

# **NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE FOR ON-STREET PARKING**

**20 March 2025 at 1.00pm**

**Braintree District Council, Causeway House, Bocking End,  
Braintree**

## **Members Present:**

Councillor Graham Butland (Braintree District Council)  
Councillor Neil Hargreaves (Uttlesford District Council)  
Councillor Ken Williamson (Epping Forest District Council)

## **Substitutions:**

Councillor Tom Cunningham for Councillor Paul Honeywood (Essex).  
Councillor Alastair Gunn for Councillor Nicky Purse (Harlow)

## **Apologies:**

Councillor Mick Barry, Councillor Martin Goss, Councillor Paul Honeywood,  
Councillor Nicky Purse.

## **Also Present:**

Paul Atkinson (Colchester City Council)  
Robert Carmichael (Colchester City Council)  
Trevor Degville (Parking Partnership)  
Jo Haynes (Essex County Council)  
Amelia Hoke (Epping Forest District Council)  
Owen Howell (Colchester City Council)  
Dean James (Harlow District Council)  
Sarah Lewin (Uttlesford District Council)  
Esme McCambridge (Braintree District Council)  
Andrew Nepean (Tendring District Council)  
Mel Rundle (Colchester City Council)  
Richard Walker (Parking Partnership)

## **198. Minutes**

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

## **199. NEPP Financial Update**

Paul Atkinson, Deputy Section 151 Officer [Colchester City Council], presented the financial position of the NEPP as at the end of Month Eleven of 2024-25. Variances were given on items by line, with the overall picture to date showing a £67k surplus.

Expenditure included an overspend on management costs, partly owing to paternity leave. There had been no increase in management numbers, but there were cost increases from pay inflation and the increase in employers' contributions to National Insurance. Recruitment of Civil Enforcement Officers [CEOs] had increased, and the £1.78m budget line for CEOs and Supervision was in line with the previous year. Back-office costs had seen a slight increase, and Data-led Services expenditure was due to be zero for 2025-26.

Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] costs were forecast to see a small reduction, whilst Premises costs had been corrected to cover the two units maintained in the Harlow area. Costs for supplies and services were expected to remain broadly unchanged from 2024-25. Third-party payments were expected to reduce, whilst the bad debt predicted to hold steady at £70k. A small increase in permit income was expected, and Penalty Charge Notice [PCN] Income was expected to rise slightly to £2,100k. The reserves position was laid out for the Joint Committee.

The Deputy Section 151 Officer was asked whether there was anything in the Budget's expected income which involved work requiring public consultations. More detail was requested as to how the working time of Richard Walker, Head of Parking, was split between the NEPP and Colchester City Council. A breakdown was requested of the back-office costs shown.

The Head of Parking confirmed that there was nothing in the expected income shown in the Budget which related to work on which the public would need consultation before proceeding. Regarding the split of his time, the Head of Parking explained the balance between work on NEPP matters and work on Colchester parking, estimating that around 45% of his time was spent working on off-street parking in Colchester. There was likewise a split in back-office costs between on- and off-street parking work, with the Budget apportioning costs on that basis. The Head of Parking explained how the split was worked out and work apportioned area by area. No significant variation was expected from previous years. An action point was agreed for the Head of Parking to provide Joint Committee members with a summary as to how the splitting of his time, and back-office resource, between on- and off-street parking had been calculated.

The Joint Committee welcomed the NEPP's return to a surplus position, and asked for more information as to how bad debts were now handled by the

organisation. The Head of Parking noted the difference in PCNs issued year by year, including the very limited issuing around the time of the Pandemic, necessitated by the situation at the time. A small increase in PCNs issued had been recorded in the current year and variations in that Budget line were expected to settle out. The last few months of the financial year were always critical for PCNs, e.g. poor weather could cause a significant reduction in PCNs issued. The full bad debt value for the year was not available as year end for 2024-25 had not yet been reached.

*RESOLVED* that the JOINT COMMITTEE:

- a) Approves the Budget for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix A.
- b) Notes the forecast outturn for 2024/25 as of 28th February 2025 (Month 11).
- c) Notes the projected impact of the forecast outturn for 2024/25 and the Parking Reserve balance.

## **200. NEPP Business Plan**

Richard Walker, Head of Parking, underscored that no significant changes were proposed for the Plan, compared to the last time this was examined by the Joint Committee, due mainly to the work still ongoing to rebuild the Partnership's reserves. The organisation's transformation project had now been completed, and new structure was in place.

The NEPP's history over the past few years was outlined, and a rundown given of the content of the updated Business Plan, which now included content covering local government reorganisation as well as explaining the split of on- and off-street work and budget arrangements.

