



Northumberland County Council

**DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND HOUSING IN CONSULTATION
WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

BERWICK COACH PARK

Cabinet Member: Councillor Glen Sanderson, Environment & Local Services

Purpose of Report

To consider options for Coach Parking in Berwick.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Chapel Street coach park is converted to a car park, subject to planning approval.
2. The existing coach drop-off/pick-up point on Church Street is retained and signage is provided to direct coaches to the new parking location.
3. Coach parking is provided at the Swan Leisure Centre using the existing access track (Option 4) whilst the long term provision for coach parking in Berwick is determined following an assessment of the demand from tour operators.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the *Economic Growth* and *Places and Environment* Aims in the Corporate Plan:

“Our aim is to promote a more prosperous county that provides high wages, skilled jobs and opportunities to create thriving businesses.”

“Our aim is to maintain and further improve the quality of our towns, villages and countryside and make it easier for residents to access services and high quality, affordable homes and to travel using different modes of transport. To achieve this, we will keep Northumberland clean, green and safe from detrimental impacts of climate change, build more houses to benefit those most in need and provide a convenient, integrated public transport network.”

Key Issues

1. The Chapel Street Coach park was opened in the spring of 2017.
2. Since its opening the County Council has received concerns from local residents about the current coach park in Chapel Street relating to its impact on the local area and quality of life for those living adjacent.
3. The local MP has also expressed concern.
4. Potential options for an alternative coach parking site have been explored.

Background

1. In recent years a number of studies have been carried out in Berwick relating to issues such as traffic management and public realm improvements.
2. A number of these reports highlighted a lack of coach parking in Berwick as an issue which limited the ability of the town to attract coach trips and benefit from the increased spending they bring.
3. In particular, the 'Tweed and Silk – A Public Realm Strategy for Berwick-upon-Tweed' report states that *'Coach visitors are a potential rich source of tourist income currently under exploited in Berwick. The Tourist Information Office finds that coach drivers frequently complain that they cannot park adequately. Drivers need a drop-off location close to good facilities, consequently many avoid Berwick at present. This problem is clearly a high priority which needs to be solved'*
4. The need for a coach park was endorsed by the Berwick Chamber of Trade who wish to encourage coach trips as a way of boosting the local economy.
5. A number of sites within Berwick were investigated in an options appraisal in order to determine whether they were suitable or capable for use as a coach park. At that time it was concluded that the Chapel Street site, which was a car park with an adjoining area of hardstanding which was purchased by the County Council, was the most suitable location. Planning permission was granted for change of use to a coach park in May 2014. Objections received from adjoining residents during the planning process included concerns over air quality, noise, overlooking and loss of privacy.
6. A coach drop-off/pick-up point was provided nearby on Church Street so that coaches could drop-off passengers before moving on to the coach park to wait until returning to pick-up.

7. The coach park on Chapel Street opened in April 2017. It cost £451k to construct. Land acquisition cost a further £120k. Figure 1 shows the locations of the coach park and drop-off point.

