

## **ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARKING CHARGES FOR 2015/16 AND CHRISTMAS PARKING 2014**

### **Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee – 21 October 2014**

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: Consideration and comment

Also considered by: Cabinet 13 November 2014

Key Decision: Yes

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**Executive Summary:** This report is the annual review of parking charges. It proposes car park and on-street parking charge options for 2015/16, and includes consideration of free Christmas parking for 2014

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**This report supports the Key Aims of** the effective management of Council resources and supporting and developing the local economy

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. R Hogarth

**Contact Officer(s)** Gary Connor x7310

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**Recommendation to Advisory Committee:** It be resolved that the following proposals be considered and that the views of this Committee be submitted to Cabinet for consideration in relation to:

- (a) the proposed car park charges for 2015/16, subject to consultation as noted in the report;
- (b) the proposed on-street parking charges for 2015/16, subject to consultation as noted in the report; and
- (c) the dates for free Christmas parking to be provided in all car parks and on-street parking areas throughout the district for two Saturdays before Christmas 2014; and the cost in terms of lost income be funded from Supplementary Estimates.

**Recommendation to Cabinet:** That the following be resolved:

- (a) the proposed car park charges for 2015/16 be confirmed, subject to consultation as noted in the report;
  - (b) the proposed on-street parking charges for 2015/16 be confirmed, subject to consultation as noted in the report; and
  - (c) the dates for free Christmas parking to be provided in all car parks and on-street parking areas throughout the district for two Saturdays before Christmas 2014 be confirmed; and that the cost in terms of lost income be funded from Supplementary Estimates.
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**Recommendation to Council:** It be resolved that:

cost in terms of lost income for free Christmas parking to be provided in all car parks and on-street parking areas throughout the district for two Saturdays before Christmas 2014 be funded from Supplementary Estimates.

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**Reason for recommendation:** To ensure car parking charges are set to support a sustainable local economy.

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### **Introduction and Background**

- 1 One of the primary considerations when reviewing parking charges is to ensure the Council makes the best use of its parking spaces for the benefit of the local economy.
- 2 The Council's approach has been to ensure our parking charges are set to encourage people to visit our towns while at the same time promoting a good turnover of parking spaces for the benefit of businesses and visitors.
- 3 This has resulted in high use of the Council's car parks and on-street parking spaces, benefitting retailers. Past studies by the Local Data Company concluded that Sevenoaks town has one of the healthiest high streets in the country with the fewest number of empty shops for a town of its size. The Council's approach to setting parking charges has contributed to this success.
- 4 At the same time additional income generated from parking charges will allow the Council to cover the increased cost of providing parking, including maintenance, business rates and utility costs.
- 5 Any surplus income is invested in District Council services by contributing towards the Council's budget requirements at a time when the Council faces the biggest reductions in Government funding in its history.
- 6 The Council's 10 year budget, approved by Council in February 2014 assumes an increase in the levels of income of 3.5% to enable a balanced budget to be delivered. This includes income from parking.
- 7 This report sets out options for parking charges from April 2015 and also recommends that the Council considers repeating its free parking concession on two Saturdays before Christmas, to support local businesses

### **Background Information**

- 8 Car park ticket machines do not accept bronze coins, and because of the general lack of availability of 5p coins, parking tariffs are usually set to the nearest 10p. This practice is commonly adopted by local authorities. Although a tariff increase of 10p may be relatively low in monetary terms, it can be high in percentage terms depending upon the scale of the charge, particularly in relation to lower tariffs.

- 9 For guide purposes, current car parking charges for neighbouring authorities are attached as Appendix A.
- 10 For information, in relation to parking in the vicinity of rail stations, the current day charge for the station car parks operated on behalf of Southeastern Trains is £6.70 at Sevenoaks, £6.00 at Swanley and £3.50 at Knockholt station. Annual season ticket charges at Sevenoaks are £1,212 for Car Park 4 (off Morewood Close) and £1,467 for Car Park 1 (adjacent the station).

## **CAR PARKS**

- 11 A 3.5% budget increase for 2015/16 amounts to £73,215.
- 12 As at the end of September 2014 (approximate figures given), there was a shortfall of £30,000 for total car park income against budget target. Income from pay and display charges was £43,000 below target, whilst income from season tickets was £11,000 above target.
- 13 To achieve the additional income approved by Cabinet in respect to this financial year, after 6 months we would expect income from pay and display charges to be up by £31,000 on last year. Actual income is up nearly £34,000 compared to the same period last year. This shows, therefore, that the expected additional income is being achieved for this current year. It is worth noting that this is despite the reduction in spaces brought about by the Marks & Spencer development, as mentioned below.

