

Devizes Market Place.. What & Why?

The cross party decision to take on assets and services from Wiltshire Council was not one taken lightly by Devizes Town Council and whilst for most of the services the decision was clear, the decision to take on the Market Place had to be based on the long term interest of the town.

There are many different opinions being expressed on the decision to bring the Market Place back under local control and differing options are being suggested which regrettably were not available to the Town Council, even though we argued robustly for the area to be handed over to the town with its current use.

In November 2018 new parking arrangements were introduced by Wiltshire Council, turning Devizes Market Place into a pay and display carpark; however, as the Town Council was in discussions with Wiltshire Council over a range of services to be devolved, we won a deferral to of the introduction of charges pending the outcome of negotiations.

Throughout our negotiations with Wiltshire Council, we constantly pressed for the Market Place to be transferred to us with its current use, allowing the Devizes community to decide how it was to be used in the future; however, following their parking review last year this request conflicted with their new parking policy and was not acceptable.

In January 2019 Wiltshire Council agreed to delegate a number of services and assets to Devizes Town Council including the Market Place, however its transfer was conditional on it being used as a community space with some allocation for blue badge holder parking.

The Town Council only had two options when it came to the Market Place, each of which have consequences

1. Town Council doesn't take on the Market Place

If the Town Council decided not to bring back some local management of the area then the following would be a consequence.

- Parking fees would be implemented at 70 pence for 1 hour and £1.30 for two hours.
- The current use as a free short stay car park would end.
- The majority of those who choose to park in the Market Place as it is free will seek one of the 190 free on-street parking spaces
- For most of the time the Market Place will potentially become an underutilised parking area as evidenced by the Central and West Central Car Park (There are 5 pay and display car parks within 350 yards of the Brittox with around 450 spaces).
- When the area will become a pay and display car park, which will include bank holidays and potentially Sundays within a year or so,

the town's event parking allocation will not be sufficient to cover all the events that go on each year, therefore some of the community events we enjoy in the Market Place, such as the lantern parade, carnival and May Fair may come to an end as there will be a subsequent, hire charge levied as compensation of the loss of parking revenue. This charge is £20 per space per day, giving a total cost of over £1400.

- Retail trading is difficult and Devizes is no exception. However even with free parking in the town, we do not seem to be able to arrest the downward decline.
- Delivering this option will require no further need to amend any of the current parking orders, therefore the aspiration to increase short stay parking from 3 to 4 hours will sit as a low priority for Wiltshire Council.

2. *Devizes Town Council take on the Market Place*

With the Market Place transferring to the Town Council there will be consequences which are set out below.

- As the option above, the current use as a free short stay car park would end.
- As above, the majority of those who choose to park in the Market Place as it was free will try to find free on-street parking.
- To free up some further free on street parking, adjacent blue badge parking, taxi ranks and the coach drop off points will be relocated into part of the Market Place.
- As the Market Place will be under local control there will no restriction to holding events in the area as there is no requirement to use the limited free event parking allocation.
- The Town Council will commit funding and resources to deliver a strategy to increase the number of events in the town centre, which in turn should increase footfall to support our local businesses.
- Wiltshire Council has committed to undertake the necessary traffic orders, so there is an opportunity to increase short stay car parking from 3 to 4 hours.

As a democratically elected body, Devizes Town Council had committed to a plan that will promote Devizes as a great place to visit and live and do all it can to increase the number of visitors on a weekly basis.

We recognise not all sections of the community support our approach, however where in the past we have taken on projects of this nature, such as the refurbishments of Hillworth Park and the Corn Exchange, we have seen a dramatic increase in usage and preserved the facility for generations to come.