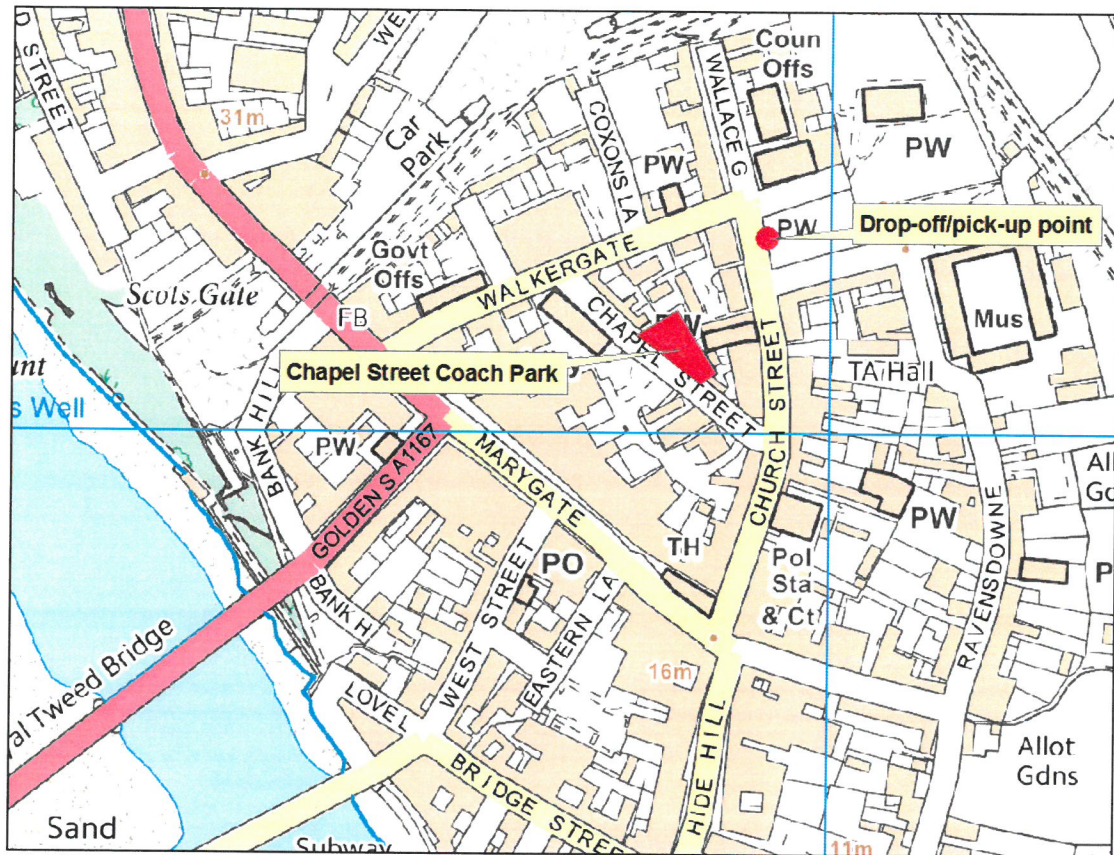


Fig.1 Existing Coach Park and Drop-off

8. Camera monitoring was carried out for 35 days during July and August to establish the current level of usage. The results show that the coach park was in use on most days, with at least one coach present. The maximum number of coaches present at one time was four. In total 50 coaches used the coach park during the monitoring period. The average duration of stay was 74 minutes, with the longest stay being 5 hours 54 mins and the shortest 14 minutes.

Potential Options for an Alternative Coach Park

9. Since the coach park opened the County Council has continued to receive complaints from residents in the surrounding area about the impact its use has on their amenity.
10. In response to these complaints the County Council has considered further whether the coach park should remain in place, or could be moved to an alternative location.

11. Four potential options were identified:

- Retain the existing coach park in Chapel Street.
- Provide coach parking in Walkergate.
- Provide coach parking in Castlegate overflow car park.
- Provide coach parking at Swan Leisure Centre in Tweedmouth.

12. Note that all the potential options retain the use of the existing drop off/pick up point on Church Street.

Option 1 - Retain the existing coach park in Chapel Street.

13. The existing coach park became operational in April 2017. Its hours of operation are 8am to 7pm and access outside of these times is prevented by timer-controlled rising bollards. Signage is in place to direct coaches along the appropriate route, though additional signs were recommended if the coach park was to be retained.

14. Anecdotal evidence from coach drivers suggests that the coach park has not been well promoted to date. In addition, coach tour companies plan their itineraries months in advance, and it is difficult to assess its success or otherwise from a coach usage point of view after such a short period.

15. It should be noted, however, that the current coach park has generated significant concerns from local residents in terms of its impact on their quality of life. Issues raised include noise, pollution and visual amenity. If the current coach park is retained, these concerns are likely to continue.

Option 2 - Parking Bay on Walkergate

16. A bus parking bay is currently in place on Walkergate opposite Berwick Library and adjacent to the new office development on the former Kwiksave site. The bay is on-road and is used by coaches and local buses as an informal drop-off point and as a place for buses to layover between trips.

17. A coach parking bay could be created by narrowing the footway to approx. 1.5m and the carriageway to approx. 6m at an estimated cost of £115,000. However, there are significant disadvantages with this option:

- The maximum capacity would be 2 coaches which is less than the current capacity of 4 at Chapel Street.
- Utilities are present in the existing footway which may need to be protected or diverted and would add to the cost.

- Parked coaches would affect visibility for vehicles exiting Hatters Lane and Coxons Lane, both these lanes are accesses to car parks and therefore have high traffic volumes.
- It is likely to be unpopular with the tenants of the new office building.

Option 3 - Castlegate Overflow Car Park

18. This option would convert part of the existing overflow area at Castlegate car park into a coach park. The overflow area is currently grass with a reinforcement mesh.
19. It is unlikely that this proposal would be acceptable or gain planning consent. The use of this area for car parking as an overflow car park only has consent until May 2018. It is expected that Historic England would object to any proposal to use the area for coach parking due to its negative impact on the historic town walls.
20. To utilise this area as a coach park would require substantial works to upgrade the surface to a more robust road construction suitable for coaches. It is estimated that this would cost approx. £45,000 per coach space.

