

**Okehampton Town Council
Full Council Meeting 21st August 2023
Meeting Report**

Date:	14 th August 2023
Name:	Emma James

DCC On-Street Parking Charges Proposal – To consider any update relation to the proposals and any action to be taken following a meeting with DCC on 17th August.

Correspondence received from DCC on 8th August, previously circulated:

Apologies for the absence of response on your previous correspondence relating to parking management proposals in Okehampton.

I understand that there are concerns within the Town Council and community relating to any change to how parking is managed in your community. We would not have developed any Policy if we felt it would be detrimental to our communities.

We maintain that these proposals will assist in effective management of parking stock, ensuring turnover to support businesses and promoting the use of off street car parks for longer stays. The use of pay & display parking is well established in Devon and nationally. I understand that you do agree with our position on this. Please find attached a draft FAQ document which explains our aims and approach.

With regards data, the Policy presented to Cabinet in November '22 (Item 238, <https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=133&Mid=4462&Ver=4>) was informed by liaison with the Economy team, the key document was a summary of Retail Vacancy Rates provided in July '22 (attached), this was used to identify those which are likely to experience the highest levels of visitors and therefore need additional traffic management measures. A principle that we explain in our Policy. An impact is available through the same link.

Additionally the proposals were also informed by discussion with our Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny group, via a Scrutiny Commissioning Liaison meeting with representatives of that committee and reported here: Item 72 <https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=427&Mid=4486&Ver=4>

Consultation on Railway Station Ticket Office Closures – To consider a response to the consultation which closes on 1st September.

Consultation Information – further details can be found on GWR's website [Have your say | Consultation on changes to ticket offices | Great Western Railway \(gwr.com\)](#)

We are consulting on proposals to move ticket office staff into other areas of the station where they can help more customers, as transactions from ticket offices drop below 15%.

Train companies have listened to feedback and have extended the time available to respond to the consultation by an extra five and a half weeks to give as many people a chance to take part.

Passengers now have until Friday 1 September 2023 to have their say. Input from passengers and independent watchdogs will help shape final proposals, so that all passengers are supported as the railway responds to generational shifts in passenger buying habits.

The consultations are happening as part of an industry-wide set of proposals that would mean ticket office staff would work on station platforms and concourses where they can be closer to customers. Subject to consultation, ticket offices could be phased out over a number of years.

Ticket office staff would be freed up to work in other areas of the station where they are closer to customers and better placed to help, in line with models already in place at some Great Western Railway stations such as Newbury or Reading Green Park.

Our Passenger Assist programme – which helps disabled and mobility-impaired customers navigate stations and board trains – will not be affected by the changes. The proposals are designed to increase staff trained and available to help customers at stations across the network, including those with additional accessibility needs.

What will happen to ticket offices?

Subject to consultation, ticket office staff would transition to multi-skilled roles – similar to those already in place at GWR since 2007. This would allow staff to help more customers with a wider range of issues, including helping them to buy tickets, wherever they are on the station.

This will, however, mean changes to how our station teams are organised, and some ticket offices will close as the new roles are introduced.

GWR is consulting with the public on an individual station-by-station basis. This includes publication of Equality Impact Assessments for each proposal and is independently run by industry watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

Why is this happening?

Digital tickets have made it easier and faster for customers to buy and manage tickets online, which means fewer people than ever are using ticket offices.

The approach would help bring station retailing up-to-date from 1996, when the rules on how to sell tickets were set and before the invention of the smartphone. Back then, 82% of all tickets were sold at ticket offices nationally,

compared to less than 15% on average today. Bringing staff out from offices would allow the railway to respond to the generational shift in customer behaviour, in common with many other industries and organisations that have long since done so such as Transport for London, most airlines and many banks and supermarkets.

How can I comment?

