

Proposed Swansea Council
Car Park Charges in Gorseinon Consultation

The Response of
Gorseinon Institute

Gorseinon Institute Management Committee
Gorseinon Institute Lime Street SA4 4AD

17th January 2014

Point summary: proposed car park charges

1. The Council is misidentifying the nature of the car park
2. The mix of activities in the Institute enables it to project a particular role in the community
3. It will affect the number of Blood Donors
4. It discriminates against the Institute in relation to other community centres
5. The pricing policy (1 hour free etc.) discriminates against the users of the Institute
6. An asymmetrical pricing policy between car parks in Gorseinon creates significant traffic problems
7. It brings the development of the Institute to a halt
8. It prevents future opportunities based on the needs of the area from being met by the Institute
9. It ignores past investment in the Institute
10. It creates a perception of a trajectory of closure for the Institute
11. It vitiates the locational advantages of the Institute
12. If the Institute closes then there is no alternative use for the building
13. Charges alter the viability of user groups that have impact beyond their 'other identity'
14. It ignores the informational role of the Institute
15. It moves the viability of groups to other Counties
16. It reinforces a perception that Swansea Arts Strategy is for central Swansea only
17. The car park charges are a predatory and opportunistic proposal

Gorseinon Institute's Response to Swansea Council's proposal for car parking charges in Lime Street

1. The Council is misidentifying the nature of the car park. It is assuming that the car park has a mostly economic and legal function in terms of shopping and business and the impact of the charges would be limited to that, whereas the car park especially behind the Library at the top of Lime Street has a critical function in supporting key Social Policies (e.g. older people) and Arts Policy as well as Library access. The social policy impact is altered substantially and thus in this case (car park and Gorseinon Institute), amounts to a removal of social support.

The Institute and the Library share the car park and the Institute relies on it to support the viability of the groups that use the Institute regularly and many of these groups have a social policy impact and are vulnerable groups. Without the **free** car park the viability of key groups of users would simply vanish e.g. Sequence Dancing. This would create a downward trajectory of usage amounting to a spiral of decline.

Furthermore, the notion of 'free' has to be tempered with the notion of 'economic multiplier'. Although the 'free' represents an investment (an opportunity cost perhaps of the proposed charges) it creates economic activity **more than** the initial investment (car park charges foregone) i.e. the local economic multiplier so the car park in reality is already being paid for by the surplus economic activity that it (the 'free') generates. The car park charges amount to a tax on economic development and the Traders as a group suffer a 'double blow' within this calculation.

The 'free' (the relinquishing of charges) component is part of the matrix of economic calculation and 'free' is given a value within the multiplier calculation i.e. the car park as a producer of value. In fact it is better not to look at the car park as 'free' at all but rather as an economic key to accessing and unlocking further economic activity due to the geographical placement of Gorseinon and the **mix of activities** that go on in it; its attractiveness.

So the 'free' (in the domain of Car Park charge) is not merely an investment but the key to stabilising and developing economic activity and preventing decline; it is a tool. In addition it is not just about individual traders 'whinging' and protecting their own interests but the placement of economic activity and understanding their individual place within that. It is not whether they as individuals survive or not but the rich 'mix' of activities that their survival as a group creates as people do not come to Gorseinon just for one thing but to engage in 'the mix'. The Traders have to be looked at as a group (as a whole) that economically creates that rich mix. Once car park charges are put in place, the rich mix begins to reduce and ends up becoming the 'poor mix' or worse, no real mix at all simply being subsistence occupations and activities. Gorseinon has a growing 'rich mix' of activities at the moment and the free car park is a key component of maintaining and developing this.

It is also a contradiction if the Council's policy is to support and regenerate High Streets generally and specifically in Gorseinon because the big retail corporations in Gorseinon e.g. Sainsbury, ASDA, Aldi, all have car parks which are free for their customers yet the small shops would not have this if there are car park charges. This amounts to fixing the competitive advantage in favour of large companies. It disadvantages the small in favour of the large and large retailers represent an outflow of income from the area and this is hard to justify given the Council has an obligation to support local economies.

