

ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARKING MANAGEMENT 2019-20

Cabinet - 11 October 2018

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For recommendation to Cabinet

Also considered by: Direct and Trading Advisory Committee - 9 October 2018

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary:

This report is the annual review of parking management for 2019-20.

It proposes consulting on freezing all charges on and off street across the district with the exception of a modest increase to Bradbourne car park to keep abreast of inflationary pressures.

The proposed changes help to regulate demand and support the economic vibrancy and viability of Sevenoaks, improving the lives of residents.

This report supports the Key Aims of:

Providing value for money, and supporting and developing the local economy.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Matthew Dickins

Contact Officer John Strachan, Ext. 7310

Recommendation to Direct & Trading Advisory Committee: That the parking management proposals for 2019/20 be considered by the Committee and its views be submitted to Cabinet, for consideration, prior to consultation.

Recommendation to Cabinet: That the views of the Advisory Committee be considered and parking management proposals for 2019/20 be agreed for consultation, with the results of the consultation being reported back to Cabinet for consideration.

Reason for recommendation:

To help regulate and manage the use of on and off street parking facilities in the District; to ensure car parking charges are set to support a sustainable local economy; and to support services for residents as set out in the approved 10 year budget.

Introduction

- 1 This report considers the setting of parking charges in the Council's car parks and the fees for on-street parking between April 2019 and March 2020 inclusive.
- 2 The report proposes consulting on modest increases to the 24 hour parking rate and season ticket rates in Bradbourne car park.
- 3 These proposals follow a package of successful parking measures implemented over the past few years which have seen the Council:
 - freezing the majority of charges in Sevenoaks, Swanley and Westerham;
 - freezing Season Tickets, Resident Permits, Visitor Vouchers and Non-Resident Permits for a number of years;
 - protecting the three hours free parking at Darent car park, Westerham;
 - improving Sunday enforcement;
 - improving facilities;
 - introducing warning notices to national acclaim;
 - introducing dropped kerb enforcement;
 - introducing Safer School Parking Zones;
 - maintaining and extending free all day weekend parking in the SDC staff car park in Gordon Road;
 - improving provision for part-time workers;
 - increasing overall parking capacity; and,
 - maintaining over a thousand complimentary spaces on Sundays.

Background

- 4 The Council operates a number of public car parks and on street pay and display facilities in towns and villages in the District. It is important to regulate these finite resources in order to balance the needs of parking users, including: commuters, local businesses, residents, shoppers and other visitors including tourists.
- 5 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. Parking charges are one aspect of effective parking management however others - such as hours of operation and maximum stay periods - are also kept under review.
- 6 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. Indeed the Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study (ENS), conducted by Turley Economics and noted as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan stated that Sevenoaks enjoys a vacancy rate of 6.72% which is believed to

comprise those properties which are empty through natural turnover in tenants. This compared favourably with the national average of 11.2%. The Council's approach to parking management - focusing on turnover, efficient management of a limited resource, affordability and customer satisfaction - has undoubtedly contributed to this success.

- 7 Further evidence of the success of the Council's positive approach to supporting its towns is available in the Sevenoaks Chronicle with it reporting this year that Sevenoaks boasts "one of Britain's most soaring high streets", and continuing "footfall is up and empty shops a thing of the past." Just a few months earlier, it stated that "Sevenoaks town centre is always a hive of activity" adding that "the town stays busy in the evenings too".
- 8 In addition to operational costs such as non-domestic rates, insurance, general maintenance, utilities, enforcement and security, it is important to re-invest in the Council's car parks to ensure these assets remain welcoming, safe and fit for purpose. Recent improvements have included installing new safety barriers, increasing capacity, resurfacing, renewing drainage, and upgrading lighting. The Council has recently developed an award winning multi decked car park on the Bradbourne car park site and is in the process of developing a much needed multi decked car park on the Buckhurst 2 car park, which is due to reopen, on schedule, in Spring 2019.

