

# **Wells-Next-The-Sea Car Parking Study**

**Final Report**

**TSB1216**

**October 2003**

Prepared by Technical Division

# Wells-Next-The-Sea Parking Study

## Parking Study

October 2003

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## **Wells-Next-The-Sea**

### **Parking Study**

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## Executive Summary

- an initial aim of this study was to investigate park and ride/interchange with the coasthopper in Wells. The brief evolved during the study as it was found that a planning application for Heritage Centre was being put forward.
- This study is independent of the Heritage bid, however liaison to find common ground/mutual benefits was necessary.
- The aims and Policies within the Norfolk Coast Transport Strategy and AONB Visitor Management Strategy have been taken into account.
- Some recommendations such as improved signing, improved resort information (ie websites leaflets, advertising literature - stating how to get there by more sustainable forms of transport), amending the layout of Stearmans Yard Car Park could be relatively low cost measures.
- As part of the planning application for the heritage centre it has been calculated that provision for 53 cars should be made. The heritage centre are currently negotiating with Holkham Estate (land owners) and Budgens store about use of land adjacent to the proposed store (off Freeman Street) for a permanent car park. This site is on the edge of the built envelope of the town and is accessed off a main road into the town.
- Any additional off-street provision would only have a seasonal demand as ample parking on and off-street already exists off-season. It is recommended that the guidance within the Norfolk Coast Transport Strategy and Visitor Management Strategy For the Norfolk Coast is followed as closely as possible to minimise traffic impact in the town centre and visual impact on the surrounding environment.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Wells-Next-The-Sea is a town with a population of approximately 2400 located on the North Norfolk Coast. It is situated within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and transport issues are guided from policies within the Norfolk Coast Transport Strategy (NCTS). See location plan TSB1216/TS/001 in Appendix A.
- 1.2 It is popular location for tourists and day-trippers particularly in summer, as well as being a shopping centre for residents from nearby villages.
- 1.3 The aims of this study was not only to assess/establish the general parking needs in Wells, but to assess the merits / opportunities of providing some form of park and ride link, or integration with the existing Coasthopper bus service. (The coasthopper service (no: 36) operates between Hunstanton and Cromer).
- 1.4 At the early stages of this study, it was discovered that a bid for a Maritime Heritage Visitor centre was being independently pursued. It is possible that this bid will require to address some parking issues for a possible increase in car generated trips to the proposed centre. North Norfolk District Council Planning Department have indicated that this centre is likely to generate parking for 53 additional cars and that this issue will need to be resolved before planning permission is granted.
- 1.5 This study is independent of this planning application/bid, however some ideas have been discussed and could be beneficial for Norfolk County Council and the Heritage bid.

## 2.0 Existing Parking/Transport network situation.

2.1 The existing car parks/main parking areas are identified on plan number TSB1216/TS/002 in Appendix B.

2.2 There are currently seasonal waiting restrictions Good Friday to end of September on many of the main through roads (Freeman Street, The Quay, Theatre Road etc) in Wells. The use of additional no waiting cones has been observed, in particular on the north side of The Quay, sections of Buttlands, and sections of Polka Road (east side)

2.3 Previous surveys taken during an Interreg Project in 2000. This is shown in the table 2.1 below.

Parking Place.	Owner	Est capacity	car count 08/92		car count 08/00	
			am	pm	am	pm
Light railway/highway		30	ns	ns	ns	ns
Polka Road (coach/lorry) car park	NNDC (North Norfolk District Council)	11	ns	ns	ns	ns
Buttlands area car park & highway	Highway	140	45	51	122	133
Staithe Street	NNDC	20	18	20	19	19
Quay	Harbour	90	60	97	63	67
Stearmans Yard	NNDC	160	150	164	141	152
Behind Anglo Garage		60			13	46
Beach Road (Pinewoods)	Holkham Estate	340	79	275	244	408

Table 2.1

2.4 The Anglo garage site is currently being redeveloped and is therefore no longer available for parking.

2.5 During the survey in August 2000 some attitudes to parking (and park and ride) were undertaken by means of face to face surveys with users of Stearmans Yard Car Park. The results of this are shown below:

**What was reason for visit?** 52% holiday , 46% day trip, 2% other.

**What was expected duration of stay?** 1-2hrs 14%, 2-3hrs 31%, 3-4hrs 27%, 4-5hrs 13%, 5-6hrs 2%, 6-8hrs 12%.

**Do you think there is a parking problem on the Norfolk Coast?** 82% No

**Where have you travelled from today?** 69% within Norfolk

**Why have you chosen that car park?** 66% convenience, 8% shopping, 0% beach

**What do you think the traffic problems are in the area?** 82% no problems, 9% too many cars, 3% unsuitable roads, 1% parking, 5% other.

