

## Free Christmas Parking

**Council – 19 February 2013**

Report of the: Community and Planning Services Director

Status: For Decision

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### Executive Summary:

This report seeks confirmation that the cost of the free Christmas parking for 2012, estimated at £15,000, be funded from Supplementary Estimates

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**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Hunter

**Head of Service** Head of Environmental and Operational Services, Mr. Richard Wilson

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**Recommendation: It be RESOLVED that** the cost of the free Christmas parking for 2012, estimated at £15,000, be funded from Supplementary Estimates.

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### Introduction

- 1 On 8 November 2012, Members of Cabinet considered and approved proposals for increasing certain parking charges to contribute to the Council's overall budget target for 2013/14. At the meeting held on 8 November, Members also approved the provision of free Christmas parking on two Saturdays before Christmas with the recommendation that this be funded from Supplementary Estimates. This was not taken forward for consideration by Council and, hence, a recommendation to request approval by Council is included with this report merely to regularise the situation.
- 2 This report concerns objections and comments received in respect to the proposed car park and on-street charges following public consultation to amend the Council's Car Parks Order and on-street Traffic Regulation Order.
- 3 For Cabinet Members' information, a summary of the proposals as approved on 8 November, subject to consultation, is attached as Appendix A.

### Car Park Proposals

- 4 The consultation period ended on 16 December 2012. In addition to the Notice in the local newspaper and displayed in the car parks, letters were sent to all season ticket holders advising them of the proposals.
- 5 Three comments were received in response to the consultation. These include a response from the Sevenoaks Town council and from Kent Police. The comments received are attached in full, i.e. in verbatim, in Appendix B for Members' perusal and consideration. They relate to the following areas:-

Car Parks Subject:	Number of Comments:
Pay & display charges – Sevenoaks town centre car parks	1
Season ticket charges – Sevenoaks station car parks	1
General comment	1

- 6 **In respect to the pay and display charges in Sevenoaks town centre** (see comment 1), comments were received from the Sevenoaks Town Council expressing concern at the proposals and requesting the disclosure of revenue and usage information to enable the effect of previous price rises to be analysed. Please refer to further comments regarding this under the heading “Parking Trend and Income” below.
- 7 **In respect to the Sevenoaks station season tickets** (see comment 2), comments were received from a Sennocke car park season ticket holder, assumed to relate only to the proposed increase in season ticket costs, expressing objection to the proposed increase and suggesting that there ought to be a price freeze in recognition of financial conditions.
- 8 For information, the proposal is to increase the cost of annual season tickets in the Bradbourne and Sennocke car parks by £10. In respect to the Sennocke car park, this would be an increase of 0.9%.
- 9 **In respect to the general comment** (See comment 3), this is a standard response from Kent Police and does not make specific reference to the proposed charges.

### **Parking Trend and Income**

- 10 Information relating to car park usage and income for the Sevenoaks town centre car parks is included in this report in response to the request by the Sevenoaks Town Council.
- 11 A check on parking usage in the Council run car parks is undertaken during one week of every month to provide usage records on a sample basis. The survey is undertaken twice each day to coincide with the morning and afternoon peaks. The number of parking spaces available in each car park is recorded. Where possible, the car parks are surveyed on all working days of the week, but for some months perhaps only one or two days are achieved, due to the availability of staff resources. The car parks are not surveyed on Saturdays.
- 12 The parking surveys can really only provide a sample of parking use for each month and should not be taken as giving an accurate indication. Nevertheless, they do serve as a useful guide as to parking trends in the car parks.
- 13 Appendix C shows a record of parking spaces available between April 2009 and December 2012. Two data sets have been included to reflect the two different pricing structures within the town centre car parks, one for the Blighs car park and

another which includes the Buckhurst 1, Buckhurst 2, South Park and Suffolk Way car parks which collectively form the “other town centre car parks”. Only data for the morning period is shown as this tends to be the busiest time of the day for parking use.

