provided in the town in support of these works. Cabinet consider that the Hornbeam Road Car Park could meet this need at no significant cost to the Council (given that the car park hasn't existed / been operated until now) and that an initial six-month period of use without charges would be helpful in establishing and understanding future levels of demand.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Cabinet therefore propose that the Hornbeam Road Car Park, North Walsham is operated on a without charge basis for a period of 9 months from 1st April 2022, during which time a longer term charging and management strategy will be developed for this car park asset.