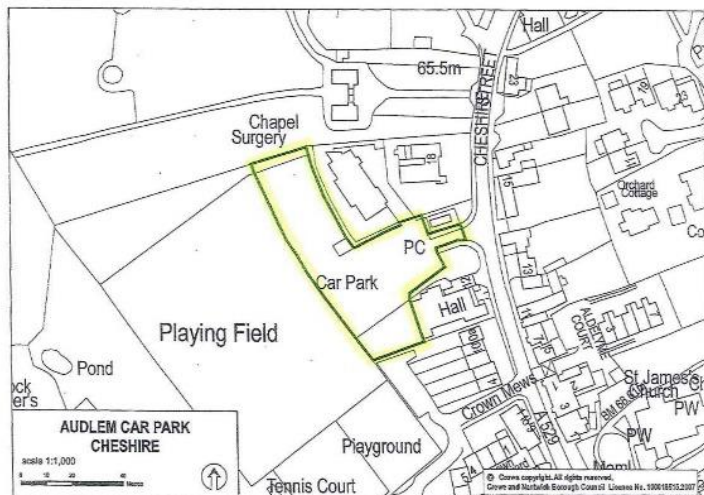


AUDLEM PUBLIC HALL RESPONSE TO THE CAR PARKING PROPOSALS FOR AUDLEM

BACKGROUND

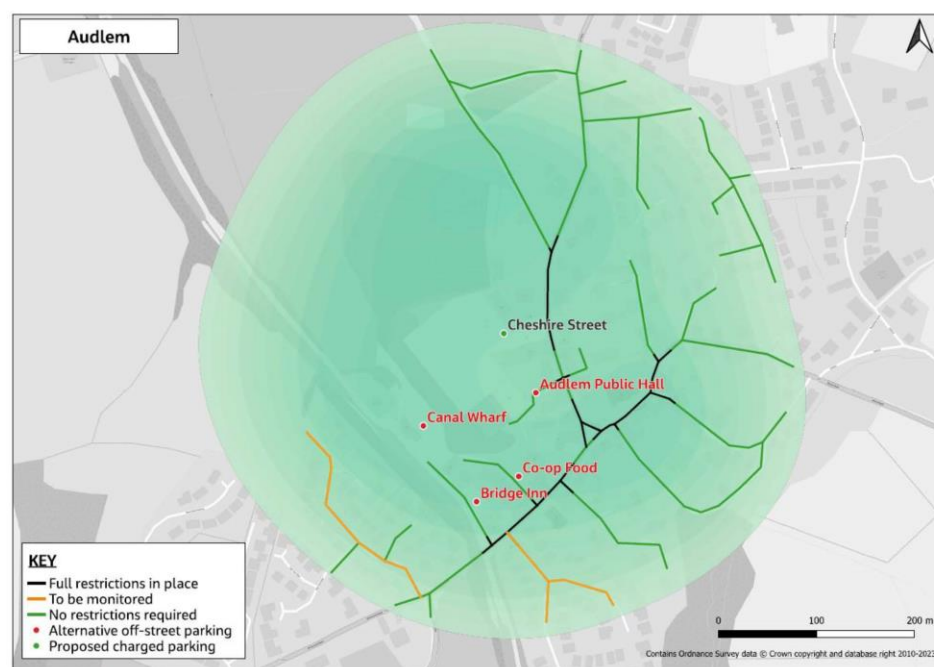
Audlem Public Hall and Annexe is a community asset serving the parishes of Audlem, Buerton and Hankelow. It provides facilities for a wide variety of community groups and activities and contains a purpose-built community gym. It is owned and run by the Audlem Public Hall Charity, managed by local volunteers. The Public Hall has been a central part of the life of Audlem and the surrounding area for over 100 years. Its income is almost entirely dependent on the hire of rooms and gym membership fees. Without that income, the Hall and Annexe could not operate.

