

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2026

Present

Chairman: Cllr P. May

Councillors: Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr G. Caddy, Cllr S. Cockerell, Cllr P. Evans, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr N. Hampton-Rumbold, Cllr S. Larcombe, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr A. Wood

Officers: C. Austin (communications officer) M. Green (deputy town clerk)

25/52/SF

Public Forum

T. Mayers

T. Mayers spoke in relation to agenda item 9, Request from Cobb Traders – Parking Concessions, Free Parking Days and Autumn/Winter Parking Scheme. He said several businesses had stated that footfall had been down for the past couple of winters and this concern was now supported by the feedback gained from the Cobb Traders social media consultation with over 500 comments. He said it was clear from the hundreds of responses that many people were either visiting the town less frequently or staying for shorter periods of time. He said a common concern raised was the parking is cheaper in other nearby locations, particularly during the winter off-peak months. He said the Cobb Traders were very disappointed by the decision to extend winter parking charges from 6pm to 9pm in Monmouth Beach car park. They had reviewed other coastal towns in the area and they had struggled to find any that apply similar evening charges. He said Dorset Council had recently reversed its plans to introduce evening parking charges across its car parks. He said the town had to remain competitive to continue to attract visitors, particularly outside of the summer period, and that the town council couldn't be complacent and assume people would come irrespective of the price hikes in parking. He said East Devon offered a 50% winter discount and Swanage Town Council charged just £2 all day in their car parks during the off-peak months. He believed offering a similar discount in line with East Devon or Swanage would be an incentive for people to visit outside of the peak times and bring considerable benefits to the local economy. He said there was also a strong case to suggest that reduced parking charges may increase overall usage of the car parks, discourage parking on residential streets and encourage visitors to stay longer and increase revenue for Lyme Regis. He said the Cobb Traders had previously requested parking data to build a robust business case but the information provided limited to the total revenue figures did not allow for meaningful analysis of key metrics such as transaction volumes, average spend per visit, or occupancy rates. He said the Cobb Traders assumed data had been used to model the potential revenue impacts put forward on this agenda and the group would welcome the opportunity to review the data. He encouraged the council to introduce a winter parking discount, which could be introduced for a trial period of only a few months. He said it could take the form of a daily rate, as in line with Swanage, or a percentage discount as in line with East Devon. He also requested on behalf of Cobb Traders that the parking benefits available to Lyme Regis residents were extended to those business owners who

traded in Lyme Regis but reside outside of the boundary area. He said the Cobb Traders were pleased to hear the council was now allowing free parking on the Saturday of the Big Christmas Weekend and said the traders would also welcome this being extended to the Sunday in all town council car parks. He said it was a great opportunity for the council to show the council does support local businesses.

G. Symonds

G. Symonds spoke on the same agenda item. He said car parking charges in Lyme Regis could affect the entire economy of the town. He said charging for car parking in the evening, especially in the winter months would mean that Lyme Regis has some of the most expensive car parking in the country. He said not many people visited in the evenings, and that car parking should not be seen as a cash cow. He said the town council used Swanage Town Council as the benchmark for other decisions, but he felt this time the council had ignored Swanage and decided to have a different charging structure. He said soon people would start parking in other places where they didn't have to pay. He questioned the different figures in reports on this agenda; item 20 stated there would be a projected loss of income of £236,361 across both Woodmead and Monmouth Beach car parks, but he said this was incorrect because that figure was the entire takings of those car parks over a period of time and he wanted to challenge the council on the reported figures.

N. Ball

N. Ball said his son had sent five emails to five councillors, and only two had replied. He said even if councillors couldn't always answer questions, it would be courtesy for the council to engage with the public. His son was very interested in the town and what happens within the council chamber, and as the council wanted people to be interested in what it does, responding would be a good way to engage. He also spoke in relation to agenda item 9 and said the council needed to help businesses. He said the cost of living was going up, the cost of fuel was rising, and that the town was in for a difficult season. He referred to a previous comment that the town council had no statutory responsibility to help businesses and that businesses in the town paid business rates to Dorset Council, which was the case, but it was still a negative attitude. He recalled the last time the Cobb Traders had challenged the council over concessions in the gardens and that the council had squashed that idea to help local businesses, but it had now overcharged for outside seating. He said nobody was talking to each other and trust needed to be regained between the parishioners, the traders, and Dorset Council. He said people were getting fed up in the town with too much power from council officers and not enough discussion between councillors and the public. He felt the council was not going about the situation in the right way. Referring to the list of payments, he queried why business rates were being paid on the Guildhall.