Option 4 - Swan Leisure Centre, Tweedmouth

21. The Swan Leisure Centre is just over one mile south of the town centre in Tweedmouth. It is easily accessed from the A1167 Northumberland Road via a roundabout junction. Coach drivers would be able to use the leisure centre catering and toilet facilities.
22. The leisure centre has indicated that they are willing to allow coach parking within their site providing the impact on the car park is minimal. An access track located to the south of the leisure centre building has been identified as the preferred location as it has no direct impact on centre users and has little effect on the existing car parking, although 4 spaces could be affected by coaches turning.
23. A short extension of the access track will be required in order to maintain access for deliveries and emergency vehicles whilst a coach is parked. Lighting may also be required. New signage would be required to direct coaches to the coach park from the drop-off point. The estimated cost, is £15,000. (including lighting).
24. The access track can only accommodate one coach. If further coach parking is required either car parking spaces would be lost, or an extension to the car park would have to be constructed. There is, however, scope to increase coach parking to meet demand.

Converting the existing coach park to a car park

25. If an alternative site for the coach park is selected, the existing site at Chapel Street can be converted back to car parking. Including reinstated on-street parking, the maximum number of parking spaces available is 22. It is suggested that no disabled parking provision is made due to the space constraints, however, there are 4 disabled spaces available in the Parade car park which is approx. 200m away.
26. The parking bays within the coach park are marked out using quick-setts. It is likely that their removal will damage the surface beneath so some repairs will be required. Re-marking of parking bays will then be carried out.
27. The estimated cost of conversion back to a car park is £19,000. This includes the physical works, Traffic Regulation Orders and Planning application.
28. Traffic regulation orders and planning applications normally take around 8 weeks to complete. However, given the issues raised it is suggested that the coach park is closed as soon as an alternative site is ready for use.

Conclusion

The coach park on Chapel Street has only been in use for a short period and it is difficult to gauge whether it would attract greater use over time. However, it has been subject to repeated concerns from local residents about its impact on the local area and quality of life which have brought into question whether it is the best use for the site.

If the coach park is converted to a car park, the coach drop-off/pick-up point on Church Street will remain to provide a suitably located facility for dropping off and picking up visitors in the centre of the town.

If the coach park is to be relocated, the Swan Leisure Centre in Tweedmouth is considered a suitable site. It has the advantage of being in the County Council's ownership, is easy to provide coach parking for a single vehicle and has potential for future expansion should demand increase in the future.

Recommendation

Given the continued opposition to the use of the current coach park on Chapel Street it is recommended that:

1. The Chapel Street coach park is converted to a car park, subject to planning approval.
2. The existing coach drop-off/pick-up point on Church Street is retained and signage is provided to direct coaches to the new parking location.

3. Coach parking is provided at the Swan Leisure Centre using the existing access track (Option 4) whilst the long term provision for coach parking in Berwick is determined following an assessment of the demand from tour operators.

Implications Arising out of the Report

Policy	None
Finance and value for money	The necessary budget to implement the recommendations will be accommodated within the overall Integrated Transport element of the Local Transport Plan capital programme.
Legal	Traffic regulation orders and planning consent are required.
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	The recommendations will impact on the Council's property at the Swan Centre.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled parking would not be accommodated in Chapel Street car park but disabled parking bays are available nearby.
Risk Assessment	None
Crime & Disorder	None
Customer Consideration	Statutory consultees will be consulted. Consultation is carried out via the planning process.
Carbon reduction	None
Wards	Berwick North, Tweedmouth

Background papers:

Berwick Coach Parking Feasibility Report (NCC 2017)
 Tweed & Silk - A Public Realm Strategy for Berwick Upon Tweed (Southern Green 2010)
 Berwick Destination Management Plan (Miller 2008)

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that relevant officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	initials
Finance Officer	n/a
Monitoring Officer/Legal	n/a
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
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Director	PJ
Portfolio Holder(s)	GS

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DECISION TAKEN

Title of Officer(s) and Portfolio Holder: Director of Local Services & Housing
Cabinet Member for Environment & Local Services

Subject: **BERWICK COACH PARK**


Consultation Local County Councillors and Berwick Town Council have been consulted on the future of Chapel Street coach park and alternative options for coach parking and are supportive of using the Swan Leisure Centre site.

Decision Taken:

1. The Chapel Street coach park is converted to a car park, subject to planning approval.
2. The existing coach drop-off/pick-up point on Church Street is retained and signage is provided to direct coaches to the new parking location.
3. Coach parking is provided at the Swan Leisure Centre using the existing access track (Option 4) whilst the long term provision for coach parking in Berwick is determined following an assessment of the demand from tour operators.

Signature of Director/
officer/Portfolio Holder

 5/1/18

 18/10/17

Date