The Joint Committee was informed that the increase in the real living wage rate meant that the pay bands were being squeezed upward at the bottom end of the pay scale. There was now an urgent need to conduct work on sign and line maintenance, following a few years of no work being done on this as an expenditure-cutting measure. The parking sector as a whole would be taking on responsibility for funding the National Parking Platform [NPP] development work, following an end to Government funding for this. The Platform was described as a way to allow different parking apps to be usable to pay for parking across the UK, ending the need for motorists to install individual apps for different parking sites.

The National Persistent Evader Database [NPED] would make data sharing easier and lead to swifter police action where necessary.

The National Blue Badge Day of Action was described and outcomes given, leading to ways to reduce Badge misuse nationwide. It was likely that the Day of Action would be expanded to a whole week in the future. A Committee member asked if more communications and promotion work could be carried out for the Day/Week of Action, to which the Head of Parking agreed that this was a good idea.

The Digital Traffic Regulation Orders [D-TRO] initiative had now been updated, and all TROs would need to be digital and handled/advertised online from some point between June and October 2025. The online open data for these would be used to inform autonomous/semi-autonomous vehicles.

Examples of issues were given regarding obstructive parking on footways, indicating where footway parking might be necessary, and in identifying where problems were caused. A preference for deregulation had been shown in meetings of the British Parking Association [BPA], but with local authorities having discretionary powers regarding rule setting and enforcement. Consultation responses from 2020 were still being worked through by Government. The parking industry had been told that action would be taken 'soon.'

There was no power for the NEPP to increase the penalty charge for PCNs, as this power resided with Government. There would be a positive effect on the NEPP Budget if PCN rates were to increase in line with inflation. Organisations such as the BPA, LGA [Local Government Association] and Control were all lobbying for a change to allow PCN levels to be set locally, subject to veto powers of the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Joint Committee was informed that the NEPP's operating system was due for renewal in about 18 months and would need to be replaced.

Concern was expressed by the Committee at the unviability of the NEPP having fixed income from PCNs, with costs continuing to rise from inflation. Some support was voiced for the idea that PCN levels should be decided locally, rather than by Government.

A Committee member noted that submissions for the initial consultation on local government reorganisation [LGR] would need to be submitted by the following day, with a deadline of 26 September for specific proposals to then be put forward. The Government's response was expected within the 2025-26 financial year. It was emphasised how much work this would mean for member authorities' officers, and the Committee member suggested that all work plan content for the Joint Committee should have to be able to show that it was necessary to be done. The possibility that staff would start to seek to leave the local authorities of Essex was raised, which would lead to the existing councils experiencing more and more impacts from staffing shortfalls.

The suggestion was made that LGR should be more prominently covered in the Business Plan, including any deadline dates which NEPP partners would need to meet, and that staff should only be tasked with new work if it was absolutely necessary. Another Committee member stated that his council had introduced a system to assess all its work processes and decide which needed to continue and which should be stopped. This was to allow officers to concentrate on necessities. The Head of Parking noted that all reports to the past three Joint Committee meetings had included a section on LGR. The Business Plan had been significantly trimmed, and all work had been reviewed last year as part of the recovery plan. Only core operations were now being continued.

The Joint Committee considered the expectation that elected members for the new councils were expected to be in place by 2028. A Committee member suggested that the NEPP should switch back to budgeting district by district, which might make it easier to transition to whatever the new arrangements would be, following LGR.

The Joint Committee discussed the ending of Park Safe project work on changing poor parking behaviour around schools. The project had been too successful at changing people's behaviour, which had meant that it had not been self-funding. The four fixed cameras and two Park Safe cars had been in use at sites where need was identified. Much work had needed to be done to install cameras and then move them to the next sites. 41 sites had been identified for the pilot project, with the NEPP addressing four, then moving on to the next four, and so on. Whilst expectation had been that it would take around 1.5 terms for the cameras to improve parking behaviour, it was found that on average problems were reduced by 82% within five weeks of cameras being installed.

The cost of relocating cameras had significantly increased, along with the cost of new equipment. The scheme could not be made to be self-funding, but had generated a lot of data, and feedback from CEOs also. There was the possibility that a shared services scheme of this type, on a larger scale, could be made to work. Examples were given as to where cameras could be most effective, e.g. around school clusters. Not all data and issues had been analysed, but the NEPP aimed to seek a way forward in the coming financial year.

The Head of Parking was asked how large an increase in sign and line maintenance was expected, and explained the budgetary decision previously taken to not do this work for the past few years. There were now items of maintenance work which were needed urgently in many places. There were issues where lack of maintenance was making restrictions unenforceable. There was a combination of general maintenance and specific problems to address.

