



AUDLEM
PARISH COUNCIL

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Dear Sirs

Car Park Review 2023 – Audlem Response by Audlem Parish Council

1 Introduction

Audlem Parish Council has studied Cheshire East's Audlem Parking Strategy document. The document is riddled with significant errors, which clearly make the conclusions reached on page 19 of the document very doubtful. These will be highlighted later.

In addition to the errors, Parish Councillors have spoken to a number of stakeholders, **none of whom have been consulted** on the proposal to charge for parking on Audlem's one and only public car park. Again, this will be dealt with later.

Audlem Parish Council, on behalf of its residents, strongly objects to the proposed imposition of charges on Cheshire Street car park.

2 Current Position

Audlem is a village, not a town, whose boundary adjoins Shropshire. The Shropshire Union Canal, which is a big tourist attraction, runs through the centre of the village. It has been described as "*six miles from anywhere*" Its village centre is at the confluence of the A525 and the A529. It has 20 retail outlets, 18 of which are owned by small independent traders. As such, it is the service hub for the surrounding villages and hamlets of Buerton, Hankelow, Adderley (in Shropshire) Lightwood Green and Coole Pilate. None of these has a village shop.

Those who know Audlem are aware that traffic congestion is a daily occurrence in the village centre. The limited parking bays on both Cheshire Street and Shropshire Street are frequently full. As a result vehicles often park on the double yellow lines on either side of the bays on both streets.

This congestion occurs often, owing to the narrowness of Stafford Street down to the junction of School Lane where vehicles no bigger than cars and vans can pass each other safely. Large vehicles such as HGVs, tractors with large farm equipment behind and combine harvesters pass along here on a daily basis. They often mount the pavement in order to pass oncoming vehicles thereby endangering pedestrians and causing traffic chaos. This chaos has an impact for firefighters trying to gain access to the Fire Station situated on Shropshire Street. This is an unmanned station and relies on them getting there as quickly as possible. This scenario also applies to the other emergency services getting through the village where the emergency can sometimes be a matter of life and death and time is of the essence.

It is intriguing to read on page 15 of the Audlem document that in the workshop held with CEC officers, “local knowledge to ensure any factors or circumstances specific to the context of Audlem” was drawn upon. Parish Councillors find this hard to believe, as any knowledge of the existing problems would have highlighted the folly of displacing more vehicles from the car park onto the road network.

3 Road Safety

As highlighted in Section 2, road safety is already one of the most important issues in Audlem village centre. Cheshire East Council has a duty of care for its road users, both drivers and pedestrians. The inevitable effect of imposing charges for parking in Cheshire Street car park is to displace more vehicles on to the existing road network.

Councillors would like to know whether the following stakeholders were consulted prior to the consultation period:

- **CEC Highways Road Safety Officer**
- **Cheshire Constabulary**
- **Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service**
- **North West Ambulance Service**
- **West Midlands Ambulance Service**
- **Audlem First Responders**

If they were not consulted, can you please explain why? The lack of any such consultation will nullify any conclusions reached in the document.

Parish Councillors understand that the reason why Audlem’s car park was excluded from the 2021 review of car park charging was because of road safety issues. Apart from an increased number of vehicles on the road, nothing has changed since then.

4 Retail Outlets

As mentioned in the introduction, Audlem has 20 retail outlets, 18 of which are small independent traders. These retail outlets are used, not only by residents of Audlem, many of whom live outside the settlement core of the village, but also residents of the hinterland villages and hamlets of Buerton, Hankelow, Adderley, Lightwood Green and Coole Pilate, all of whom need to travel into Audlem. In addition, Audlem attracts a large number of visitors. Many of these visitors use the retail outlets and the pubs during their stay. If parking charges are imposed, many of these visitors could well go to other destinations where parking is free. Without this extra income, businesses could find their viability in jeopardy.

The bus service into Audlem does not go through all of these areas. It is infrequent (between one and a half hours and three hours between buses) so it is likely that these residents will use a car. If parking charges are introduced, it is possible that residents from

outlying areas will no longer visit Audlem and travel to neighbouring towns such as Market Drayton and Whitchurch. Here there are supermarkets with free parking for two and three hours respectively. Market Drayton also has a free car park all day. Alternatively, these residents could go to the supermarkets in Nantwich, again with free car parking.

The result of the imposition of parking charges will be to permanently damage the viability of these retail businesses, leading to many of them closing down.

Also many of the people who work in these businesses commute to Audlem. The first buses to arrive in Audlem from Nantwich are 09.21 via Wrenbury and 09.22 via Buerton. As normal business hours start at 9.00 at the latest, workers using these buses would not be able to get into work on time. This is yet another example of lack of knowledge of the area.

5 Other Organisations

Audlem has a number of organisations whose patrons use Cheshire Street car park for short-term (ie in most cases less than 15 minutes) parking.

