

DISABLED PARKING IN OFF-STREET CAR PARKS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members to consider the redesignation of the type of persons who are eligible to park free in Off-Street Disabled Parking Bays in view of the representation made by The Rochford District Access Committee for the Disabled.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In the ten years to March 1999 the number of Disabled Badges in circulation in the UK has almost doubled from 929,000 to 1,823,000. However, during this period, the number of cars on the road increased by only a quarter and there has been no comparable increase in the number of severely disabled people.

- 2.2 In its review of the Blue (formerly orange) Badge Scheme published in March 1999, the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) reported that despite national ground rules local authorities are interpreting the discretionary criteria differently and therefore administering the scheme in different ways with varying degrees of strictness. It goes on to say that many people issued with a badge under discretionary criteria should not have been judged eligible and this abuse has devalued the scheme. The report makes a distinction between 'disabled' and 'severely disabled' people and comments that the latter probably does not exceed 750,000 nationally.

- 2.3 The Department of Transport's circular, issued 1982, stated that:

"Badges should be issued to people who are unable to walk or have a very considerable and permanent difficulty in walking and under no circumstances should anyone who does not satisfy one or other of these basic requirements receive a badge".

Disabled Motorists' pressure groups advocate that had these criteria been adhered to, there would not be the problems there are today.

- 2.4 Apart from the convenience of being able to park virtually anywhere, Blue Badge Holders have the potential to save significant sums in parking charges. Undoubtedly, the latter benefit is one of the main attractions of acquiring a Blue Badge by motorists who should not be judged eligible.

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- 2.5 Since the introduction of off-street parking controls in 1979, the Council has always provided specially marked bays, with enhanced access, to disabled motorists but has never required them to pay for their parking. This concession was offered to avoid the need for the severely disabled to have to access a ticket machine rather than an implication that they cannot afford to pay. As the number of disabled badge holders increases and the ease of obtaining one goes unchecked, the Council should review its policy.

3 CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Rochford District Access Committee for the Disabled has approached the Council regarding the abuse of Disabled Person parking bays in Council car parks. They support the viewpoint that the reason that Blue Badges are so sought after by those with only very minor disabilities is the benefit of free parking. They advise that the only people exempt from paying Road Tax are the genuinely disabled. Therefore, if free parking were limited to those who are "Road Tax Exempt", the attraction of obtaining a Blue Badge by the aforementioned group of motorists would be greatly reduced.
- 3.2 Essex County Council Social Services Department confirms that only motorists receiving High Rate Mobility Allowance are eligible for an exempt Road Tax Licence.
- 3.3 A survey of the other thirteen Authorities in Essex revealed that abuse of the scheme is commonplace. At least one of the Essex Authorities does charge disabled motorists and this policy is adopted by other local authorities in the country.

4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is entirely discretionary whether Local Authorities charge disabled motorists for parking. Restricting free parking to those disabled motorists displaying an exempt road tax disc would be a small step forward in both controlling the issue of Blue Badges and limiting abuse of the system in the Council's car parks. It would also show a real commitment to those genuinely disabled persons who are often unable to find a convenient bay in our car parks.
- 4.2 The DTLR is carrying out a comprehensive review of the Blue Badge Scheme during 2001 and any final decisions emanating from this report may need to be dovetailed into the recommendations contained in this guidance. As yet, the guidance has not been issued.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A stricter regime might lead to an increase in disabled parking on-street in Town Centres.

However, by October 2004 it is proposed that on-street parking will be decriminalised in the District and probably under Council control.

6 FINANCE & RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An increase in Pay & Display revenue is likely but at this stage it is not possible to quantify.
- 6.2 An amendment to noticeboards in car parks would be required at a cost of around £300. This could be met from existing resources.

7 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

- 7.1 That free parking in Pay & Display car parks is restricted to disabled persons displaying Exempt Road Tax Discs only.
- 7.2 That the changes are advertised in the car parks and an initial period of grace is exercised by the issuing of warning notices to drivers.

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Background Papers:

- (1) Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee report – 'Review of the Orange Badge Scheme'.
- (2) Department of Transport circular – 'Orange Badge Scheme of Parking Concessions for Disabled and Blind People'.

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