A Joint Committee member suggested that copies of the Business Plan be produced to help show people what the NEPP did. The Head of Parking agreed that this could be done.

*RESOLVED* that the JOINT COMMITTEE adopts the NEPP Business Plan for 2025/26, with additional content regarding the prioritisation of work, proceeding into LGR.

## **201. Agreement wording amendments update**

Councillor Hargreaves gave a summary of the work that had been done regarding suggested alterations to the wording of the NEPP Agreement being put forward by Uttlesford and Tendring District Councils. A substantive response had only been received from Colchester City Council and the NEPP. A meeting had been held with their representatives, Councillor Barry of Tendring District Council, and officers on the Monday of this week, prior to this meeting. Further changes had then been incorporated and circulated to all Joint Committee members on that

Monday. The Section 151 Officer had advised that the NEPP should seek to maintain a £400k reserve, and a change had been proposed to specify that TROs could be introduced, even if the £400k reserve was not in place, as long as the TROs were cost neutral. A list of non-delegated TRO functions had been obtained. Councillor Hargreaves stated that the proposal he was working on would see parking and red lines outside of schools specified as being for Essex County Council to handle, as the education authority.

Regarding the provisions for partners leaving the NEPP, Councillor Hargreaves stated that there had been a lack of clarity on exit arrangements. The proposal under discussion would see an equal split of reserves or debt between all partners, unless all partners agreed otherwise.

The proposed amendments would see the deletion of most of Appendices E and F, where content did not have a function or was contradictory. Content was suggested to say that the NEPP could do other project work, with the Joint Committee's approval, especially if it were to be income generating. Not much of this type of work was expected, with LGR progressing.

A draft had been circulated to all Joint Committee members, and Councillor Hargreaves set out that he intended to next send a copy to the Head of Legal Services at Essex County Council, to identify any problems from the County Council's perspective, and he would seek their response by the end of April.

Councillor Cunningham, Essex County Council, stated that he was not happy with the manner in which the process on this matter had been carried out, and that the Chairman of the JPC, Councillor Honeywood, had thought it appropriate to remove the item from this meeting's agenda, to allow constructive consultation and conversation beforehand. Councillor Cunningham expressed his belief that the suggested amendments had not been circulated to all partners and officers. Councillor Hargreaves confirmed that the original draft had been circulated to all partners some months ago, and only one response had been received. Councillor Hargreaves stated that he was happy to give further time for partners to provide comments and asked for a timeframe from the Joint Committee. Councillor Cunningham clarified that his concerns were not around the timeframes set, but that it was important to first consult those who could advise on what was possible, and that this proposal should first have been put to the County Council.

It was noted that the most recent draft had only been shared a few days prior to this meeting, and a Committee member requested that the Joint Committee think about how this matter was to be handled, emphasising the need to work together, listen and constructively engage.

A Committee member asked the Joint Committee to consider what the worst thing that could happen would be, should this matter not be taken any further, making the argument that there was no point working continuing with Agreement amendments if the organisation would not be continuing to exist. The NEPP partners' legal teams would all be very busy working on preparing for LGR, and the Joint Committee should decide what work was vital to do, and what was not, with other issues appearing to be much higher priority, in the current

circumstances, and officer time likely to be stretched.

A complaint was made by a Joint Committee member that the latest version of suggested amendments had only been circulated around 23:15 on the most recent Monday, just two full working days prior to this meeting, which had not given partners enough time to consider the proposals. Councillor Cunningham raised significant dissatisfaction with the proposal to transfer functions from the NEPP to the County Council, where these would involve cost implications for that Council which had not been identified or quantified. Councillor Hargreaves noted that the NEPP had never worked on traffic regulation orders for new developments, and that he would be happy to agree to dropping the proposal to transfer any functions to the County Council, if that Council was not supportive of it.

A substitute on the Committee expressed dissatisfaction that there was nothing in the agenda giving details of the proposals, so no view could be given on them. This Committee member however stated that they had received officer advice raising concerns with the amendments as circulated.

Councillor Hargreaves stated that he would seek offline consultations with all NEPP partners and would recirculate any suggestions to all NEPP partners.

## **202. Forward Plan 2024-2025**

A request was made for future NEPP Joint Committee dates to be added to members' calendars. Owen Howell, Clerk to the Committee, gave assurance that the 2025-26 meeting dates would be added to the NEPP website, and Outlook invitations issued to all Joint Committee members and attending officers.

*RESOLVED* that the JOINT COMMITTEE approves the North Essex Parking Partnership Forward Plan for 2024-25.