

Calls for parking charge scheme in East Lothian to be scrapped rejected

A bid to scrap plans to introduce parking charges in East Lothian's town centres has been overwhelmingly rejected.

A consultation in North Berwick, which is the first town to see a Traffic Order drawn up to introduce the charges, as well as permit zones, drew hundreds of objections and saw a petition with more than 4,000 signatures produced.

And at a meeting of East Lothian Council on Tuesday, the Conservative group put forward a motion calling for the entire scheme to be dropped and the £500,000 set aside for it to be reallocated.

However their call was dismissed by the Labour administration, SNP opposition and the council's sole Scottish Greens councillor, who all insisted town centre parking needs to change.

A report from council officers had revealed the North Berwick Traffic Order received 659 responses with dozens of different themes, ranging from the impact on the High Street to one in 10 objectors saying there were no parking problems and concerns it would encourage motor home parking.

Officers said the amount of documents made available as part of the order had also caused a problem saying the volume of information was "large and technically challenging, which drew negative feedback from the public, with some expressing the view that the information was incomprehensible."

They asked councillors to let them withdraw the order and draw

up a new one adding lessons learned from the first consultation would help speed up the process when it came to consultations in other towns.

However Conservative Councillor Jeremy Findlay tabled a motion, instead, calling for elected members to note the high level of objections and drop plans to proceed with parking charges in any town in the county.

And he said the decision by officers to reject a petition signed by thousands as 'incompetent' was seen by the town as 'ignoring them'.

The local ward member for North Berwick Coastal told the meeting: "The overwhelming opinion in North Berwick is that no new Traffic Order should be promoted.

"To proceed with a new order is a waste of officers' time and money. It has cost at least £136,000 so far and that is before it takes into account all of the officers' time spent on this ill-fated project."

Mr Findlay pointed out North Berwick Business Association was 'wholly opposed' to parking charges believing it would be damaging to members adding: "Who are we to argue with them?"

He was backed by fellow Conservative councillor Donna Collins, who said she believed the money involved in the scheme could be better spent.

However council leader Norman Hampshire (Labour) accused his fellow councillors of 'playing politics again'.

He said: "They are acting like the ostrich with its head in the sand. Towns in East Lothian have all had to deliver significant growth and the number of people trying to access our town centres has grown greatly.

"People are using their cars to get in there and the situation is serious in some town centres."

The council voted by 16 votes to three to allow a new Traffic Order and reject the amendment.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter



East Lothian Council headquarters John Muir House Haddington
pic Google Maps