**Do you think park and ride would reduce traffic problems?** 11% yes, 4% maybe, 3% no, (82% no problems)

**If unable to park here would you considered using a free bus from an inland car park?** 39% yes, 43% no, 17% maybe, 1% don't know.

**Do you think that better cycling provisions would help reduce traffic related problems?** yes 8%, maybe 3%, no 4% (82% no problems, 3% no answer)

**What would you have done if charges were increased to £5 unlimited stay at this car park?** go elsewhere 71%, would pay 24%, park on-street 1%, walk 1%, other 3%

- 2.6 A day time off-peak season survey of on-street and off-street was undertaken on 12 February 2003, an evening off peak survey was undertaken on 26 February 2003 and a Saturday daytime off-peak undertaken on 1 March 2003. This attempts to establish a baseline data that could be attributed to residents and local users. (The results are shown in table 2.2 below and on plans TSB1216/TS/004, 005 and 006 in Appendix C).

<b>Date / Time</b>	12 Feb 03 (11.00hrs - 12.00hrs)	26 Feb 03 (18.00hrs- 18.30hrs)	1 Mar 03 (10.00hrs - 11.00hrs)
Parking Area			
<b>Off-street</b>			
Stearmans Yard	2	1	18
Quay	6	4	21
Beach	7	1	46
Staithe Street	17	9	19
Polka Road	6	3	3
<b>On-street</b>			
Freeman Street	19	17	27
The Buttlands (formalised bays)	24	3	25
The Buttlands	36	39	66
Polka Road	11	1	10
Station Road/Mill Road	15	19	16
The Quay	6	6	8
Maryland/ southern section of Northfield Crescent	2	4	5

Table 2.2

2.7 Summer surveys were undertaken on 23 & 26 July, 23 & 26 August 2003. The beat surveys throughout the days are shown in Appendix D. The table 2.3 below summarises these findings at times comparable to table 2.2 above.

<b>Date / Time</b>	23 July 03 (11.00hrs - 12.00hrs)	23 July 03 (18.00hrs- 18.30hrs)	23 Aug 03 (18.00hrs- 18.30hrs)
Parking Area			
<b>Off-street</b>			
Stearmans Yard	51	54	139
Quay	44	40	74
Beach	82	55	69
Staithe Street	26	18	44
Polka Road	4	2	2
<b>On-street</b>			
Freeman Street	2	1	12
The Buttlands (formalised bays)	35	30	32
The Buttlands	77	72	99
Polka Road	19	9	26
Station Road/Mill Road	24	20	30
The Quay	17	27	10
Maryland/ southern section of Northfield Crescent	7	7	6

Table 2.3

2.8 The existing route of the coasthopper is shown in plan number TSB1216/TS/008 in Appendix E.

### **3.0 Analysis of survey data.**

- 3.1 Wells can reach its parking capacity during peak summer periods, however only a small percentage of people surveyed indicated that they felt there were parking problems. (However the 98% of those surveyed were visitors. Only 2% were residents, which is too small a sample to comment on their view.
- 3.2 A reasonable percentage (39%) indicated that they would consider using a free bus from an inland car park.
- 3.3 The motorists seem to already seek out the most appropriate car park (ie most using Stearmans Yard indicated that they had used it for shopping and not for the beach and likewise the Beach Road car park was predominately used by beach visitors, although it can be observed that some visitors then walk or catch the miniature train to the town as part of their stay). (It should be noted that the operators of the Beach Car Park sign an overflow facility for this car park at peak times). An area of land adjacent to the pitch and putt course is used on these occasions.
- 3.4 The introduction of a higher priced charging strategy in the town centre was clearly not a popular solution and many people indicated that they would go elsewhere. Although this obviously could remove some of the parking from Wells, it may not reduce traffic as the unwary motorist could still drive to the town, see the tariffs, decide not to park, then seek alternative parking, and failing this leave the town. This would also have a detrimental effect on the tourist nature of the town.