Supporting documents

- 9 Appendix A provides information on the current parking charges in neighbouring towns and Southeastern car parks. In considering Appendix A, it is helpful to note that the aforementioned ENS concluded 20% of the market conducted its main comparison shop in Tunbridge Wells, which lies 11 miles to the south of Sevenoaks. Tunbridge Wells had a town-centre vacancy rate of 13% and higher average parking charges than Sevenoaks. At 12% Bluewater was assessed as receiving considerably less business from residents of the Sevenoaks District than Tunbridge Wells, despite being the second most popular shopping centre in the UK, offering a wider mix of retailers and choice of comparison goods, and having free parking.
- 10 Appendix B presents existing parking charges alongside the proposed charges.

Sevenoaks Car Parks

- 11 Sevenoaks town remains a thriving shopping centre, containing many popular high street shops, eateries, boutiques and speciality stores, as well as the popular Stag Theatre. The town has a busy daytime, evening and weekend economy, supported by the car parks and on-street parking amenities.
- 12 At peak times each day, all of Sevenoak's town centre parking operates at or close to its maximum capacity, making it all the more important to closely monitor, manage and balance the use of these car parks and on street spaces.

- 13 Parking pressures increased temporarily in 2018 following the closure of Buckhurst 2, the town's only long stay car park, to allow the development of a new multi decked car park on the site, significantly increasing the long stay parking capacity in Sevenoaks town. The Council made a commitment to all its Buckhurst 2 customers to provide alternative parking in on and off street locations close to the town for the period of the improvement works, which it has done. The Council has also operated a daily "park and ride" service for town centre workers.
- 14 The Council is committed to supporting and encouraging the use of alternative sustainable transport options. As part of this, the Council is installing electric vehicle charging points in its car parks, its staff have access to e-bikes helping ease them from four wheels to two, and it has just taken delivery of its first electric vehicle, cheaper and greener than its diesel predecessor.

Blighs

- 15 There are no proposals to change the cost of parking in this car park. Blighs car park continues to operate at or around full capacity at peak times throughout the day.

Buckhurst 1, South Park and Suffolk Way

- 16 There are no proposed changes to the cost of parking in these car parks. For the fourth year running it is proposed that the popular pound per hour structure remains. However it is recommended the 'Up to 5 hours' charge be withdrawn as capacity becomes available in Buckhurst 2 for medium to long stay provision. This should then relieve pressure on these car parks without inconveniencing those who take advantage of the five hour period.

Buckhurst 2

- 17 Buckhurst 2 car park will reopen in Spring 2019. As previously promised, daily and season ticket charges will remain unchanged, representing a five year freeze. The proposal for 2019-20 includes introducing parking for up to 5 hours, in addition to the current all day tariff, helping to make full and effective use of the much-needed extra capacity that this new car park will be bringing to the town.
- 18 The increased capacity at Buckhurst 2 car park will lead to additional income, which will be "ring-fenced" to repay the loan funding the car park development. This income falls outside this review process.

Council Offices

- 19 It is proposed that the SDC staff car park in Gordon Road continue to provide complimentary all-day parking at weekends to assist workers in the town.

St Johns and St James

- 20 For the fifth year running, there are no proposed changes to the tariffs in these car parks.