This argument about the Traders within Gorseinon is put here in a report from and about the Institute (a community organisation) because there is a symbiotic relationship between the traders and the Institute and this may well increase with the richness of the mix (of traders and the mix of users within the Institute) and benefit both parties. As the mix within the Traders reduces due to viability failure from car park charges, then this also has an effect on the Institute. The fortunes of each are tied together in intricate ways and the failure of either is ultimately the failure of both.

The charges will also penalise Volunteers both in the Institute and also in some of the Charity Shops in Gorseinon. The volunteers in the Charity Shops usually do three or four hour shifts and therefore the proposal that the first hour is free is an irrelevance.

The charges are a way of manipulating the texture of the local economic multiplier to shift advantages around within the City and County and between contiguous Counties and it is difficult to see what the rationale is in doing this. As a way of raising revenue due to budget constraints it is deeply suspect as the motive within calculations of economic development becomes unclear. The austerity argument seems more of a mask than a real attempt to maintain economic stability in the area. There is a sense in which the car park charges are a way of 'economically shooting oneself in the foot' and in the case of Gorseinon Institute destroying worthwhile tools of social policy and Arts provision.

2. The mix of activities in the Institute enables it to project a particular role in the community

As this mix/diversity reduces, the community may begin to view the Institute as being for an elite group of people and this invites criticism and is socially divisive. It is the intention of Management of the Institute to produce a mix/diversity that reflects the community and not simply pander to whoever can afford it, or who fits into some kind of restricted set of people. The car park charges attack the mix by attacking the viability of groups whose viability is sometimes marginal. Helping groups to grow and develop becomes much more difficult when there is a financial entry barrier yet it is part of the development of the Institute to help groups to develop.

As the car park charges reduce the diversity of users by hitting their viability it will fuel the perception that the Institute is unable to host certain activities and as a result the notion that the Institute could be a venue for such activities is erroneously rejected. Once the Dancing is lost, the Dance floor is lost, for it is assumed to not be there. As long as that group can be supported by the Institute then the facility is 'marketed' to some degree by its inclusion in the mix overall.

3. People who donate blood ('the gift relationship' Titmus) - that use the Centre may incur the charges and this may impact on the donation pattern.

Given that the donation takes about an hour (although the actual blood extraction takes 15 minutes) this will penalise the donation act. Any recompense for car parking would be awkward to justify and would be a disincentive and detract from the 'gift relationship'. In addition people donating may rush back to their cars in the car park prematurely to avoid the charges but clearly may intrude on the rest period and thus risk fainting while driving. The following is from-:

http://www.welsh-blood.org.uk/about-blood/faqs/#question_1

"Blood donation itself takes around 15 minutes. You should expect to be with us for around 45-60 minutes to allow time for you to complete the health questionnaire and enjoy some refreshments after your donation"

Any delay risks going over the 60 minute/1 hour free time of the proposed car park charge. In some cases due to the numbers (average in Gorseinon of 130 a day with a maximum 9 hour day=minimum 14 an hour) there is a half hour delay before entering into the process and this would clearly mean a car park charge for those using the car park. People giving blood using the car park would then be clock watching to ensure free time compliance and any problem resulting in a delay would incur the car park charge even if that delay is due to the blood donation service rather than them. How would the Blood Donation Service respond to a request for car park recompense? The likelihood is because of the gift relationship (a classic piece of social policy research and theory by Titmus) they would not ask for car park recompense simply preferring to go elsewhere for their blood donation.

This would then alter the economics of the blood donation's work at the Institute as the costs incurred in their work and staff time would be spread over less donations. It may then be the case that they would stop coming to the Centre simply because the number of donations would not make it 'worth while' i.e. uneconomic. The calculation would have to be made as to the break even point re: the costs of turning up and staffing the Centre and the number of donations that justify that. The marginality built in to that calculation may be on the edge already and the car park charges may clearly push it over the edge and make the blood donation services' visit unviable.

If they take more time to fill out the questionnaire or even engage in pleasantries then this may produce the risk of car park charge. There may be any number of reasons for delay including health. The Blood Donation Service would be under a certain obligation to ensure that the people are 'out of the door' within the 60 minute/1 hour time limit and the question then has to be asked as to whether they are moving them through the process on the basis of risking the car park charge or health and good donation practice.