## **The Blighs Development**

- 14 The development to provide a new Marks & Spencer store in London Road, Sevenoaks began in June 2013. As a result, 54 short stay spaces were lost from the Blighs car park, of which 5 formed part of the main Blighs car park. In June 2014, the Pembroke Road car park with 54 long stay spaces, which had initially been reduced to 33 spaces, was also lost to the development. No adjustment has been made to the budget target for parking income for the current year to take account of the significant reductions in parking spaces.
- 15 Due to the opening of the new Marks & Spencer store on 8 October, the overall parking situation in the town centre remains somewhat unsettled.
- 16 The Marks & Spencer development included the provision of a VMS (variable message signing) system for the town centre. Electronic signs have been installed on the main approaches to the town centre which indicate the number of spaces available in the town centre car parks, thus encouraging better use of parking facilities in the town.
- 17 The small upper, surface car park associated with the development (30 spaces) will be managed and operated by the Council as part of the Blighs car park, with the same conditions and charges applying. Transfer arrangements should be in place from the time of the store opening. The undercroft car park (49 spaces) is to be privately managed and, as far as we are aware, is not directly linked, in management terms, to the M&S store.

## **Proposals for the Buckhurst 2 Car Park**

- 18 The Council has recently submitted a planning application to provide approximately 300 additional parking spaces at the Buckhurst 2 car park. The proposals for the additional spaces form part of a separate investment strategy and, therefore, do not feature as part of this review. The existing spaces, however, were not included in the financial calculations and, hence, they do need to be included in the review.
- 19 It should be noted that any recommendations in respect to parking charges for the existing parking spaces at the Buckhurst 2 car park will automatically apply to the additional spaces proposed as part of the scheme.
- 20 The business case for the new car park was assumes an annual increase of 3% for pay and display and season ticket charges to enable the costs of the scheme to be self financing. The proposals contained in this review for 2015/16 take this into account.

## **Car Park Charges**

- 21 Proposals and options for car park charges are provided and attached as Appendix B. There are two versions shown, B1 and B2, to take account of whether a change to the evening parking charge is to be recommended. B1 assumes that a change to the evening charge is not included, whereas B2 assumes that it is. A proposal for the evening charge is discussed below. All income figures quoted are net of VAT.
- 22 The proposals within each option are not exclusive to that particular option, but can be interchanged or swapped with those in other options to provide a preferred set of proposals should Members so wish. However, care should be taken to maintain charging differentials, particularly between Blighs car park and the other short stay car parks in the town centre.
- 23 Included in Appendix B, as an example and as a possible option, is the income that could be derived from a flat 10p increase to all pay and display tariffs and a £10 increase to all season tickets.
- 24 In formulating the options, an attempt has been made to avoid the areas where increases were applied as a result of the previous review for the current financial year.

## **Westerham Parking Charges**

- 25 As noted in the appendix, the performance of the parking charges introduced in Westerham this year in response to the parking policies proposed by the Westerham Town Partnership, are being discussed with the Town Partnership and the Westerham Town Council. Therefore, this section of the appendix has not been completed. It is intended to report details at the time of the meeting.

## **Evening Charge**

- 26 The £1.00 evening charge was introduced in 2004. Over the years the use of a one-off payment for the evening period has caused confusion to car park users. This continues to be the case. Members may wish to consider removing the evening charge and instead extending the daytime charges through into the evening period. If this were to be done, a cut-off of 9.00pm is recommended as there are few parking purchases after this time.

## **Car Park Options**

- 27 Option 1 in Appendix B1: mainly proposes increasing the 30 minute and 1 hour charges in Blighs, which were not included last year, and increasing the 2, 3 and 4 hour charges in the other town centre car parks to try and maintain the charging differential. As previously stated, increases for the Buckhurst 2 car park are in line with the investment strategy for the proposed scheme. In respect to Swanley, a nominal 10p increase is proposed to the long stay charges in Swanley in order to reduce the amount of coinage required.
- 28 Option 2 in Appendix B1: includes an increase to the 2 hour charge in Blighs which enables the 2 hour charge in the other town centre car parks to be removed. Otherwise, this option is much the same as option 1.
- 29 Option 3 in Appendix B1: applies increases to the longer parking periods in all the town centre car parks to encourage the turn-over of spaces and to maintain the average hourly cost for each set of charges.
- 30 Options 1, 2 & 3 in Appendix B2: the inclusion of the evening charge enables the extent of the increases to the other parking charges to be reduced.
- 31 The two day ticket in the Bradbourne car park will be automatically adjusted to twice the day ticket rate.
- 32 The cost of altering ticket machines and signing has been taken into account in the budget figures provided.
- 33 The adjustment of car park charges will require an amendment to the Council's Off-Street Parking Places Order. The process requires the Council to undertake statutory public consultation by way of Public Advertisement of the proposals. To enable any revised charges to take effect at the beginning of April 2015, the proposals would need to be advertised and any objections received reported to Cabinet for consideration.

## **ON-STREET PARKING**

- 34 A 3.5% increase for 2015/16 amounts to £19,947.
- 35 As at the end of September 2014 (approximate figures given), income from on-street parking charges was £49,000 above target. The account as a whole was £30,000 in surplus.

