

Item 5c – Christmas Parking Arrangements

Cabinet's Recommendation to Council

Cabinet considered this issue as part of the Annual Review of Parking Charges at its meeting on 30 September 2010. A report is attached which sets out the implications of agreeing to fund the free Christmas Parking as a supplementary estimate.

The Minute of the Cabinet's discussion of the Annual Review of Parking Charges was as follows:

The Chairman of the Environment Select Committee informed Members that his Committee had considered the various options in detail at its last meeting and had suggested increases of 6% for off-street car parks, with the exception of Blighs in Sevenoaks and the Swanley Car parks where 7% increases were recommended to discourage long-term parking. The Committee had recommended increases of 3.5% for on-street parking charges.

He drew particular attention to his Committee's view that if new charges were to be brought in from January 2011, they should be set for a 15-month period until April 2012. This would allow for the charges to be realigned with the usual budget setting process.

The Chairman of the Environment Select Committee also informed Cabinet that his Committee had been strongly opposed to introducing charges on a Sunday but had been strongly in favour of free parking on two Saturdays before Christmas, to help local traders.

The Chairman of the Environment Select Committee further informed the Cabinet that his Committee had opposed the introduction of parking charges in Eynsford and Shoreham, as it was feared this would increase already significant congestion in those villages.

Finally, the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee drew the Cabinet's attention to an article in the Sevenoaks Chronicle, which quoted a number of local businesses as being very concerned that high parking charges were discouraging shoppers from coming into the town. In response, the Chairman of Cabinet stated that this was not the case as the number of people parking in the Council's car parks was not declining.

The Parking and Amenity Manager informed Members that consideration had been given to better management of the Blighs car park in Sevenoaks when drawing up the options for parking charges. The Blighs car park was the busiest in the District with people often queuing to park so the options aimed to discourage longer stay parking through increasing charges for 2-3 hour parking and reducing the cost of parking for 30 minutes. There were other car parks in the town were more suitable for long stay parking. He stated that an attempt had also been made to standardise charges in different areas where feasible for both on-street and off-street parking.

The Parking and Amenity Manager drew Members' attention to an error on the Tariff Increase Summary contained within Appendix C, where the figure for long stay parking in Swanley should have read 50p, rather than 20p. However, the total income figures were not affected.

The Parking and Amenity Manager reported that Sencio's Chief Executive, Mark Whyman, had stated that his organisation would be pleased to participate in the free Christmas parking initiative again this year. He also stated that the Chamber of Commerce had written to state that this initiative had proved very successful last year and that they hoped the Council would be able to offer it again to shoppers this year.

The Portfolio Holder for the Built Environment informed Members that he supported the recommendations of the Environment Select Committee with regard to off-street parking, with one amendment. He felt that the long-stay and season ticket increases for Buckhurst 2 and Pembroke Road car parks should be at 5%, as this would make the new charge a round figure, reducing the number of coins people would need to pay for their parking. Members of the Cabinet agreed with this view.

With regard to on-street parking charges, Cabinet noted the recommendation of the Environment Select Committee. However, it felt that the options to standardise charges across the District were preferable, as people would expect to pay the same for parking on a street in Sevenoaks, wherever that happened to be.

Members supported the proposed standardisation of resident permit charges for off-street and on-street parking. Members also agreed not to introduce charges in Eynsford or Shoreham or on Sundays.

Members agreed to two Saturdays' free parking in the run-up to Christmas, to support local businesses. They also stated their intention to make parking free on the evening when the Christmas lights were turned on.

With regard to the proposals to standardise car park season ticket charges, Members decided not to proceed with this proposal as it only affected a very small number of people and would not be cost effective to amend.

Members also agreed to set the charges for a 15-month period starting in January 2011.

A non-Cabinet Member queried whether any work had been undertaken to see whether the cost of enforcement could be reduced. The Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that the cost of enforcing parking was lower than the income generated by the enforcement but there was a general review being undertaken of how costs could be reduced across the Council.

Resolved:

- (a) That car park charges for 2011/12 be increased by the option 3 increases for Blighs Car Park and car parks in Swanley, by the option 1 increases for long stay and season ticket charges for Buckhurst 2 and Pembroke Road car parks and by the option 2 increases for all other car parks, subject to consultation as noted in the report;
- (b) That on-street parking charges for 2011/12 be increased in line with the options for standardised tariffs set out in the report, subject to consultation as noted in the report ;
- (c) That the new charges take effect from the beginning of January 2011 and run until 31 March 2012, in respect of both car parks and on-street parking;
- (d) the level of annual season ticket costs in the Sevenoaks St Johns Hill, Swanley and Westerham car parks should not be amended;
- (e) the charging structure for residents' car park permits be amended to suit the on-street charging structure;
- (f) parking charges be not be introduced at the Eynsford and Shoreham car parks or on Sundays; and
- (g) free parking be provided in all car parks and on-street parking areas throughout the District for the two Saturdays before Christmas Day 2010 and that Council be recommended to fund this from Supplementary Estimates.**

The recommendation highlighted in bold is for consideration by the Council.