In addition the staff of the Blood Donation Service would have to ask the people donating Blood if they came by car and where they parked in order to ascertain the risks of car park charge and then monitor which people who are donating are subject to that. Those subject to the charge, if they go over 60 minutes would have to be monitored differently to ensure that their visits are timed allowing also for the fact that it will take a minute from Car park to Centre and back presumably being warned not to engage in any conversations with others on their way out.

The exact aetiology of delay would have to be known in order to place the car park charge in its proper domain and a suitable system would have to be installed to record this to avert legal conflicts later. A mitigating mechanism would have to be installed into the process of car park charges such that if the reason for delay lies with the Blood Donation Service then recompense is possible and likely by the Council or the Blood Donation Service itself. Naturally they may take the view that the car park charge should not be born by them and form part of their costs and budget, and therefore there should be some kind of legal 'lien' in order that the Council does not penalise either the Blood Donation Service or the person giving the Blood; this would entail the person taking their Car Park charge ticket to an appropriate person in the Council as it is unlikely that the Blood Donation Service would wish to handle such monies as this may lead to a demarcation dispute. Given the sums involved most would forgo the 'lien' and simply go elsewhere.

Ultimately any recompense given for blood donation may taint the 'gift relationship' which is a fundamental axiom of blood donation in the UK and although it is not strictly 'paying for blood' it leaves a bad connotation and perception that paying for blood is bad blood. The 'gift' has to endure through the process and once the process begins to detract from the 'gift' it begins to degrade the relationship in principle. It is the expectation of unjustified or 'unprincipled cost' within the process that corrodes the relationship, attacking the donation and its basis. The fact that it is 'returned' money is not the point, for those who are donating the blood who incur the charge have what amounts to an 'entry fee' to give blood, even if that is returnable and that is not a good precedent to set.

4. The car park charges would mean the Institute is being disproportionately impacted in relation to other Community Centres. Many other community centres have car parks attached to them whereas Gorseinon does not. E.g. Penlan shares a car park with the Library, Waunarwydd has its own car park.

Given that Gorseinon Institute is in the top five performing Community Centres in terms of usage (at least) Car Park charges would penalise success and in effect reward failure since other Community Centres lower down the ranking with car parks could be viewed as not making best use of their facilities whereas Gorseinon is making best use of its own and of local resources. The car park charges would mean that the Council is making Gorseinon and Gorseinon Institute more expensive to use in relation to other community centres and this creates a potentially damaging politicisation of the community centres in Swansea as other community centres begin to look more closely at the relative cost benefit structure of community centre provision, the areas they serve and the extent to which they are discriminated against either due to their location, diversity of their usage or particular resources they lack or enjoy.

5. It makes no sense to make one hour free and charges for subsequent hours, because the usage pattern of the Centre usually entails a greater amount of time than one hour. Most of the groups using the centre use it for a period of longer than one hour e.g. Dancing, Art, Welsh, Yoga, Guitar. The kind of activities that they engage in are not 'shopping' or business etc. but the nature of the Institute tends towards a greater amount of time spent. By having a pricing regime that is based on free one hour slots and charges for over one hour, it discriminates against most of the users of the Centre who use or share a car.

The assumption of such a pattern of charges is that the Car Park is merely a place requiring one hour time slots enough for visiting the shops or conducting some legal business, it takes no account of the Community Centres and views the Car Park as mainly an economic resource rather than a critical mechanism of social policy support and Arts provision.

6. A separate regime of car park charges between the top of Lime Street and the bottom of Lime Street would be difficult to implement without impacting on the traffic system which creates other problems of traffic congestion and safety issues for people/users walking to the Institute.

Once Car park charges are in place this will exacerbate a problem in Lime Street itself as drivers seek to use resident and other spaces in order to avoid the charge including the Ambulance space in front of the Institute. This would therefore require extra traffic warden activity in order to police this since the alternative is to allow an increased level of traffic and parking which will impact on Lime Street's 'rush hour'. Drivers may also be tempted to

use other streets nearby (e.g. Trinity Street including the Trinity Street *cul de sac*, Cross Street, and possibly some of the back lanes leading to garages as well as grass verges here and there.