#### **4.0 Identification of possible interchange/parking sites.**

4.1 During discussions with the Project Manager for the Heritage centre bid, some sites had already been identified and discussed with local landowners. These sites are shown on plan number TSB1216/TS/002 in Appendix B.

4.2 General guidance in the Visitor Management Strategy for the Norfolk Coast, Norfolk Coast Project 1995, is that if any new parking is provided it should:

- help to overcome existing circulation or parking problems,
- is located (preferably in built up areas) where it does not detract from the character of the surrounding area or result in an unacceptable increase in visitor pressure on adjoining sensitive land,
- is of high quality reflecting local distinctiveness,
- consider the needs of the less mobile and those with disabilities.

4.3 The benefits/disbenefits of each site are outlined in the table below

<b>Site</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Disbenefits</b>
Playground north of Freeman Street / west of Beach Road  <b>Site 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Close to proposed development and other town attractions</li> <li>- Land owner has expressed interest to make land available</li> <li>- No need for park and ride or other type of link</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nearby residents could object</li> <li>- Location means traffic still has to travel through the town.</li> <li>- Against NCTS policy (ie north of A149)</li> <li>- Could be considered to have a visual impact on relatively undeveloped area</li> <li>- Need to find alternative site for playground</li> </ul>
Field off Holkham Road/Freeman Street  <b>Site 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reasonable distance from A149</li> <li>- Traffic would not need to pass through town</li> <li>- On existing coasthopper route</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intrusion into rural landscape (visual impact - subjective)</li> <li>- Against NCTS policy (ie north of A149)</li> <li>- Could be considered to be too far to walk</li> </ul>
Field off Maryland (Northfield Crescent)  <b>Site 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reasonable access from a main route into the town</li> <li>- Considered to be lesser intrusion onto landscape ie on edge of built environment and adjacent to light industrial estate.</li> <li>- Preliminary discussion with land owner already taken place (by Heritage bid project team)</li> <li>- Reasonable walking distance to town (approx 800 metres to southern end of Staithe Street))</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land could be susceptible to flooding. Therefore could be expensive to remedy.</li> <li>- Against NCTS policy (ie northside of A149)</li> <li>- Nearby residents could object</li> <li>- some on-street waiting restrictions in surrounding area could be necessary</li> </ul>
Field off A149 (Two Furlong Hill)  <b>Site 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In line with NCTS policy (ie south of A149)</li> <li>- Close proximity to A149 and B1105</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could be visually intrusive.</li> <li>- Maybe considered too far to be attractive to walk from.</li> <li>- Would require a pedestrian facility across A149 (probably refuge)</li> </ul>
Land near Light railway  <b>Site 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In line with NCTS policy (ie south of A149)</li> <li>- Reasonable position for interchange with coasthopper and light rail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pedestrian link would be required to Wells.</li> <li>- Likely to be deemed too far to walk therefore transport required to act as park and ride.</li> </ul>

Table 4.1

- 4.4 Some sites for temporary parking (until a longer term solution can be found) have been put forward by the Heritage Project Team to North Norfolk District Council. These included: Northfield Crescent, railway station, High school, primary school, pitch and putt (off Beach Road), football pitch (off Beach Road). The Heritage centre preferred the use of either the football pitch or the pitch and putt. From their point of view these would require a relatively low set up cost, some parking already takes place on them therefore it could be debated that there would be no change of use, they are in a position close to the centre. The disadvantages of these sites are that the traffic would still impact on Wells, (ie would still have to drive through Wells), there would be visual intrusion.
- 4.5 The Heritage centre is currently negotiating for the use of land for car parking adjacent to the proposed Budgens store off Freeman Street. (This site is on the edge of the built up envelope and traffic would not have to travel into the town centre to park. However, the site is located on the north side of A149).
- 4.6 Any new off street parking would have to be agreed with the local Planning Authority (North Norfolk District Council).

## **5.0 Feasibility of linking to Coasthopper/improved service.**

- 5.1 Monitoring of the existing coasthopper service has revealed that, in the case of Hunstanton, users of the service tend to be local residents and not tourists parking and then “hopping” along the coast. In effect very few people use the combination of a car park to ‘park and ride’ along the coast. This is probably due to the relative ease of parking at destinations along the coast. However the coasthopper has seen increased patronage. This is thought to be local residents and locally based visitors (ie staying in lodgings on (or close to) the route) and should continue to be encouraged.
- 5.2 Under the current operation of the coasthopper the bus stops at Buttlands in Wells is considered to be one of the main intermediate alighting and joining point along the route. This location is close to the town centre and it is recommended that if any alteration to the route is necessary, the changes should try to maintain this area as part of the route.
- 5.3 If a new car park is identified in or on the periphery of Wells then there could be some advantages in considering an additional stop for the coasthopper at this location, providing that the location is not detrimental to the timing of the service. The site outlined earlier in the report which could most easily be linked to the coasthopper is the site off Freeman Street.

