

Transport & Parking Group Annual Report 2011/12

Members: Ian Heggie (SS, Chairman), Chris Gregory (Stratford, Vice Chairman), Cllr Jenny Fradgley (SS, Secretary), Neil Basnett (Chairman of Stratford), Roger Bennett (WCC currently on sick leave), Julie Crawshaw (WCC temporarily replacing Roger Bennett), Roger Davis (SS), Elizabeth Dixon (Accessible Stratford and SS), Cllr Keith Lloyd (STC and SDC), Martyn Luscombe (Stratford Voice), Cllr Kate Rolfe (SDC and WCC), Robin Sankey (SS), Pat Whitehouse (Retail) and Yvette Widowfield (SDC).

The group has again had a busy year and the key documents prepared during the year will be placed on the Society's web page. The group's web page forms part of the Stratford Society's web page and is accessed from the Society's home page. Among other things, it includes the Agendas and Minutes for each meeting.

The main issues dealt with during the year included: (i) a seminar with staff from Bury St Edmunds to share best practice on road signage; (ii) a survey of road signs and lines along the Historic Spine; (iii) the group's contribution to the parking element of SDC's Systems Thinking Exercise; (iv) re-instatement of the Town Ambassador Courses; (v) WCC's Bus Station and Southern Park & Ride feasibility studies; and (vi) the proposed new footbridge at Stratford-upon-Avon station.

(i) Bury St Edmunds Seminar. A few years ago, the Historic Towns Forum participated in a major program called "The Historic Core Zones Project" which focussed – as a demonstration project – on de-cluttering four towns: Bury St Edmunds, Lincoln, Shrewsbury and Halifax. Briefly, they defined "restricted zones" in each town and – within these zones – gained approval from DfT to both reduce signage and make it smaller. To share this experience, we therefore invited senior staff from Bury to visit us to share their experience through a seminar held at the Town Hall. In the event, Ian Poole, Head of Economic Planning & Development at Bury (also former Chair of the **HTF**) and Steve Boor, their chief traffic engineer, came armed with pictures, drawings, dimensions and other materials to share their experience. They explained how they reduced the number of signs, how they reduced their size, how long and difficult it was to get DfT approval for non-standard signage, and what enforcement problems they encountered. A full report on the seminar proceedings will be posted on our web page.

(ii) Historic Spine Signage Survey. The Group worked alongside the Historic Spine Working Group to undertake a survey of road signs and lines along the Spine. The survey was carried out in August by Ian Prosser, Dick Prior, Paul Burley and Ian Heggie. The results were written up in the form of a report by Ian Heggie, commenting in general about yellow lines, followed by 24 comments about signs (or groups of signs) which might hopefully be removed or reduced in size in Henley Street, High Street, Chapel Street, Church Street and Old Town (a copy of the report on the survey will be posted on our web page). Ian Prosser and Ian Heggie then walked the Spine with Roger Bennett from WCC and agreed that many of the signs could be removed, or reduced in size. Some have already been removed under WCC's maintenance budget and we have been assured that the remainder will be dealt with over the next 2-3 years. WCC has also agreed a special policy for the Spine – all new and replacement signs will be at the minimum size specified in the

regulations, unless there are good reasons for not using the minimum. Finally, it is not only road signs that blight the Spine. A huge BT broad-band cupboard has recently been erected just outside Hall's Croft in spite of planning permission which required it to be sited elsewhere. The Group – with strong support from Cllr Rolfe – is working to have it re-located. The matter is now in the hands of SDC's enforcement team.

(iii) SDC's Systems Thinking Exercise. In last year's Annual Report we noted that, with our support, both Stratforward and the Town Council had carried out comprehensive parking surveys. We helped prepare the final report on the Stratforward survey, together with their proposed Action Plan. An initial meeting was held with SDC representatives in November to discuss our findings, but we were unable to make any further progress. Fortunately, the chair of the committee dealing with parking issues changed and the new chair invited us to join the Systems Thinking parking committee. Thereafter, we made encouraging progress on most of the issues highlighted in the surveys, plus other issues raised by SDC. These included: (a) naming and branding car parks to ensure motorists approaching the town could find them on a map (where is Unicorn Meadow?) and could be directed to the nearest spaces; (b) changing the parking tariffs to make them simpler, encouraging evening visitors to use off-street car parks (rather than residential streets) and encouraging day visitors to stay longer; and (c) upgrading the SDC web site to show all car parks – both public and private – together with their charging regimes. The committee's report is in the process of being finalised and we are expecting it to be published shortly.

(iv) Town Ambassador Course. The Ambassador course was originally delivered by the Town Management Partnership and, once it had closed down, we were constantly asked if we could re-instate it. The T&P Group agreed to lead and design the new course, while Stratforward agreed to administer it. The course aims to make the town more visitor-friendly by giving staff who regularly come into contact with visitors (e.g., Parking Attendants, hotel front desk staff, etc.) a "behind the scenes" introduction to the main attractions in the town. The first re-instated course was delivered in early November, while the second is planned for April. The new offering exceeded all expectations and we received several written and verbal messages of congratulations afterwards. One thing we hadn't expected was feedback suggesting that the target group should be expanded to include petrol station staff (visitors regularly ask them where to park, how to get to the theatre, etc.) and street cleaners who get asked the same questions. They will now be included in our future offerings. The programmes for the November course and planned April course will be posted on our web page.

(v) Bus Station and Southern P&R Feasibility Studies. Several members of the Group were on the Steering Committees for these feasibility studies. The reports were presented in July and neither produced an economic business case to support the schemes. They could therefore only be implemented by using Section 106 funds. The Group reviewed the feasibility studies and accepted the Steering Groups' conclusions. However, since bus congestion in Bridge and Wood Streets is an ongoing concern and, even if a bus station was built it would be several years before it opened, the Group has contacted the main bus companies with a view to meeting them to discuss what might be done *now* to alleviate the present situation. This

meeting will be held in the next few weeks.

(vi) Proposed New Footbridge at Stratford Station. The group opposed the Stratford Parkway scheme, because we were concerned that it might adversely affect the existing town station and that the new (un-manned) parkway station would not be DDA compliant or user-friendly for people with disabilities, parents with small children, etc. We were therefore delighted when the government announced last December that the DfT had approved funding from its Access for All scheme (which aims to improve access to stations) for a new footbridge at Stratford town station which will meet the needs of all users and the DDA. The scheme will cost around £1.23 million and the DfT will finance £1 million of this cost. The balance is expected to be raised from developer contributions (Section 106 payments). The group welcomed this news. First, it means that at least one of the town's two stations will be user-friendly, (i.e., DDA compliant), it will make the town station more attractive to rail travellers and this, in turn, will make it more likely that the town station will remain open.

Future Directions:

Among other things, the Group's future meetings will be looking at the issues facing cyclists wishing to use the town centre, realistic charging for Blue Badge parking, restricting parking along the Historic Spine (by re-locating, rather than abolishing parking spaces), ensuring SDC's parking report is adopted, and working with Stratford Voice to try and get Lucy's Mill replaced by a user-friendly bridge that can cater for all users, including cyclists, those with disabilities and anyone with prams.