Hypothetically if there is a charge on the bottom car park (approx. 15 spaces) but not the top (approx. 93 spaces) then the traffic patterns would alter as the result of drivers making a calculation as to how long they will stay and how far they have to walk. If there is any doubt in their mind about how long they stay then they will go to the car park that has no charge. This may increase the flow of traffic up High Street and into Cross Street if they come from the East because of the one way system (and partial one way system in Lime Street). If the charge is on the top and not the bottom then the flow of traffic from the West will bypass the turning to the Car Park at the top (Cross Street), and increase the number of vehicles using the car park at the bottom creating a congestion problem of exiting on to the lights and junction at the bottom of High Street.

From the point of Gorseinon Institute's users it makes no sense, and penalises them if the charge is on the top car park since older people, vulnerable people, young people and children would then have to walk from the bottom car park to the Institute and this would create safety problems even if they were prepared to walk. They would have to cross a street (Lime Street) potentially at times which are quite plainly 'rush hour' and may try to cross at the Trinity Street turning which has traffic turning into it emanating from the bottom and the top of Lime Street. As the institute is used across the time range from 8.30am to 10.30pm this may mean a 'walk in the dark' in rush hour times depending on the time of year. Since both Car Parks have only one entrance and exit which are the same (and obviously both are two way traffic) then the risks of severe congestion at rush hour times will increase depending on the asymmetrical or symmetrical charging regime chosen.

Furthermore, if the charges are put on Brighton Road car park (approx. 46 spaces) and not Lime Street then the increased traffic to the no-charge areas will increase congestion especially at rush hour. A common regime of car park charges or no charges i.e. the *status quo*, would create what we have now but any asymmetrical regime of car park charges may create anomalies in Gorseinon's delicate traffic pattern which in system terms is technically 'error sensitive'. That would be difficult to eradicate once the charges are in place and would entail a recalculation of traffic patterns with the resulting interest groups becoming more animated and sensing an opportunity to reinvest their specific points of view into any future traffic plan.

7. Car Park charges would not only limit the development of the Institute but virtually bring any future development to a halt and even reverse it. Once the car park charges are in place they tend to stay in place and it is much harder to remove them.

This is at a time when the area is growing in terms of population and new housing is being built e.g. Housing at Garngoch currently under development, the new Bryngwyn housing, the older people's housing just off the Cross in Alexandra Road, new housing in Penllergaer just off Jn 47. The Institute would find it hard to develop new plans, usage patterns (new groups of users), new ways of working with other organisations, new plans to use technology (websites, energy efficiency, communications with users, emerging local TV), in short the uncertainty of its future *via* a formula

Car park charges=declining usage patterns=eventual closure

would effectively bring all development to a close. The Institute could not possibly plan on such a basis and this would impact immediately as groups begin to drift away trying to find other premises, further exacerbating a decline in the usage pattern. Since no new groups would use the centre for any length of time if it is 'under threat' through the formula, then the decline would be difficult if not impossible to arrest.

8. The catchment area for the Institute is much greater due to its success and Gorseinon geographical position and further development would enable a greater usage rate

Clearly at a time when there are growing opportunities for the Centre to maximise usage and play an even more critical role in the community (e.g. Foodbank, Jobclubs) and the policies of the Councils (both Swansea and Local) it makes no sense to suddenly ignore those opportunities by following a formula that is tantamount to eventual closure.

Effectively the Council is destroying its own ability to intervene by destroying one of its own tools. As the needs of the area becomes more apparent, the ability of the Institute to meet those needs would become less if car park charges become essential for using the Institute. Gorseinon and Swansea have, with the Institute, an organisation which enables opportunities to be taken but once the charges are in place an entire mechanism of social policy and support begins to die and with it the ability of the Council to intervene in a cost effective way.

9. Despite the age of the building it has been extremely well maintained and is in very good condition and this contributes to the relatively high usage pattern. The inclusion of Projectors, Wi-Fi, lighting, audio facilities, recent painting, adherence to health & safety and fire regulations, a group of supportive volunteers, a stable cadre of cleaners who not only clean the building but monitor its condition drawing attention to any problems early, amounts to a significant investment of time, money, expertise and motivation. The Car Park charges would be tantamount to throwing away this investment and putting in its place a routeplan of closure resulting in not only social policy impact but costs of maintenance.