## **6.0 Local Park and Ride service.**

- 6.1 There has to be clear benefits to attract motorists to use park and ride. These benefits are usually cost and time.
- 6.2 There are various forms of park and ride:
- paying for the parking and allowing free travel – can work well for shoppers, tourists and commuters especially where city/town centre parking is limited and a charging strategy in the town centre.
  - free parking but payment for travel – tends to be more attractive to commuters, with single car occupancy.
  - free parking and travel – fully subsidised, but usually off-set by price of admission to attractions.
- 6.3 The mode of transport can also be varied, however bus is by far the most common form of transport.
- 6.4 It has been found from previous national reports (such as: Bus-based Park and Ride: A Good Practice Guide, The English Historic Towns Forum 1993) that attempts to operate park and ride as low level services (ie Saturday services, or for overspill car parking) have often failed, despite the initial perception of low cost/risk. The reason for this is because by nature they tend to be poorer quality services (ie less frequent buses and poor infrastructure) which are deemed not attractive enough to the user.
- 6.5 It is questionable that a bus park and ride service in Wells could be made attractive enough to attract sufficient users. The availability of on-street parking (which could be addressed with waiting restrictions, but are likely to be met with resistance from residents and businesses), the relative short distances of travel, the lack of scope of implementing bus priority measures (buses are subject to the same congestion as cars without priority) and the fact that the perception of the visitors from previous studies was they had no difficulties in parking all present problems to establishing a park and ride.

6.6 However, a 'novelty' form of the ride could become an attraction in its own right. These are typically land-trains or horse and carriages. These have to be licensed when using the highway and would have to be run by a private operator. Careful consideration of a route would have to be made. The beach area already has a "novelty" train link to the town centre. Therefore a land train is only likely to serve the town centre itself. Suitable pick up and set down points would be necessary, if these are on the highway then a form of taxi rank is the usual means.

## **7.0 Integration with railway services.**

7.1 Wells has a light railway link to the inland village of Walsingham. However, this railway is a tourist attraction in its own right and only operates seasonally. The encouragement of visitors to park at Walsingham and utilise the train to Wells is not seen as a feasible transport solution because Walsingham itself has demands upon its parking because of its 'attractiveness' as a village and the holy shrine/pilgrimage sites.

## **8.0 Other improvements/items to be considered.**

**8.1 Car park signage.** The existing car park signs are shown in photographs in Appendix F. Car park signs are aimed at visitors (rather than local or frequent users of an area). Possible improvements to signs are shown in Appendix F. These improvements are generally to distinguish between the Beach and the town centre car parks.

The option shown attempts to direct visitor traffic along the main roads (ie A149, Polka Road, Holkham Road to Stearman's Yard, the Quay and the Beach car parks). Currently traffic from the south using the B1105, is directed by signs to the beach and town centre at Two Furlong Hill into Park Road and Mill Road. It is considered that it is more appropriate to use the main roads rather than these relatively narrow roads.

Order of cost = £3,000

**8.2 Variable message signs.** Another option could be a more expensive signage system utilising variable message, information signs on the approach roads to Wells. (These signs are typically used in larger towns/cities to indicate to motorists the occupancy of car parks, therefore attempting to redirect users to other car parks and away from those which are full). These require accurate counter systems at the entrance and exits of car parks (usually below surface detector loops). These tend to be best used where barrier controlled equipment regulates car parks.

Specialist firms develop these systems to suit individual needs of a town/city, therefore if this is deemed an appropriate option, it would be necessary to appoint a consultant to undertake the design of a possible solution.