Bradbourne and Sennocke

- 21 The new Bradbourne Car Park reopened in April 2017, following its temporary closure in August 2016 and redevelopment as a multi decked car park in a multi-million pound improvement which was completed both on time and on budget. Customers now benefit from:
- comprehensive CCTV coverage;
 - innovative Premium Bays;
 - more flexible payment options;
 - short-stay parking to help local businesses, notably the shops around the station on London Road;
 - low energy LED smart lighting which reduces disturbance for neighbours whilst improving the safety and comfort of customers and their vehicles;
 - electric vehicle charging points;
 - year round protection from the elements for the majority of vehicles;
 - regular patrols; and,
 - the coveted Safer Parking Scheme's Park Mark® status.
- 22 The aforementioned Premium Bays offer a number of benefits besides being on the ground floor, close to the entrance. They are over a metre wider than the national standard used in the rest of the car park and they are numbered and reserved for the exclusive use of the Premium Bay Season Ticket Holder at all times each and every day of the year.
- 23 A new Premier Inn has recently opened on the old Sennocke car park site, providing a much-needed new hotel for Sevenoaks to help boost the local economy and tourism in the town. Parking for the hotel is available in Bradbourne, utilising overnight what was traditionally a car park used only during the day.
- 24 It is proposed the season ticket prices, and the respective day rate, be moderately increased following a three year freeze, to help ensure that it remains commercially and competitively priced, and to manage demand and supply of parking around Sevenoaks station. The Bradbourne season ticket is, and will remain under the proposals, significantly better value than the other commuter car parks provided by a third party operator.

Other Car Parks

Bevan Place, Park Road and Station Road (Swanley)

- 25 For the fourth year running, there are no proposed changes to the tariffs in these car parks.

- 26 To continue to encourage a better balance between the use of Bevan Place and Station Road car parks, it is proposed that season tickets for the former remain available at a price which represents a significant saving on using the latter.

Darent, Quebec Avenue and Vicarage Hill (Westerham)

- 27 For the third year running, there are no proposed changes to the tariffs in these car parks.
- 28 To continue to ease pressure on the limited number of on-street spaces, it is proposed that three hours free parking is preserved in the Darent car park.

On-Street Parking

- 29 On street fees apply on some roads across the District, covering eight tariffs divided into thirty-three charges.
- 30 There are no proposed changes to the tariffs on any roads across the District, which includes Sevenoaks, Swanley, Westerham, Edenbridge or Knockholt.

Resident Permits, Visitor Vouchers and Non-Resident Permits

- 31 For the seventh year running, there are no proposed changes to Resident Permits, Visitor Vouchers or Non-Resident Permits charges, though Members may wish to note the higher charge in Tunbridge Wells (£60 - £80, against £35).

Key Implications

Financial

The provision of parking facilities is subject to inflationary pressures like all services and the council has invested heavily in ensuring its offering continues to support the needs of car park users and the local economy, for example with the new Bradbourne and Buckhurst 2 car parks.

The service is not a statutory function and should be paid for by its customers, rather than being provided at a cost to residents and general operating budgets.

The Council's 10-year budget assumes an average 3.5% annual increase in the levels of income from parking charges from 2019/20 onwards, to enable the delivery of a balanced budget and continued provision of valued services to residents.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

Changes to the car park charges will require amending the off-street Parking Order.

Equality Impacts

There is a low risk that the proposals in this report would have any implications under the Equality Act.

Sevenoaks District Council supports the Blue Badge Scheme allowing free parking in its off-street car parks and in on-street pay and display parking bays.

Community Impact and Outcomes

Measured and reasonable parking charges can encourage the use of more sustainable transport options and healthier lifestyles for journeys to school, work, and visits to shops and other amenities in towns and villages.

Human Rights

There are no human rights issues or implications.

Conclusions

Town centre parking in Sevenoaks is at capacity. A number of changes to the management of on and off-street parking could be made but it is recognised that the temporary closure of Buckhurst 2 has made it difficult to make as full an assessment as desired of the likely parking picture post-Spring 2019, so the scope of these proposals is limited. The focus of this report is on management not money but it should be noted that these recommendations mean that income will be less than budgeted. This need not affect the delivery of a balanced ten-year budget (and therefore the services the Council provides to residents) as deferred income could be recovered in future years. Members may wish to consider formally adopting such a flexible multi-year approach, which would have the benefit of allowing the Council, as a local parking provider, to be more responsive to economic cycles as well as the needs of its customers and communities.

Appendices

Appendix A - Parking Charges for Neighbouring Authorities and Southeastern Rail car parks

Appendix B - Proposals for On and Off-Street Parking Charges

Background Papers

None.

Richard Wilson
Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services