

Ringwood Town Council Meeting 25th November 2009
– a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleaven

1) District Council Budgets for 2010/11

Although we have to make savings (again) of approx. £1 million pa, Cabinet is working hard to minimise any Council Tax increases without reducing front-line services. Considerable efficiency improvements in the operation of our Health and Leisure Centres are being implemented and the policy of redeploying Council staff when ever vacancies arise is still in place as the first option.

Within my Planning and Transportation Portfolio responsibilities, we are bidding to renew our SID/SLR speed management programmes (£35k) in response to safety demands.

We are having to reappraise our Young Persons Concessionary Travel scheme as it is currently running 40% over budget and increasing (£50k to £70k onwards). The difficulty here is that qualification has by default become one only of age range, whereas the original idea was to assist those youngsters not in employment education or training to reach job interviews or counselling appointments where transport links are unaffordable or non-existent.

Similarly, as we are not the Transport Authority, we are planning to reduce our subsidy to the New Forest Tour bus, although our Tourism colleagues and/or National Park may make up the shortfall. (N.B. I have seen a business case made – by Burley business people – for this Tour bus to reach the western side of the Forest including Ringwood – a service which we probably would all support, but not on a subsidy basis!)

2) Parking Matters

Pay and display charges not being proposed for an increase next year, but the parking clocks will increase on January 1st. The shoppers 3-hour clock at the (new) equivalent cost of £1 per month for use any number of times anywhere in the District is regarded as almost laughably cheap by my equivalent office holders in neighbouring Authorities, where season tickets for parking are many times more expensive.

The often wheeled-out accusation that “parking fines and charges are a cash-cow” is being dealt a severe blow by the local press. A quote today from an “Advertiser & Times” reporter - referring to a national survey - goes as follows :-

“The data for the New Forest is as follows:

Parking fines in 07/08 totalled £256,939, and in 08/09 £209,317. With a daytime population of 106,139, the fines equal £2.42, and £1.97, per person in each year. The national English average was £6.14, with places like Kensington totalling £85 per person bumping this up, although many rural councils were lower.

I wondered if NFDC could comment on its own figures? Like you said, the parking clocks seem good value, and would NFDC's average actually be much lower without the many thousands of tourists coming to the district?”

Perhaps our residents/visitors are more law-abiding, or we are too lenient or not patrolling enough? Or have we got it about right!

(crt 24.11.09).