R. De-Voisey

R. De-Voisey supported those who had already spoken and confirmed a survey on Facebook about parking was a true reflection of what she heard in her shop on a day-to-day basis. She was concerned about claims some of the comments on social media were false and said she heard these kinds of comments she was hearing herself in her business, from hundreds of people. She urged the council to read all the comments if they had not done so already.

A. Ball (read out by an officer)

A. Ball expressed support for the three parking requests put forward by the Cobb Traders. He said extending the parking concessions to businesses with a registered trading address in Lyme Regis would provide meaningful support to the local business community, particularly during the quieter trading periods. He said many local traders relied on regular access to the town for operational needs, and enabling fair access to parking helped to strengthen the viability of local. He said the proposal for an additional free parking day on Sunday 13 December in support of the Big Christmas Weekend was also a positive initiative as events such as these relied on strong physical visitor turnout. Removing the barrier of parking charges could encourage greater attendance and increased footfall, helping to create a vibrant and successful event. He said the introduction of a discounted autumn and winter parking charge of £2 per day was a sensible and pragmatic approach during the off-peak season. He said during the off-peak months, parking demand was lower, and many spaces would otherwise remain unused, therefore if the council offered a lower daily rate, it was unlikely to represent a significant loss of income to the council. He said it had the potential to attract additional visitors and encourage longer stays in the town, by supporting local businesses at a time when trade was slower. He said many of those who would benefit from these concessions were likely to be parking during quieter periods and in spaces that might otherwise remain empty. He said in those circumstances, the reduced rate or concession did not necessarily replace existing revenue, it helped make productive use of parking capacity that would otherwise generate no income at all. He referred to a previous comment that the town council has no statutory responsibility to support local businesses and received no financial support to do so and said while this was correct in a legal sense, it reflected a short sighted and self-interested view of the council's role within the community. He said local businesses were not separate from the town, they were a fundamental part of its identity, economy and daily life. He said they created employment, attracted visitors and maintained the vitality of the high street and contributed a significant amount to the overall prosperity and appeal of Lyme Regis. He said a thriving business community benefited residents, visitors and the council itself and for that reason, the question should not be whether the council had a statutory obligation to support local businesses, but whether the council had a broader civic responsibility to act in ways that encouraged the town to thrive. He said the measures proposed by the Cobb Traders were modest, practical steps that foster success without placing a significant financial burden on the council. He said the proposals represented a constructive and common-sense approach to supporting local businesses, encouraging visitors during quiet months and strengthening the local economy, while making effective use of available parking spaces. He said the requests put forward by Cobb Traders deserved serious consideration and support.

25/53/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr M. Denney – illness
Cllr D. Holland – prior commitment
Cllr C. Reynolds – illness

25/54/SF Minutes

It was noted Cllr C. Aldridge had given her apologies for the meeting and was not absent without apology.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2026, with the above amendment, were **ADOPTED**.

25/55/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

25/56/SF Dispensations

There were none.

25/57/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 4 February 2026.

Beach replenishment

The deputy town clerk said Dorset Council (DC) had started the beach replenishment works and it was currently operating to programme.

There was some concern about the fencing remaining in place after the works were completed, as this closed off the beach to the public. The deputy town clerk said it was expected to be taken down within a couple of days of the work completing but it was agreed he would raise the concerns with DC and request it was taken down before the coming weekend.

25/58/SF Update Report

There was no update report.

25/59/SF Request from Cobb Traders – Parking Concessions, Free Parking Days and Autumn/Winter Parking Scheme

The chairman brought this item forward on the agenda.

Members discussed the request for businesses with a trading address in Lyme Regis to have a concessionary permit and noted there was already a non-residents' parking permit, which would be available to businesses and their employees at a discounted rate.