The Public Hall and Annexe occupies the entirety of the southern border of the Cheshire Street car park and it has no separate car parking facility. Users of the Public Hall and Annexe use the Cheshire Street car park. The plan on the Cheshire East website included as part of the statutory notice (below) erroneously includes an area which was purchased by the Public Hall Charity from Cheshire East Council and upon which the Annexe was built and then opened in 2017 as can be seen by comparing the plan with a Google Maps Satellite image beneath.





The Audlem Parking Strategy Report contains a “heat map” which purports to show areas of alternative parking to the Cheshire Street car park. It is surprising that the “heat map” (below) shows one of the alternative parking areas to be Audlem Public Hall as the Public Hall does not, in fact, have any parking area at all.



The Public Hall and Annexe are in constant use throughout the day and evening by a wide variety of users. By way of example, ADCA (Audlem and District Community Action) is a charity which provides welfare support to vulnerable and socially isolated older people living in this rural area and offers day clubs, coffee clubs, befriending services and a carers support group. This group has a permanent base within the Annexe and its volunteers use the Cheshire Street car park for their own transport and for those transporting its clients to and from the Annexe. As a charity, relying on volunteers, it can ill-afford to incur the expense of paid parking.

As the Public Hall and Annexe serves not only Audlem itself, but also the surrounding geographical area, the groups and activities to which the Public Hall and Annexe draw on a diverse population which, in the absence of any comprehensive public transport links serving the

area which is rural, relies on private car transport to get to and from the Public Hall. Many of those who participate in the groups and other activities held in the Public Hall use the Cheshire Street car park. The on-street parking within the village is extremely limited and is used by shoppers. In addition, the on-street parking is limited to 1 hour, with no return within 2 hours. Requiring hall users to pay for parking places an additional financial burden on what are, by definition, community-based and run activities, the viability of which would be threatened by the increased cost of participation.

A major feature of the Annexe is the community gym. This has a well-established and growing membership. Again, members are drawn from a wide geographical area and practically, travel to and from the gym by car is common amongst the gym members. The imposition of parking charges would compromise the economic viability of the gym, the membership fees of which play a very significant role in the income of the Public Hall.

In addition to the established groups, the Public Hall is available for use for private functions, such as wedding receptions, birthday parties and funeral teas. Children's parties are generally held during the day, or on Saturdays and parents often accompany children to those events. Requiring those attending such parties to pay for parking would act as a disincentive to those looking for a suitable venue – again, impacting on the financial viability of the Public Hall. Similar considerations apply to wedding receptions and other functions.

The Public Hall has long been an established venue for funeral teas. There are 3 churches in Audlem, two of which are in the heart of the village. The Methodist Church has very limited parking and has recently taken steps to encourage those not attending the church to park elsewhere. When funerals are held at the Methodist Church, the Cheshire Street car park is the natural choice for the mourners. St James the Great Church has no parking facilities and again, the mourners use the Cheshire Street car park. The proximity to both the Churches and to the Cheshire Street car park makes the Public Hall the natural venue for funeral teas and the implementation of a parking charge would adversely affect mourners and would tend to militate against the continued use of the Public Hall in those circumstances.

Of course, Cheshire Street car park is a public car park and the Hall and Annexe users share the car park with others – the Medical Centre (which has no separate parking spaces for patients); the activities on the playing field (Saturday football training and walking football which takes place on a weekday, for example); the Mobile Library which visits regularly; walkers, who use Audlem as a base to explore the countryside and canal; and patrons of the thriving businesses within the village.

In short, the Management Committee and Trustees of the Audlem Public Hall and Annexe oppose the introduction of parking charges on the Cheshire Street car park on the grounds that it will significantly and adversely affect the viability of a well-used, vital and central facility catering for the residents of not only Audlem, but the surrounding area. If parking charges act as an incentive to seek alternative groups and activities where there may be free on-site parking, not only will the income of the Public Hall suffer, but the knock-on effect will be that there is decreased footfall within the village and the shops and businesses which rely on visitors to the village for their trade, will also be subject to reduced revenue.

Trustees and Management Committee
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