

# Outline brief for Economic Impact Assessment of St Clements Car Park closure

## *The issue*

Development of the St Clements car park is proposed and the Council will shortly be considering a second planning application from the developer, the first having been refused.

One of the grounds for refusal was inadequate provision for temporary car parking during the 11 month construction period. The developer has paid a deposit of around £300,000 to the seller of the land – the City Council – which he understands as being refundable in the event of planning permission not being granted.

Many traders in East Oxford are objecting strongly to the proposal because they believe that they will be driven out of business if there is no public car parking on St Clements for 11 months. This is especially the case because of the economic recession which several of them claim is already rendering them vulnerable. They are also unhappy that the development, once completed, would leave a net loss of 32 car parking spaces in St Clements.

The developer, in consultation with city officers, is proposing an alternative temporary car park for 65 cars some distance away up the Marston Road, with a shuttle bus service. The hours during which the shuttle bus would run have not yet been specified.

Despite the fact that large sums of public money (>£4m), and people's livelihoods, are at stake, there has been no proper assessment of the economic impact of :

- the permanent loss of 32 car parking spaces in St Clements
- the temporary (11 months minimum) loss of the St Clements car park with no alternative parking offered
- the temporary loss of the car park with the suggested alternative car park/shuttle bus

Without a properly-conducted economic impact assessment the West Area Planning Committee will not have the information needed to make this major decision – a decision which may well hinge on this issue.

## *What is needed*

A study by a consultancy, independent of both the developer and the City Council, but jointly commissioned and paid for by them in consultation with traders' representatives. The study needs to ascertain :

1. who is typically using the St Clements Car Park at different times of day and night, both weekdays and weekends, how long a typical stay is, and the purpose of their visit.
2. whether their intended destination is in East Oxford or in the city centre, and whether it is social or has an economic impact.
3. whether an alternative car park – either Tesco's car park on the Cowley Road or the proposed alternative up the Marston Road – would be adequate, or sufficiently *inadequate* to discourage the visitors from coming to East Oxford at all.
4. The study needs to conduct a longitudinal survey of every trader in St Clements and the Cowley Road as far as Marston Street to determine where their customer base is coming from, whether it is dependent on a car for transport, and whether the alternative parking on offer would be enough to retain their business.

5. The study needs to explore the possibility of remedial measures other than the proposed temporary car park e.g.
  - suspension of parking restrictions on St Clements, possibly combined with re-routing of the London-bound buses out of the city via Banbury Road (or some other route avoiding St Clements)
  - financial compensation to traders via business rate relief or suchlike
  - grants to fund free delivery services to customers
  - some scheme to refund customers the cost of their public transport into East Oxford, assuming they would be paying for car parking further out.
  - any other ideas suggested by traders and their organisations
6. The study report should outline the methodology and sample base used, but see note (4) – sampling of traders would not be adequate because of the widely varying nature of the businesses.
7. The study should conclude with an estimate of the total net loss (if any) to the economy of East Oxford that would be caused by the proposals, were they to be given approval.