

Executive Committee – 4 November 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public and Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Cllr Caroline Ellis	<p>At the time of writing 1,584 residents have signed a petition demanding that Somerset Council retain the Mary St/High St car park as a car park, rather than sell it to a developer for housing. They are deeply concerned at the social and economic impact of the potential loss of this car park – on the viability of key arts and social venues and businesses in the vicinity, on places of worship, attendance at vital community events, and on older and disabled people’s access to vital services and amenities in the area. They would like the Council to come to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the role this car park - which is the only one in the area with evening parking - plays in the community, the myriad social and community services in the vicinity whose service users rely upon it and the impact on women and disabled people of removing a safe and accessible night time parking option. People will not simply say ‘oh well, let’s park further away’ – many will literally not be able to; instead they will stay at home, lose access to friends and activities, feel isolated and businesses will lose vital custom. To date I note that no mitigation has been proposed to address the loss of 12 disabled parking bays or the complete lack of parking in this key area after 7pm. I would like to ask the Executive the following questions:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do they not agree that the grave concerns expressed and the large degree of public concern over this now merits a pause to conduct <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. an equality impact assessment on this proposed asset disposal b. a wider socio-economic impact assessment on the proposed asset disposal, taking into account the impact on vital community services in the vicinity including services, venues/cultural and social amenities as well as high street and other neighbouring businesses and to engage properly with local residents, businesses and community groups whose lived experiences, needs and circumstances are so relevant to taking good decisions? 2. Have they considered alternatives to selling the land to a developer for housing which would nonetheless provide a route to helping to close the budget gap? Such alternatives could include potential disposal to the Town Council to continue to run as a public car park (they would need to be provided with details of likely maintenance costs and revenue, carry out a condition survey and all other aspects of due diligence in order to consider this) or retaining the car park lower storey(s) and building housing above (this could secure at least some accessible parking including at night time whilst offering the prospect of securing further income towards balancing the budget.)

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| | <p>3. Have they considered whether there is any viable mitigation possible within current budgetary constraints – for example opening Orchard Car Park in the evenings (not just for one off events – the need for evening parking is a DAILY need), improving its safety and creating further on-street disabled parking spaces close by and various other measures?</p> <p>4. Can we be assured that early, transparent and meaningful engagement and consultation with stakeholders will become the norm before decisions on specific asset disposals come forward in the future so that we can fully understand and assess all the implications and avoid unintended consequences that could impact negatively on our communities and economy?</p> <p><u>Response from Cllr Mike Rigby – Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets</u></p> |
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