

## Parking in King's Lynn – a long-term solution

King's Lynn is an attractive and historic market town. People want to come here to live, to work, to shop, to study, to find entertainment, to see historic buildings, the waterfront, the parks, to meet family, and to find friends old and new.

They come by car, bus, train, motorbike and bicycle or they walk. But mostly they arrive by car.

There are plans to improve bus, train, bicycle and pedestrian services, and millions are spent on maintaining and extending the road network.

But it seems we are reducing car parking places in town centres – certainly in this town.

The time is surely past when we should be making it more difficult for car drivers to bring their cars into town and find somewhere to park.

I've wished success to the campaigns to encourage people to walk, bike, bus and train into town rather than come by car.

The rising price of fuel isn't reducing car use. Rising levels of pollution are worrying health authorities, but not car drivers. Future developments might help – other fuels such as electricity could reduce pollution. But more and more people are driving now. A thousand more a month in Norfolk alone, I read recently. So cars will be with us for the foreseeable future.

My experience, living in central King's Lynn for half of a long life, is that the town's roads just get busier and busier all the time. I suspect that quite a high proportion of the drivers I see in the town centre have achieved what they wanted to do – to drive into Lynn. But many arrived many minutes previously, and are just driving around looking for somewhere to park. That search extends overall journey times, and increases pollution and frustration.

The solution? How about this as a starter:

Increase parking spaces in the town centre.

Make town centre roads safer for everybody.

Reduce vibration to our historic buildings.

How do we do all that?

Increase parking spaces

There are currently some 2,735 paid-for parking spaces in King's Lynn town centre. The Borough Council gets most of the income, but 243 of the spaces are at the Church Street car park by the Minster, where the profits go to Japan.

Suppose we divide the historic town centre into two new parking zones, Old Town and New Town, and increase the number of multi-storey car parks. Drivers would access the zone nearest to their walking destination from any turning west from the main road corridor serving the town, Wisbech Road-London Road-Railway Road.

They would not be able to drive directly from one zone to the other. They would have to return the way they came in. The size of the town centre means that most people arriving by car can walk easily to their destination wherever they park.

This would end the flow of through traffic in the old town, including those who just want to drive through the town to enjoy the scenery. It would also deter lorry drivers from taking short cuts through the town centre rather than using the by-pass as they are directed.

Shoppers, residents, workers and visitors would benefit by having to cope with fewer and lighter vehicles.

Multi-storey car parks are the only practical way to provide extra parking places in town centres.

Many of them are an improvement to their locations – the backs of shops aren't pretty.

Converting current ground level car parks to multi-storeys could quadruple their capacity. And

ticket income.

For example, making the current Austin Street car park a four-floor multi-storey would add around 690 extra spaces, an increase of some 25 per cent to Lynn's parking capacity – from 2,735 to 3,420 spaces.

The only road changes required to achieve this plan would be to restrict access across Purfleet Bridge to pedestrians and emergency vehicles.

#### Multi-storey charges

If we accept that multi-storey car parks will solve Lynn's parking problem, we have the opportunity to re-think the charging policy. Currently our one conventional multi-storey is the most expensive place to park. If it were cheaper it would fill up with commuters early, and leave more convenient parking spaces for the people who will increase the footfall our town centre businesses need.

When did you ever see our multi-storey full? The economics should be adjusted so that more people paying less would produce as much income as fewer people paying more. Done well, it might even increase overall income.

#### Make the town centre wholly 20mph

Some of our town centre roads now have a 30mph speed limit, some 20mph. But the whole of King's Lynn historic town centre would benefit from being entirely 20mph. Accident statistics support this change so far as pedestrian safety is concerned, and a growing number of UK towns have adopted 20mph throughout.

Average speeds on King's Lynn roads are often less than 20mph anyway, because of rush hour peaks or hold-ups. Making the historic core entirely 20mph would reduce confusion.

#### Reduce damage to historic buildings

King's Lynn is proud of its many listed buildings. Constant heavy traffic takes its toll on the foundations and walls of all of them. The historic core is a famous asset for the town, and we should do our best to ensure it continues to work for its residents and visitors. No through roads would achieve that.

#### Where would the zones be? See attached map

We already have parking zones in effect – South Lynn to an extent, and the Friars area. Cars cannot be driven through the Friars and into the old town centre. The only cars in the zone are those where the drivers live or have business in the zone, or can walk from the Friars to their destination.

The suggested Old Town zone would be entered from Wisbech Road (via a 20mph Harding's Way), or from current London Road turnings from Millfleet to Blackfriars Street.

The new New Town zone would be accessed by any current turning west off Railway Road or John Kennedy Road.

#### Where to build new multi-storeys?

Old Town zone: there is one already by the swimming pool, but a second could be built on the current Boal Quay car park, just outside the zone, with vehicular access and exit ONLY via the 20mph Harding's Way to Wisbech Road. Drivers as pedestrians would then be able to walk across Boal Street into the town centre. Only buses and emergency vehicles would be allowed to drive between the multi-storey and the town centre.

New Town zone: the Sainsbury's multi-storey works well, and there could be a new one on the

Patrick & Thompson site off Tuesday Market Place as soon as the timber yard relocates. Other sites might be thought preferable or additional, such as the NCP car park to the east of the Minster in Church Street; Austin Street next to the postal sorting office, or within the old Post Office building structure.

In fact, almost any substantial existing surface car parking area could accommodate additional floors – not Tuesday or Saturday Market Places obviously.

Multi-purpose multi-storey?

Multi-storey car parks don't have to be islands. If the Borough Council wanted to build itself a progressive new green office building on Boal Quay, for instance, some of the site could be used as a multi-storey.

Cost is key

The town would benefit in the long run, so I think the Borough Council should look for money to build new multi-storey car parks. Norfolk County Council should be asked to contribute. But the scheme would best be designed and managed by a team of people who know King's Lynn well.

The Borough Council is most likely to have such a team.

Consultation is absolutely necessary

Not the kind of consultation that invites comment on what has already been planned, but the kind of consultation that gives an opportunity to every road user to suggest how Lynn's parking problems might be solved.

It seems to me that a scheme something like this could be achieved with some intelligent review of road signs, but with only limited disruption to everyday traffic. An evolutionary rather than a revolutionary approach.

If you think it has merit, please do what you can to publicise it with the great and the good, and relevant others.

Do send me your comments, objections or amendments if you wish by letter or email. Politely, and with your name and address please.

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