

Cllr Teresa Heritage

A strong local voice for Harpenden



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Dear Resident

Open Letter to the Residents of Harpenden - Free Parking

My recent post on Harpenden social media sites about the decision taken at the District Council not to introduce 2-hour free parking in the District caused quite a stir.

My reason for writing is to explain why I felt so strongly about the Council's decision on not introducing 2-hour free parking, or some more friendly regime for the whole district, and improving the parking enforcement.

Residents had asked me if some free element could be added to the parking charges in Harpenden, as queues were long at times and it took longer to shop. Shop keepers had pointed out to me that many of the free on street parking places were parked all day in many cases by workers in the Town Centre and nobody ever ticketed them (this was happening before Covid too).

I wanted to talk about this at the Council meeting, actually representing the views of the residents, but all parties, except the Conservative Group voted for the guillotine of the debate at 10.45, only allowing the proposers to put their motion then take a vote. To my mind discussing this was the most important debate of the night and it had been put last on the agenda! A 15-minute extension would have allowed a few of us to speak and give our reasoning. The Lib Dem group had put down an amendment to consult with business and shopping centres on the feasibility of the likely effectiveness of free parking and deleted the call for more localised parking enforcement and proposed a needs-based enforcement approach. We need enforcement in Harpenden Town Centre.

I should also add that the suggestion of free parking was not news to Cllr White, the Lib Dem leader, as I had sent an email to him and a senior officer on 28th May asking for free parking to be introduced during lockdown. I was told that they were awaiting parking statistics and would look at the issue, but nothing happened – so as far as I was concerned nothing was going to happen, as consultations take time to organise and process. Something needs to happen now whilst shops and businesses are trying to catch as much business as they can. The motion was not seeking permanency just short-term measures.

Naturally during the social media debate the County Council was criticised for introducing Safer Street measures on the Lower High Street as parking bays were taken away. My response to that is, if I may, if business owners/workers did not park on the High Street in the free spaces meant for shoppers and used the car parks, where reduced rates are provided given to businesses I believe, there would be enough space for all. At least the Safer Street measures were put in place quickly and efficiently and are being monitored to see if they do provide the reassurance required by residents to encourage them to shop and feedback from shop keepers and residents is being monitored and acted up where possible.

Thank you for listening.

Cllr Teresa Heritage

District & County Councillor for Harpenden

Actions, not words