- 36 Income from pay and display charges for the first 6 months of this year is up by £38,000 compared to the same period last year. To achieve the additional income approved by Cabinet in respect to this financial year, we would expect to be £25,000 up at this point. This indicates, therefore, that the expected additional income is being achieved for the current year.
- 37 In view of the better than expected level of income received, Members may wish to consider freezing on street parking charges for 2015/16..
- 38 Three options are provided for consideration in Appendix C. The appendix comprises two pages, C1 and C2. C1 shows all the current charges for the different parking areas within the district. However, with the parking charge structure being more or less standardised across the district, the suggested increases can be shown against each parking period as opposed to each parking area, as shown in Appendix C2. Any increase approved would automatically be applied to any area where it featured within the district.

### **Westerham On Street Parking Charges**

- 39 As noted in the appendix, the performance of the parking charges introduced in Westerham this year in response to the parking policies proposed by the Westerham Town Partnership, are being discussed with the Town Partnership and the Westerham Town Council. Therefore, this section of the appendix has not been completed, but it is intended to report details at the meeting.

### **On-Street Options**

- 40 Option 1: in view of the positive situation of the on-street parking account, this option proposes freezing the current parking charges. .
- 41 Option 2: suggests a nominal 10p increase to the 30 minute charge. This achieves a 2.0% increase in the on street parking income which, taking into consideration the performance of the parking account, may be acceptable.
- 42 Option 3: applies a 20p increase to the 2 and 4 hour charges. This is aimed at improving the turn-over of spaces. The increases achieve 2.7% in respect to the budget target. Should additional income be required to achieve 3.5%, a 10p increase on the day charge in all areas would produce £5,900 of additional income providing an overall budget increase of 3.7%.
- 43 Any changes to the on-street parking charges would require an amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order. The process requires the Council to undertake statutory public consultation by way of Public Advertisement of the proposals.

### **CHRISTMAS PARKING 2014**

- 44 In previous years, to encourage people to shop locally and to support local businesses, the Council has provided free parking in all car parks and on-street parking areas on two Saturdays before Christmas. Members are recommended to consider repeating this free parking concession this year.

- 45 It should be noted that this would only apply to Sevenoaks and Westerham as parking charges in Swanley and in Halstead (outside Knockholt station) only apply Monday to Friday.
- 46 In connection with free Christmas parking, we understand that a request will be made by the Government's Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Communities and Local Government to repeat the "UK Small Business Saturday" this December. The request is aimed at supporting small businesses and the viability of town centres. One of the suggested measures is the waiving of town centre parking charges for the day..
- 47 We are in the process of inviting the views of the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce, the Sevenoaks Town Council, the Westerham Town Council and the Westerham Town Partnership regarding the preferred dates for the free parking concession and the Small Business event. Any responses received will be reported at the time of the meeting.
- 48 It should be noted that the provision of free parking will enable people to park up to the maximum period of stay for the car parks should they so wish. This is likely to reduce the turnover of spaces. However, all parking areas will be enforced as normal to ensure compliance with the general conditions of use.
- 49 As for last year, all ticket machines will be closed-off with suitable signing provided to advise users that parking is free.
- 50 The parking areas operated by Sencio Community Leisure at the Sevenoaks leisure centre form part of the Suffolk Way car park. Sencio has always joined the Council in providing free parking at Christmas and will be requested to confirm its support again for this year.
- 51 It is estimated that the loss of income for all car parks and on-street areas throughout the district for each Saturday would be in the region of £9,000. Therefore, the total cost of providing free parking for two Saturdays is estimated at £18,000. It is suggested that should the free parking concession for 2014 be approved, it be funded from the Supplementary Estimates.

#### **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS EVENTS 2014**

- 52 Members are advised that the provision of free parking in connection with Christmas Lights and Late Night Shopping events being held in Westerham on 27 November (free parking from 5pm) and in Sevenoaks on 28 November (free parking from 6pm) has recently been approved by the Council's Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development. The Council is pleased to support these annual events. It should be noted that the Sevenoaks event is also supported by Sencio Community Leisure.

#### **Key Implications**

##### Financial

- 53 The Council's 10 year budget, approved by Council in February 2014 assumes an increase in the levels of income of 3.5% to enable a balanced budget to be delivered. This includes income from parking. .
- 54 The financial implications are evident in the report and appendices.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 55 As mentioned earlier in this report, any changes to the car park charges will necessitate an amendment to the Car Park Order and similarly, any changes to the on-street parking charges will necessitate an amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order. There are set legal processes to be followed in respect to both of these Orders.
- 56 The estimated figures are based upon current levels of patronage. The introduction of higher parking charges could lead to reduced patronage and, hence, the under-achievement of the income levels estimated in this report.

#### Equality Impacts

- 57 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.

#### **Conclusions**

- 58 Proposals and options to review the car parking charges for 2015/16 are detailed in the appendices to this report. It is important that the proposals are considered making reference to the Parking Charges for Neighbouring Authorities.

**Appendices**                      Appendix A – Parking Charges for Neighbouring Authorities  
    Appendix B – Options for Car Park Charges  
    Appendix C – Options for On-Street Parking Charges

**Mr Richard Wilson**  
**Chief Officer Environmental and Operations Services**