Even if the Centre was not threatened as such with closure (and the car park charges does threaten that), the Car Park charges would make the Centre a more expensive place to visit and the facilities and previous investments would underutilise those investments - the Institute - at a time when maximising those facilities would seem essential to good governance and economic good sense.

10. Gorseinon Institute is incredible value for money even if the case is argued on the basis of economics alone. The car park is an integral part of the economics, and effectiveness of the Institute and by charging for it the Council is destroying the value for money that it gets!

Over the years the Institute has honed its systems and ways of working so that there is a well worked out pattern of dealing with maintenance, security, keys, opening and closing, bookings, development, different groups, Safety, official organisations, stable accounting systems and so on. This represents a significant resource for the Institute. The Foot Clinic for example has been going for 7 years in the Institute and that stability is hard to achieve.

Imagine a new organisation that had to go through the learning processes with its volunteers; it would be costly and it would take years. It takes a long time to build a stable

cadre of volunteers and users and once this is lost due to the **perception of closure**, the volunteers drift away and make other commitments. The car park charges create that perception both in Gorseinon generally and in Gorseinon Institute's users specifically. So the car park charges have an impact that is not temporary and it cannot be reversed. Simply making the charges temporary does not work because the impacts of those charges have permanent consequences that are not reversed simply by removing them. The charges would be highly destructive immediately and for Gorseinon Institute, permanent.

11. Gorseinon Institute within Central Gorseinon is in an ideal location and the car park charges would vitiate the locational advantages that accrue to it.

The alternative venues available are either locationally inferior, of inadequate quality, too expensive or are just plain unsuitable for the myriad purposes needed. Gorseinon Institute's mix of rooms and facilities makes it ideal for many different uses and the list of users clearly shows this. Once the car park charges begin to bite the mix of uses through a reduced viability of users could restrict the mix, destroying its locational advantage; even though you can get to it easily you don't use it because of the car park charges i.e. charges destroy access making location irrelevant.

Canolfan Gorseinon has very different functions and roles within Gorseinon and they are not in any way substitutes for each other. Their role and identity is particular and each stands alone in usage and advantages. Groups that currently use the Institute would not transfer to a building they see as a long walk from the bus station, a different mix of rooms and protocols, and a very expensive pricing regime in relation to the Institute.

12. If the Institute's continuance (its existence) is threatened by substantially reduced usage patterns due to the Car Park charges, then it would be difficult to see what else the Institute's building could be used for and this will impact on the street generally.

Businesses would be reluctant to take over an older building with no parking of its own and any long term non usage of the Centre would impact substantially upon its condition. The end result might well be a derelict building which would end up costing more to ensure safety yet not able to be sold. Converting it to something else would be expensive and the option of demolishing the building would be unavailable given its status.

If the building became derelict as a result of closure it could result in a major public health hazard given the lane to the rear (a potential dumping ground), Lime St being a route for revellers and the many fast food facilities in Gorseinon. Once rodent infestation takes hold it may become expensive to eradicate. By keeping the Centre open, maintaining it and having good usage patterns and a disciplined cleaning regime, it is protected against such an infestation and other problems that come with dereliction.

13. The car park charges alter the viability of certain groups which have a social policy impact beyond their 'other identity'

Sequence Dancing is a case in point; older people in particular lose bone density as they get older (especially women) and one of the ways to combat this is to keep their limbs moving by building fitness, retaining muscle mass and helping to maintain bone density. So although the dancing is an 'Arts or social activity' it has other identities which offer a way of addressing social policies. Many of the activities of the Institute have this 'other

identity' attribute and keep people (not just older people) out of the hands of the medical profession, keeping fit and active, reducing addictions, enabling the maintenance of morale in medical conditions (support groups), keeping their minds active etc.

It also discriminates against those users who require equipment for their activity. The Institute has only a small amount of storage space and this means that users who require equipment have to bring it with them and this necessitates transport i.e. the car. So the car park charges penalises them due to the nature of their activity. Tutors and teachers may have their costs increased as a result of the car park charges and thus the Institute becomes less of a place where teaching takes place.

14. The informational role of Gorseinon Institute is understated.

The Car Park creates a communications network for the Institute and the fact that it is free attracts people from a wide area (even outside the County) and as a result moves knowledge of the Institute's activities way beyond its locality and also brings skills and expertise into the Institute that may not be available in the locality. Gorseinon Institute is also used as a cost effective way to consult with the public e.g. ASDA store used the Institute over the building of ASDA. Car Park charges destroy this feature.