If you would like to comment on these proposals contact Transport Focus, the independent transport user watchdog, or – for stations in London – London TravelWatch, by **Friday 1 September 2023** using the details below:

Transport Focus for all stations except London Paddington, Castle Bar Park, Slough and Windsor & Eton Central

For more information: <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/ticketoffices>

- Email: TicketOffice.GWR@transportfocus.org.uk
- Freepost: RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ, Transport Focus, PO Box 5594, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9PZ

OTC could consider formulating a response based by that submitted by OkeRail which is as follows:

1. Unsound Business Case for Well-used Ticket Offices

We accept that there is a sound business case to consider alternative options at stations where 15% or fewer passengers buy tickets from the ticket office. ***On the same basis, it is equally a sound business principle to retain ticket offices at stations where a much higher proportion of travellers use the ticket office.***

By example, there is little doubt that closing the Barnstaple ticket office, where 45% of passengers purchase their tickets, will have a significant negative effect on patronage - and therefore viability of the line. Without detailed behavioural analysis to identify if it is possible to shape effective measures to avoid this, the proposals are ill-founded in terms of sound business practice. It is folly to consider such cost-cutting without knowing the full effects of such action on future revenue at well-used ticket office stations. ***No ticket offices accounting for more than 15% of travellers should be closed without a detailed, and well-founded, behavioural analysis on the effect on potential passenger loss.***

2. Effect on Passenger Numbers

Much hard work in partnership with local authorities and other organisations has resulted in buoyant and rising passenger numbers on many lines in the South West. Given that all agree that the dilemma for the railway is that costs are largely virtually fixed and difficult to significantly reduce, it is clear that the best path to greater railway viability and lower subsidies is to increase passenger numbers and revenue, not cut costs. ***To close well-used station ticket offices is likely to reduce line viability and increase net subsidies while achieving only very marginal cost reductions in relation to overall costs.***

3. Partnerships

It is ironic that such measures are now being proposed after years of partnership working to make it easier to travel, buy tickets, and get to the station with ease. The good work in the past, e.g. branch line ticket carnets, safe walking/ cycling routes to the station, better bus-rail connectivity, and many other effective and novel initiatives - that recognise the need to make it easier for people to travel - seem about to be undermined, and their positive effects destroyed, by these proposals through risking reducing passenger usage. **Has GWR fully considered the effect of these proposals on current and future partnership working and external funding, including with councils - by undermining a wealth of partnership initiatives doing everything possible to increase patronage?**

4. Lack of Credibility of Future Public-Facing Staff Cover Plans

If staff will be retained 'on the concourse', the main non-staff savings from ticket office closures will be very marginal - a tiny proportion of total railway costs. But if these staff will be progressively reduced downstream through 'natural wastage', their presence on the concourse will likewise be reduced. The proposals would therefore appear to be laced with a lack of transparency over intentions on future amount, and times, of staffing presence on stations. **GWR should be more transparent about future staffing levels, times, and future guarantees on this, before further consultation takes place.**

Some smaller stations have a very small ticket office lobby. Will the new concourse-based staff always be in front of the barriers (aka 'gatelines') that will prevent intending passengers from accessing platforms until they have their ticket(s)? I.e. will these staff always be in the - sometimes very small - lobby and not on the platform? Where ticket barriers exist, it is hard to envisage how these staff can perform both a platform presence and a role in helping travellers obtain the right tickets before going through the barriers. **Ticket barriers should not be installed at stations where customer-facing staff are expected to concurrently perform both platform and ticket issuing duties.**

5. Disproportionate Effect Outside London

Because Elizabeth Line ticket offices sell tickets for the whole rail network, and will remain open under these proposals, many London residents will continue to enjoy using ticket offices. The adverse effect of closures will therefore fall disproportionately on travellers outside London. **Any programme of closure should be (a) targeted, aligned to usage and particular circumstances (not indiscriminate and total as currently proposed), and (b) based on the principle of avoiding disproportionate adverse effects on certain areas.**

6. Tourism

In areas where tourism is a significant part of the economy, and where tourists make up a significant proportion of rail travellers, the effect of ticket office closures is likely to further add to this disproportionate effect. Tourists by nature are not familiar with the local geography or rail network, nor will they be aware of local ticket options or the most beneficial tickets for their journey.