It was also noted DC offered a permit for two of its Lyme Regis car parks, which was cheaper still.

It was noted Monmouth Beach car park was classed as the short stay car park and Woodmead as the long stay car park, which is why the permits had historically been issued for Woodmead car park only. At Monmouth Beach car park, spaces went so quickly so it remained a short stay car park because of the turnover of people wanting to park.

The deputy town clerk suggested the non-residents' permit should be publicised more, because it did not seem that people were aware of the permit or who could benefit from it, although it was noted they were already advertised on the council website.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr N. Hampton-Rumbold, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** not to make any changes to the current parking permits.

Members discussed the request to provide an additional free parking day in town council-owned car parks on Sunday 13 December to support the Big Christmas Weekend in Lyme Regis.

It was clarified that DC was not offering free parking on the Sunday, so the town council would be offering something more than DC. It was suggested if the council was encouraging people to stay and park for longer, it would be better for visitors to park in the long-stay Woodmead car park.

Members noted there would be less impact on the council's income if the free parking was restricted to Woodmead car park.

Proposed by Cllr A. Wood and seconded by Cllr S. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to offer an additional free parking day in town Woodmead car park only on Sunday 13 December to support the Big Christmas Weekend in Lyme Regis.

Members discussed the request for a discounted autumn/winter parking charge of £2 per day in town council-owned car parks.

Referring to earlier references to Swanage Town Council and East Devon District Council, the deputy town clerk said their business model was very different to this council as they received roughly 50% of their total income from the precept and a much smaller percentage of their overall income from car parking. He said car parking was the single largest source of income for this council and anything that affected the car parking income was potentially a much greater risk. He said it was very difficult to predict the outcome and that a reduction in car parking charges could entice more people to visit the town if it was combined with additional marketing and promotion at further cost.

A member asked if there was any data from other councils that supported more trade and footfall after introducing a concessionary rate.

The deputy town clerk stressed that the impact of parking charge changes was difficult to predict and what had worked for other towns may or may not work for Lyme Regis.

Members discussed the potential impact on income and noted the council's finances had recently come under scrutiny; any loss of income and potential impact on future budgets would need to be justified if it affected what the council could deliver for the town.

Members were reminded the 2026-27 budget had already been agreed and if changes were made now, the council would go straight into deficit. It was suggested it would be more appropriate to consider requests like this as part of the budget-setting process for the following year.

Members agreed it would be unpopular with residents if the council had to increase the precept to cover the shortfall on parking charges.

Members discussed the price suggestions for a blanket autumn/winter parking charge and the impact that could potentially have on the council and the town.

Members said residents already benefitted from the concessionary permit that allows free winter parking in town council-owned car parks and therefore only visitors and businesses would benefit from the blanket autumn/winter parking charge. They said although the council wanted to support local businesses, it needed to look at the bigger picture and agreeing to this request without a fully thought-out business plan and more data could bring a great risk. They asked to see weekly income figures from each car park instead of figures based on a period of a few months.

Proposed by Cllr P. Evans and seconded by Cllr S. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to defer the decision to offer a discounted autumn/winter parking charge of £2 per day in town council-owned car parks to a future meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee and for officers to provide further data on car parking income and variations, and comparisons to other towns in order to make an informed decision.

25/60/SF Strategy and Finance Committee - Objectives

Members noted the report.

25/61/SF Budget Performance, 1 April – 28 February 2026

Members noted the report.

25/62/SF Investments and Cash Holdings

Members noted the cash position at the end of February 2026,

25/63/SF List of Payments

Proposed by Cllr N. Hampton-Rumbold and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments in January and February 2026 for the sums of £217,790.10 and £348,865.07, respectively.

25/64/SF Debtors

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr P. May, members **RESOLVED** that under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for this item of business as it included confidential matters relating to relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person within the meaning of paragraphs 1 and 8 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Section 1 and Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985), as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

25/65/SF Exempt Business

a) **Debtors' Report**

Members were concerned about the debt relating to the accreted land, noting that the longer the situation carried on, the debt owed to the council would increase.

The meeting closed at 8.23pm.