15. The Car Park affects the movement of viability of the Institute and there are complex arguments which implicate the car park. People coming from outside the catchment area of the Institute are helping to create that viability by adding to the numbers.

This amounts to an inflow of resources and given the proximity of neighbouring Counties across Loughor Bridge or just beyond Pontarddulais the car park charges may reverse this flow so people outside the catchment area may go elsewhere out of County to places without car park charges or simply with more car park space.

In addition if activities cease due to the car park charges those within the catchment area who suffer those car park charges may similarly go outside of County given how close the borders are in Gorseinon (which is uniquely placed in this regard) and how easy it is (Loughor Bridge, the bypass, Junction 47) to get there. This amounts to an 'outflow of viability' that is the 'viability' moves around contiguous Counties given various push/pull factors like car park charges. The charges virtually move the viability of community facilities from one place to another in this case (because it is part of Gorseinon's geographical identity to be so close to County borders) to other Counties.

The idea that people would move their viability-creating-activity into Central Swansea is unlikely given the charges there. For example the Welsh course at the Institute relies heavily on car usage (90% of participants) but they would not transfer to Christina Street even if that was an option, not simply due to car park charges there but also congestion. The outlying areas of Swansea for example Dunvant, Killay, see Gorseinon as a 'sensible venue option' utilising the Garrod Avenue back door route rather than Swansea with its congestion even though Killay may be closer to Christina Street. It is the difficulty in terms of traffic, time and increased petrol consumption (as a result of heavier traffic patterns) that create these dynamics.

Gorseinon's placement geographically is ideal making its facilities well used ('sensible venue options') and this attracts people into the area. It's centrally placed, close to the motorway junction, whereas central Swansea is a kind of giant *cul-de-sac*. Gorseinon

Institute is therefore a natural venue for many areas which would be viewed as outside its catchment area. The car park charges destroy that advantage.

16. Arts Provision. Gorseinon Institute is also a venue of Arts projects, e.g. drama, music, dance.

This role is very likely to increase (for Canolfan Gorseinon as well) given a new dance shop in the town (opened 2013), a major supplier of music teaching and organiser of local music festivals (Spider Music teaching and recording studio opened June 2013), Dance in terms of Ballet and Sequence at the Institute. The Arts strategy of the City and County cannot rest on an area of central Swansea without calling into question its fairness and rationale. The Institute's contribution and potential development in this regard would mitigate against such arguments. Once the Institute's role in this regard is lessened due to the car park charges then accusations of a 'cultural desert' and a discriminatory Arts policy become more valid.

17. The Car park charges are a predatory and opportunistic proposal. As bus services become more expensive, routes curtailed and replanned to reflect maximisation of bus company income rather than community service, and bus subsidies reduced and under pressure, then people may be forced to use the car more and more where that option is available to them.

Thus, the cuts, reductions and impositions in one area of transportation become a tax on alternatives (the car park charges) and this amounts to a 'double whammy' for people who have little choice. It may be more defensible to propose car park charges in the face of a superb and inexpensive bus service (though not in the case of Gorseinon Institute) but to propose them in the face of the present relatively expensive service seems a cynical and unsavoury ploy.

Certain groups who use the Institute have to use the car and have no choice e.g. The visually impaired group (their carers, volunteers and helpers); this is just one among many with various conditions that make walking difficult, who also have no choice but to use a car. Carers may have no choice if they have to accompany their family members/clients as disabled car park provision (the badge system) does not apply to all.

The car park charges also attack car sharing for while some may share the space in their car bringing users to the Institute, once they decide to go elsewhere then that car space (their car space) disappears from the pool of car spaces. Once the transport for such passengers disappears then that further impacts on the usage pattern.

In Conclusion

The proposed Car Park charges are a Pandora's Box the effects of which animate a series of further destructive events. We hope that what lies at the bottom of this box is an Elpis spirit of hope and expectation that the Council will not create these charges in Gorseinon.

We feel strongly that the Social Policy impact, the economics and other consequences will bring a reasoned judgement to bear on these matters and that the proposed car park charges in Gorseinon will be abandoned.