5.1 Audlem & District Community Action (ADCA)

One of the most affected by imposing charges will be ADCA. This is a voluntary organisation which provides support for vulnerable adults and carers. ADCA holds sessions every Thursday and Friday at the Public Hall Annexe. Many of the vulnerable adults are collected from home and transported to the Annexe by volunteer (and accredited) drivers. Depending on the severity of the adults' infirmity, dropping off and getting the user into the room where the session is taking place, can take anywhere between a few minutes and half an hour.

5.2 Audlem Medical Practice

Both the staff and the patients of the Medical Practice will be severely affected by the imposition of car parking charges.

Patients who arrange an appointment, drop off prescriptions and samples or have a blood test are only there for a few minutes. In order to avoid charges it is possible that these patients will park on Cheshire Street, even if the bays are full.

Now that the Medical Centre has been enlarged, more outside services provided by the NHS will be located there. It seems counter-productive to charge these staff for providing health services.

5.3 Audlem Public Hall

The Public Hall is run by volunteers and is a Registered Charity. It plays host to a number of organisations which use the Hall or the Annexe weekly. Many of the members of these organisations do not live within walking distance of the Hall. If parking charges are imposed, it is possible that some of these organisations will look to relocate to a nearby location where parking is free, for example Hankelow or Adderley. Any such move could put the future of the Public Hall in doubt.

5.4 Audlem Cemetery

Audlem Cemetery is in the centre of the village. This is unlike towns that already are subject to parking charges such as Crewe, Macclesfield and Alderley Edge. The

Cemetery is adjacent to the car park, with a gated entrance. The Cemetery also attracts a significant number of visitors owing to its peaceful environment.

Should parking charges be imposed, it would mean that mourners attending the committal and relatives tending to their loved one's grave and visitors will have to pay. As already stated this does not happen at any other cemetery in Cheshire East.

5.5 Audlem Special Events Team (ASET)

ASET is a not-for-profit organisation run by volunteers. It organises the Party in the Park each year which requires the car park to be closed on a Saturday. **If ASET have to pay for all of the spaces in the car park for the maximum hours, the event would become unviable.**

6 Errors in the Audlem Parking Strategy Document

As stated in Section 2, it is intriguing to read on page 15 of the Audlem document that in the workshop held with CEC officers, "local knowledge to ensure any factors or circumstances specific to the context of Audlem" was drawn upon. If this were the case, a number of startling errors in the document would not have occurred. These are:

6.1 Comparison with Chapel St Car Park, Congleton (p 13)

There is a free-to-park Morrison's Supermarket car park within 220 metres, where residents can do their shopping (and possibly use as a short-stay free car park). Despite the assertion in the document, Audlem does not have a supermarket car park. A significant use of Audlem Car Park is for short-stay parking. To base ticket sales – and therefore income calculations – on totally different uses of the car park renders the calculation invalid.

6.2 Alternative Off-Street Parking

The Displacement Heatmap on page 20 purports to show alternative off-street parking within 300 metres. These are:

- **Canal Wharf** – which appears to be the **private** car park of the Shroppie Fly. Not only is this a private car park, but the access is down a very narrow private road which is mainly used by pedestrians making their way to the Shropshire Union Canal. To consider naming this as an alternative car park is totally ignoring the safety of pedestrians.
- **Bridge Inn** – again, this is a **private** car park.
- **Co-op Food** – we would like to know who has the 'local knowledge' of this supposed car park. **There is no off-street car park at the Co-op.**
- **Audlem Public Hall** – again, we would like to know who has the 'local knowledge' of this supposed car park. **There is no separate car park at the Public Hall. The suggestion is that alternative car parking to Cheshire Street car park is Cheshire Street car park!!**

7 Conclusion

On page 5 it states ***"In reviewing parking charges, CEC will need to balance the overall financial situation which is currently faced alongside long held commitments to ensure that the economic viability and vitality of town centres is preserved. The provision of well-planned and managed parking both on and off-street plays a key role in achieving this."***

Section 9.4.1 on page 90 of the Local Transport Plan states “***Parking provision in the Borough supports accessibility for residents, businesses, shoppers, workers and commuters. Parking provision has the potential to impact on surrounding areas both negatively and positively. When parking is well managed it can support thriving businesses, access to services and active social lives; but when not well managed parking can encourage car travel to areas which suffer unduly from congestion as well as causing other environmental and social issues.***”

The proposals for Audlem are a classic example of the latter. The imposition of parking charges at Cheshire Street Car Park will seriously jeopardise:

- road safety in the centre of the village for all road users;
- the viability of the 20 (including 18 small independent) retailers in the village and;
- the village organisations who use the car park.

It is clear that the report was produced without any local knowledge of Audlem. Worse still, no consultation took place with either your own Road Safety Officer or any representatives of the emergency services who do have the local knowledge.

Audlem Parish Council, on behalf of the residents of Audlem, strongly opposes the proposed introduction of parking charges on Cheshire Street Car Park.

Yours sincerely

CBell

Parish Clerk
Audlem Parish Council