Simply, ticket office closures are likely to deter travel for an even larger proportion of travellers in these areas. Without detailed behavioural analysis, this likelihood cannot be disproved. **GWR should make further allowance for tourist areas in decisions on the future of ticket offices.**

7. Disproportionate Effect on the Vulnerable

Many people with disabilities or frailties, and the elderly, find ticket offices essential in finding the optimum travel options they require. Has GWR fully assessed the impact of ticket office closures on equality, including on people with disabilities, the vulnerable and the elderly?

Such an assessment is required (Equality Act 2020, Section 149) and should be made public before finalising proposals, ahead of the consultation.

8. Public Service

Regardless of the operation of parts of the railway by private companies, the railway is a public service: proof positive is the amount of public subsidy which, by definition, underpins the public service principle. **As a public service the railway must be managed in a way that assesses impacts on e.g. equality considerations, and does not adversely discriminate against those who are frail, vulnerable or with disabilities, or any other sections of society.**

9. Quality of Technology

The current technology is both unreliable and not fit for purpose as it will be increasingly relied upon under the proposals:

(i) E.g. recently it took five days to repair the Okehampton ticket vending machine (TVM).

(ii) Many stations, even some with more than 250,000 annual passengers, have only one TVM, in spite of the unreliability of current TVM technology, **The norm should be two TVMs per station to ensure that a TVM is always available.**

(iii) TVMs are frequently rebooted in the day. This takes several minutes, during which time the screen only shows machine code. So intending passengers have no way of knowing that they might be working again in a few minutes: the impression given is that the TVM is not functioning and they are likely to walk away. It is therefore unrealistic, and unreasonable, to expect travellers to obtain a ticket from the TVM. **The legal basis of 'penalty fares stations' is therefore unsound if based on TVM technology.**

(iv) Nonsensically, where there are two TVMs, both are rebooted at the same time. This shows that GWR back-office staff work independently of any regard to minimising inconvenience to the travelling public. **These critical structural management failures will need addressing regardless.**

(v) Will the hand-held equipment issued to the new concourse-based staff be able to (as easily as at ticket offices) identify the full range of ticket options? Will the new customer-facing concourse-based staff be able to have the detailed knowledge of current ticket office staff, given their new role would be wider? **I.e. can GWR genuinely guarantee that the equipment, and level of staff skill and knowledge, will be sufficient to enable the full range of ticket, advice and information options to be offered to travellers (across the 50 million network ticket options)?**

(vi) The current unreliable technology will require comprehensive hardware and software upgrades before these proposals can match the rhetoric that technology can replace current provision and systems of ticket issue. But in addition to ticket issue, even if properly upgraded it is hard to see how this technology, and concourse-based staff, will be able to replicate how current complex enquiries and problems etc. are currently successfully rectified at ticket offices. **As the current quality of technology is not high standard, no**

ticket office closures should be made until the quality of IT software and hardware is vastly improved, so that technology can genuinely replace the high standard of service currently performed by ticket offices. Only then will it be fit for purpose to match the statements by GWR that technology can replace ticket offices. And these upgrade costs will need to be offset against any claimed savings from these proposals.

10. Advice and Information

It is wrong to title the consultation 'Changing how we sell tickets at stations'. Many travellers use the current information/ ticket offices for advice, information and problem-solving on ticket issues and other complex or technical processes, e.g. (to name but a few) changing travel date, refunds, seat reservations, identifying route/ time/ date options for the cheapest fare, and on the spot renewal of railcards (this last often so as to be in time for travel). We are aware that a common reason for changing travel arrangements can be due to circumstances out of one's control, such as changes to funeral arrangements, or illness. This often requires changing physical tickets, and cannot be done on-line either easily or quickly - as it is very often the case that when travel arrangements need to be changed, they need to be done quickly.

These services and facilities would be lost with the closure of ticket offices. In this context, whether intentional or not, it is wrong for GWR to headline the proposals as a 'ticket only' issue. One has to wonder if the advice and information service at ticket offices, so vital to many people often in a vulnerable position, has been sufficiently seriously considered within the proposals.