- 14 As can be seen, since the latter part of 2011/12 more spaces have been increasingly available, certainly in the “other” town centre car parks but less so for Blighs. However, the number of spaces tends to correspond with the level recorded for 2009/10. Members may recall that the Waitrose store was closed for redevelopment between July 2010 and September 2011. This would have had an impact upon car park use in the town centre as Waitrose customers would have transferred to the public car parks while the temporary Waitrose store operated from the former Woolworths site in the High Street. This would have led to a reduction in spaces available during 2010/11 and 2011/12, and this is thought to be the main reason why fewer parking spaces were available. One the effects of the Waitrose redevelopment and relocation of parking has been to mask the true parking trend in the town centre over recent years, which is unfortunate.
- 15 In Appendix D, a breakdown of ticket sales is provided for each town centre car park in terms of the percentage of ticket sales for each tariff for the last four years. This enables trends in ticket sales between the different tariffs to be identified. To enable comparison with the financial current year, all data relates to the first nine months of each year shown. Total ticket sales figures are also given.
- 16 Unfortunately, the information for the Blighs car park for this financial year is incomplete as a result of a fault in the ticket machine manufacturer’s data recording system. The percentage split for 2012/13 is based on information only available from the end of November. As a result, this might not give a truly representative picture for the whole year. In respect to the Buckhurst 2 car park, data is not available for 2009/10.
- 17 In many cases, there is relatively little variation between the current year and the previous year or two years, beyond usual fluctuations. However, it is noticeable that in Blighs the proportion of 1 hour and evening tickets has dropped whilst the proportion of 30 minute , 2 hour and 3 hour tickets has increased. Unfortunately, without knowing the number of ticket sales for the different tariffs it is not possible to gauge what effect this might have had upon income.
- 18 Whilst the ticket sales for Blighs for the current year are unknown, a comparison can still be made for the other town centre car parks. On the third page of Appendix D the top chart shows ticket sales for the other town centre car parks, collectively, for the last four years, broken down by tariff. This shows a significant drop in the number of 1 hour and 2 hour tickets bought and a small drop in the number of 4 hour and evening tickets bought. Since the cost of the 1 hour tariff had not changed in April 2012, the drop in sales cannot be related to the increase in parking charges. There would, of course, have been some reduction in ticket sales following the opening of the new Waitrose store as this would have resulted in a “freeing-up” of spaces in the town centre car parks. Unfortunately, it is not possible to quantify the degree to which this would have impacted upon parking availability in the town centre car parks.

- 19 The bottom chart on the last page of Appendix D shows the total ticket sales for each car park, where figures are available. As can be seen, sales for 2012/13 have dropped in all car parks. Again, some reduction would have been due to the opening of the new Waitrose store.
- 20 Appendix E shows the gross monthly income levels (i.e. inclusive of VAT) for each car park for the last two years and the total for the town centre as a whole.
- 21 Taking the usage and ticket sales information into account, I am of the opinion that parking use has reduced during 2012/13 probably due to a number of factors. Firstly, the weather experienced at the beginning of the year was very poor; secondly, the Olympic and Paralympic Games are thought to have had an effect; and thirdly, and I believe the most likely reason, that there has been a general down-turn in footfall which has been experienced nationally.
- 22 The higher levels of parking use during 2010/11 and 2011/12 are most likely due to the Waitrose redevelopment. Officers do not consider that the increases introduced in April 2012 would solely have led to such a drop in car park usage, particularly as they were generally limited to 10p on various tariffs and in view that similar increases in preceding years had not noticeably adversely affected parking income levels.
- 23 A report entitled 'Re-Think! Parking on the High Street' has just been produced by the Association of Town Centre Management, the British Parking Association, Parking Data & Research International and Springboard Research Ltd. This reviews off-street parking tariffs at some ninety locations across the UK and uses data on footfall, spend and centre quality to group these locations and assess the relationship to the quality of spaces and the cost of parking for the first two hours. In view of the relevance of this report, it has been placed on the website for Members' information.
- 24 These are the key findings:
- Parking operators are providing parking provision which equates to the footfall levels achieved by their location.
  - There is no clear relationship between car parking charges and the amenities on offer in a location with some mid-range and smaller centres charging more than what is the national average.
  - The mid-range and smaller groupings of centres that charge more than the national average in accordance with their offer, suffered a higher than average decline in footfall for 2011.
- 25 It is stated that the findings do not conclusively demonstrate that parking tariffs are influencing decline in locations across the UK.
- 26 Of particular interest is the annual percentage change in footfall for the period January to September 2012 (as shown in figure 4 on page 15 of the report) which tends to match the reduced levels in car park income experienced in Sevenoaks town centre.