There are some preliminary concerns about the use of such a system in Wells. Firstly, the largest car park in Wells, the Beach Car Park operated by Holkham Estate, is a non-paved car park with no specific bays marked out. Therefore capacity to some degree relies on "conscientious" parking by users and therefore could vary. Also Holkham estate offer an overflow facility to this car park (again

an unpaved area) which would have to be taken into account. Secondly, these signs could also be seen as urbanising in the AONB and could have a visual impact on the periphery of the town. This type of sign typically advises on whether there are spaces or whether the car parks are full. Another consideration is, if these signs were used and indicated that the car parks were full, what the reaction of motorists would be. It could encourage motorists to drive to more unsuitable locations on the coast (ie areas identified as red zones within the Visitor Management Plan for the coast). These signs also do not take into account on-street parking and some motorists could choose to seek on-street space.

Order of cost = £30,000 - £50,000 (initial outlay – however on-going revenue costs for maintenance would be necessary over a possible 10 to 15 year period could be in excess of £100,000.

**8.3 Parking information.** This could be as simple as production of leaflets or website pages by car park operators indicating the location of car parks and their capacities.

**8.4 Travel information.** It is suggested that the Town Council, businesses and tourist attractions should encourage use of other forms of transport whilst promoting their activities in Wells. (ie on website indicate or have links to bus services). The Town Council has previously been involved in European Car free days, some cycling stands have been provided near the Buttlands. (Holkham Estate include information on their web pages about how to get to their sites by bus and bicycle).

**8.5 Amended layout of Stearman's Yard car park.** The creation of some additional car park spaces could be considered by amending the existing layout of the car park. Three options are included in Appendix G for consideration. (Option 1 (9 additional spaces) is not considered appropriate due because of the no entry from Freeman Street, therefore option 2 (19 additional spaces) or 3 (15 additional spaces) may be more appropriate). North Norfolk District Council is responsible for this car park and therefore would have to agree to and fund any changes. The town centre area is highlighted as light green in the Visitor Manager Strategy. There is some scope to allow small scale increase in car park to encourage a shift away from the coast and particularly if it helps overcome existing circulation problems.

Order of cost = £3,000

**8.6 Change of charging strategy in Staithe Street Car Park.** There could be some advantages for local trade/shoppers if this relatively small car park is converted to a short stay facility (say 2 hour maximum stay) to promote a more rapid turn round of local use. This would also mean that season tickets available for District Council car parks would have to be amended to exclude this car park, tariff boards amended and alterations to the ticket machine. This car park is currently not signed by advanced directional signs, therefore tends only to be used by local or regular visitors to the town. However, enforcement of a shorter duration could be onerous. This off-street car park is owned and operated by North Norfolk District Council, therefore any changes would have to be agreed and implemented by the District Council.

**8.7 Extension of pedestrianised area.** Closing the southern entrance to Staithe Street Car Park near the TI (tourist Information) centre could allow extension of the existing pedestrianisation of Staithe Street southwards. However if this pedestrianisation is not thought acceptable by local residents/businesses then there could still be benefits in closing the access to the car park, removing some of the vehicular use of Staithe Street. (The changes to the access of the car park would have to be agreed by the District Council).

Order of cost = £5,000

**8.8 Footway improvements** on The Quay, crossing facilities and/or footway widening . There is a relatively high concentration of pedestrians in the summer in this vicinity and it has been observed the need for pedestrians to step out into the road to pass other pedestrians (and window-shoppers).

**8.9 Walking and cycling study.** Norfolk County Council is carrying out such a study during 2003/04.

**8.10 Improved Enforcement of Existing Waiting Restrictions.** Some reports have been received that the existing waiting restrictions suffer from abuse and that this could be tackled by greater enforcement. The traffic warden service use their resource on a priority basis. (Decriminalised parking (powers giving local authority

the ability to enforce waiting restrictions on the highway) is not considered justifiable in this case).

## **9.0 Recommendations**

- 9.1 From previous experience of the use of park and ride 'type' activities using the coasthopper at Hunstanton and the Clifftop Car Park, it is not justified that the County Council provide and operate a specific park and ride to Wells.
- 9.2 The system of road signs relating to car parking be improved to direct visitors away from using the narrow streets in the town centre.
- 9.3 Continued encouragement/publicity of public transport and cycle provision.
- 9.4 North Norfolk District Council could consider options for layout of Stearmans Yard Car Park.
- 9.5 A permanent seasonal off-street car park could absorb the peak summer demand. Current policies indicate this would preferably be close to A149 (and on the south side), on the edge of the built up area, to minimise the impact on the environment. The solution of just increasing car park capacity is not sustainable in the long term. (It could be argued that the easier it is made to park in a town then more visitors will come by car).







## Appendix D

## Appendix E

## Appendix F