By definition, transport providers have to incur costs to sell their product. It seems at best naive to imply that closing ticket offices will not have a negative effect, either on passenger numbers and revenue, or on the ability of many people, including the most vulnerable, to seek good advice and information in often difficult circumstances. The case for improving train services and reopening lines and stations is closely linked to the logic that rail services cater for people across all sections of society, especially the vulnerable and those who can otherwise not travel by other modes. In this context it seems quite bizarre to now propose measures that will disproportionately adversely affect those very sections of society that the rail industry has for so long worked hard to cater for in its business model.

In Summary

The current consultation is seen to be ill-found and premature. To avoid further challenge all the above points need to be seriously considered in detail before any wide-ranging ticket office closure programme is considered.

The comprehensive proposals to close all ticket offices by 2024, regardless of individual station usage, and the promotion of these proposals by the RDG, and presumably by proxy DfT, points to a doctrinaire one-size-fits-all policy that is unrelated to the individual circumstances of localities or sections of society that rely on these facilities. In this context, the consultation therefore appears to be lacking in integrity in seeking individual views when its stated aim is a blanket closure programme. We therefore challenge both the basis of the proposals, and the nature and timing of the consultation.

Jim the Walker

To consider the inspection report and action required that can be undertaken 'in-house'

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 M Perry Associates Ltd have been asked to visit site in order to undertake a visual inspection of 'Jim the Walker' statue attached to the side of a private property in St James' Street, Okehampton.

1.2 This report and the inspection have been undertaken in accordance with our Conditions of Appointment, a copy of which are attached to this report.

2.0 GENERAL

2.1 The 'Jim the Walker' statue was a glass-reinforced plastic statue fixed to the side of a two storey end of terrace property in St James' Street, Okehampton. The wall had a painted render finish. The statue had been installed for approximately 15 years. The statue was positioned approximately 3m above street level and is slightly offset from the ridge line of the north facing gable wall.

2.2 Prior to the site visit MPA were provided the original design calculations to check fixing loads required to secure the statue to the masonry wall. These calculations showed the fixing of the statue was by two steel brackets, one placed at low level to support the shear loads of the statue via 2 bolts. A higher level bracket was to support the lateral forces from the overturning of the statue, again fixed using two bolts. The weight of the structure was taken as 55Kg. There is no information available as to the type of fixing into the masonry wall nor the size of fixing designed for. We would expect it is likely to be a resin fixing into the underlying masonry circa 10-12mm dia. There was no information as to the arrangement and size of the fixing brackets.

3.0 SITE OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Access to view the statue was undertaken with the use of an operated cherry picker.

3.2 The upper and lower brackets were visible and appeared to be manufactured from mild steel plate between 6mm and 8mm thick. The brackets had a galvanised finish.

3.3 Fixings into the wall appeared to be stainless steel bolts with stainless steel nuts. There was an isolation washer between the galvanised steel and stainless steel fixing. There were two bolts to each bracket.

3.4 The top bolt fixing of the higher bracket, had very minimal thread exposed past the end of the nut. The nut was tight to the washer at the bottom with a gap visible to the top of the nut. This indicates the fixing may have been installed at a slight upwards angle with the nut face not being parallel to the fixing plate. The top of the bracket had an angle slightly less than 90 degrees with a slight slope to the top projecting leg. There was a welded gusset stiffener between the vertical and outstand leg.

3.5 The lower bracket was hidden behind the sculpture and therefore the view on fixings and the bracket restricted.

3.6 There appeared to be no visible signs of corrosion to the bolts or the metal brackets.

3.7 There appeared to be no visible cracking or distress evident around the fixing locations to both the upper and lower bracket. A 900mm long level was placed against the wall, and this showed the wall to be true and vertical within normal building tolerances.

3.8 There was a mesh visible to the finished face of the wall. This was assumed to be a GRP mesh likely resin adhered to the wall. It is not clear if this was part of the art installation to create texture

or if this was some form of crack repair to the rendered gable wall.