- 27 It may be worth noting that costs to maintain and operate the Council's car parks increase year on year. Business rates have increased by over £20,000 for the last two years running; last year maintenance costs rose by over £86,000 of which £72,000 was needed for repairs to car park surfacing; other essential maintenance works will need to be carried out later this or next financial year and a number of ticket machines and items of enforcement equipment are in need of replacement.
- 28 In estimating the additional income likely to accrue from the proposed increases for 2013/14, the drop in parking usage and income experienced during the first part of this financial year has been taken into account. Therefore, unless the down-turn worsens, which is not suggested by the trend information attached, the level of additional income predicted for next year should be achievable. However, whether the expected total budget for pay and display income will be achieved will be dependent upon the extent of the shortfall at this year end and whether the current parking trend will continue or recover and if so, the degree of any recovery.
- 29 As a reminder for Members, the table showing parking charges of neighbouring authorities is attached as Appendix G. It can be seen that our charges compare reasonably well with other Councils.

### **On-Street Proposals**

- 30 The consultation period for the on-street proposals also ended on 16 December 2012. The Public Notice was published in the local newspaper and was widely displayed in all on-street locations.
- 31 Three comments were received in response to the consultation. These were from the Sevenoaks Town council (the same letter relating to both car parks and on-street proposals), the Westerham Town Council and the Kent Police. The comments received are attached in full, i.e. in verbatim, in Appendix B for Members' perusal and consideration. They relate to the following areas:-

<b>On-Street Subject:</b>	<b>Number of Comments:</b>
Pay & display charges	2
General comment	1

- 32 **In respect to pay and display charges** (see comment 1), whilst the letter received from the Sevenoaks Town Council refers to both the on-street and car parks Orders, the comments contained therein appear to only relate to the car park proposals.
- 33 The Westerham Town Council object (see comment 4) on the grounds that an increase is not justified, the increase is large and that free parking is available in adjacent towns and villages namely Oxted and Brasted.
- 34 **In respect to the general comment** (see comment 5), this is a standard response from Kent Police and does not make specific reference to the proposed charges.

## **Changes to the Road Traffic Order**

- 35 For information, comments relating to an increase in on-street parking charges are not considered to be pertinent or valid objections under the terms of the legislation for the Order making process. Therefore, they would not be required to be reported to the Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board for consideration.

## **Christmas Free Parking**

- 36 At the meeting held on 8 November, Members approved the provision of free Christmas parking on two Saturdays before Christmas with the recommendation that this be funded from Supplementary Estimates. This was not taken forward for consideration by Council and, hence, a recommendation to request approval by Council is included with this report merely to regularise the situation.

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

- 37 The proposals considered and approved by Cabinet on 8 November 2012 contribute to the budget provisions for parking for 2013/14.

### Community Impact and Outcomes

- 38 The introduction of parking charge increases is likely to have an impact to some degree upon people from the local community and upon visitors to the district who use the parking facilities, although it is impossible to quantify any likely resultant effect. Rather than pay higher parking charges, people may instead decide to park for shorter periods, lessen the frequency of their visits or choose to go elsewhere.

### Legal, Human Rights etc

- 39 The processes to amend the off-street and on-street Orders are being carried in accordance with the legal requirements.
- 40 There are no human rights issues or implications.

### Equality Impacts

- 41 There is a low risk that any of the options presented will have an adverse impact on people with 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act. There are no apparent issues of direct relevance to parking charges as our car parks are open to use by anyone who chooses to do so. Free parking is generally available in roads just out from the town centres, although in some cases this might be limited to 2 hours. Free parking is offered for those with disabilities who hold a Blue Badge and this remains unaffected. Any issues will be monitored through complaints received. The Parking Enforcement Policy is subject to a separate Equality Impact Assessment and has not identified any substantial issues.

## **Conclusions**

- 42 Members are requested to consider whether they wish to make any amendments to the charges approved on 8 November 2012 in light of the consultation comments received.

**Risk Assessment Statement**

- 43 By not adopting the charging proposals approved, or by failing to provide alternatives, the budget expectations for parking income for 2013/14 might not be realised.

**Sources of Information:** The Car Park (Amendment 2) Order 2010 file held by the Parking and Amenity Manager.

The Kent County Council (Various Roads in the District of Sevenoaks) (Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading & Unloading and On-Street Parking Places) (Amendment 26) Order 2009.

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