3.9 Across the wall there were distinct marks behind the mesh which may represent filled cracking or marks in the original finish. These marks do not appear to be showing through the mesh and painted finishes, and therefore do not appear to indicate any cause for concern.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Following our site observations together with the historic calculations provided, it would appear that the installation is generally in line with the design provided on the original installation.

4.2 There were no visible signs of distress to the wall around the fixing area. Similarly the brackets and bolt fixings appear to be coping well in terms of weathering with no signs of corrosion evident.

4.3 The statue itself appeared to be intact with no apparent signs of distress or the like.

4.4 We note that the upper bolt has little thread protruding past the nut and generally this is not good practice. However we believe this arrangement is how the statue was installed originally with no signs of movement to the fixing, bracket or statue.

4.5 The ferrous metal walking stick has begun to rust. Although this does not affect the structural fixings we would suggest it prudent to clean this and provide a new suitable paint finish to assist with corrosion protection.

Neighbourhood Plan – To consider feedback from the group following comments from the council in June 2023 and to resolve approval to progress to Regulation 16 and following Referendum which would have financial implications for both Councils.

The comments submitted to the group were as follows, responses/updates are in blue text and taken from the version of the Plan on the website as of 14th August 2023:

1. Page 25 - Brownfield sites – please can some clarification be given as to the location of the identified site in New Road which is noted as being sheltered housing as it is not though there is/was any sheltered housing in this location
Removed
2. Page 28 - Some reference numbers are missing from the green spaces plan. Please can this be updated.
Updated (however 'I' and 'J' are still missing from the map, Group informed.)
3. Page 33 – Consideration to inclusion of an updated photograph of football pitch (new fence is being constructed)
Not considered essential or a priority
4. If consideration has been given to a policy that includes environmental issues; for example, provision of solar panels, ev charging points and rainwater harvesting, as part of any new developments. Or is this covered within other legislation?
Yes consideration was given and the original included environmental issues were removed as advised by WDBC, these are covered by other legislation and therefore not required in a NP
5. If all comments raised by WDBC's Senior strategic Planning Officer have been addressed, summarised as follows:
 - 1(a) Inclusion of map/statement identifying the area

- 1(b) Inclusion of a more detailed consultation statement that contains information about how and when consultations were undertaken, and addresses concerns raised.
- 1(d) Basic Conditions Statement – if a separate document that addresses all of the basic conditions has been produced.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment – Noted that a report has been obtained as required.
Following a follow up discussion with the NP Group Chair, WDBC confirmed that the comments he raised have all been addressed and he was happy to continue to Reg 16.

Terms of Reference – To resolve to approve the ToR proposed by Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council for a joint working group to plan and organise events for D Day Celebrations on 6th June 2024 and consider budgetary implications.



OKEHAMPTON HAMLETS PARISH COUNCIL AND OKEHAMPTON Town Council

D Day Celebrations WORKING GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Group shall consist of a maximum of 4 Councillors from Okehampton Town Council and 3 from Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council and up to two Officers/staff members from each Council. A maximum of 3 members of the community may additionally be appointed by approval of the Working Group. Council members of the Group will be appointed at a meeting of each Council.

The Working Group shall elect a chairman, this must be a member of one of the Councils. The Working Group or its members have no delegated authority from the Councils other than those delegated below.

The Working Group is required to –

- To meet when appropriate and when required.
- Provide brief notes from meetings held covering dates and times of meetings, attendees, subjects discussed and decisions taken and recommendations to be made to each Council.
- To report back to each Council and present recommendations for the Councils to consider.

The purpose of the Working Group is to –

1. Plan and organise joint events to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of D Day on 6th June 2024.
2. Events organised will take place within the Parishes of Okehampton Hamlets or Okehampton Town
3. Each Council may additionally organise events themselves within their own Parish if they wish to do so, those costs to be covered by that Council.
4. Identify and try to obtain grant funding from outside sources to cover some of the costs of events.

Budget???? 50% split of costs?

The role of the Working Group will continue until the Celebration events have taken place and conclusion of the financial arrangements for the event.