

ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARKING CHARGES FOR 2014/15 AND CHRISTMAS PARKING 2013

Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee – 24 October 2013

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: Consideration and comment

Also considered by: Cabinet 7 November 2013

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary: This report is the annual review of parking charges. It proposes options for increases in respect to car park and on-street parking charges to meet the income budget targets for 2014/15, and includes consideration of free Christmas parking for 2013.

This report supports the Key Aim of the effective management of Council resources.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. R Hogarth

Contact Officer(s) Gary Connor x7310

Recommendation: 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 increases to car park charges for 2014/15;
 - (b) the proposed increases to on-street parking charges for 2014/15;
 - (c) the preferred 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 2013; and that the cost in terms of lost income be funded from Supplementary Estimates;
 - (d) whether there should be any amendment to the car park evening charge in Sevenoaks town centre;
 - (e) whether parking charges should be introduced into the Council office car park on Saturdays;
 - (f) whether Sunday charges should be considered;
 - (g) the alignment of the on-street tariffs at Knockholt Station with the tariff structure for Swanley; and
 - (h) the standardisation of the on-street tariffs for Westerham town with others in the district.
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Reason for recommendation: to meet the Council's budgets for parking for 2014/15.

Introduction and Background

- 1 Through the Council's budget setting process, the budget plan increase for parking income from both car park and on-street parking for 2014/15 is set at 3.5%.
- 2 In addition to achieving the target increases for both of the parking accounts, and for guide purposes in connection with the budget setting process, the options provided indicate additional income that could be achieved.
- 3 Included in this report is a suggestion that the Council considers repeating its free parking concession on two Saturdays before Christmas.

Background

- 4 Because 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. It should be noted that 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.
- 5 For guide purposes, current car parking charges for neighbouring authorities are attached as Appendix A.
- 6 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 £6.50 at Sevenoaks, £6.00 at Swanley and £3.50 at Knockholt. Annual season ticket charges at Sevenoaks are £1,176 for Car Park 4 (off Morewood Close) and £1,411 for Car Park 1 (adjacent the station).
- 7 Car Park Proposals
- 8 The approved 10 year budget strategy assumes income will increase by 3.5% each year. For 2014/15, this would amount £70,475.
- 9 The increase in income assumption also has to take into account increases in car park expenditure such as increased maintenance and operating costs.
- 10 There was a shortfall of £107,000 for 2012/13 on the car parks account of which approximately £92,000 related to pay and display income. Although the additional income from the increases approved at last year's review of parking charges, income which applies to the current year, is being achieved, the performance of the account is not sufficient to make up the shortfall from the previous year end. As at the end of September, the total income shortfall was just over £49,000 of which £47,000 related to income from pay and display.
- 11 The development of the London Road area of the Blighs site to provide a new Marks & Spencer store commenced in June 2013. As a result, 49 spaces were lost from the "old" part of the Blighs car park and, to date, some 20 spaces have been lost in the Pembroke Road car park, but it is expected that the car park will soon have to be given up in its entirety to the residential element of the development. The loss of these parking areas will have an impact upon car park

use and, of course, upon parking income in the town. The overall parking situation in the town centre is currently unsettled and whilst care has been taken to account for the likely effects of the development upon the estimations for 2014/15, predictions for parking income are consequently more difficult to make. Investment may need to be made to meet unmet demand for car parking in Sevenoaks town centre.

- 12 The Marks & Spencer development includes the provision of a VMS (variable message signing) system for the town centre. Electronic signs will be installed on the main approaches to the town which will indicate the number of spaces available in the town centre car parks. Thus people will be encouraged to make better use of available spaces in all car parks rather than queue and wait for a space in the most central car park.
- 13 It is hoped that the VMS system will be installed in time for the run up to Christmas, as it would, no doubt, be of benefit at such a busy time of year especially in view of the reduced amount of parking in the town. The system should assist in the assessment of parking behaviour and trends both before and subsequent to the opening of the new M&S store.
- 14 The reduction in long stay parking provision as a result of the development and the impact this will have, and indeed is already having, upon the Buckhurst 2 car park, needs to be carefully evaluated. Whilst the development proposals did not indicate likely issues with short stay provision as a result of the new store, it may be timely to review parking provision in the town with a view to identifying possible options to improve parking should this be considered of benefit to the viability of the town.
- 15 Proposals and options for car park charges are provided and attached as Appendix B. This comprises a table showing individual increases proposed and the resultant income for all three options, and a second table showing the same increases in percentage terms. All income figures quoted are net of VAT.
- 16 All of the options shown more or less achieve the budget target of 3.5%, but in slightly different ways.
- 17 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.
- 18 Included in Appendix B, as an example and as an 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. This could achieve an additional £74,000. This could, perhaps, be considered as a further option to those contained in the appendix should Members so wish.
- 19 It should be noted that the achievement of the budget income target is difficult without applying significant increases to certain charges as put forward for consideration in the options provided.

- 20 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 budget year. Hence, there are no proposals in relation to the 1 hour/£1.00 charge in the Buckhurst 1, South Park and Suffolk Way car parks (item 1.5). The same argument has been applied to the charges in the Blighs car park, but the inclusion of some of the changes is unavoidable if the budget target is to be met.
- 21 Option 1 comprises an increase of 20p on all 2 hour, 3 hour and 4 hour tariffs and an increase of £20 for all season tickets in Sevenoaks town centre and Sevenoaks station car parks. In respect to the car parks at St Johns Hill, Sevenoaks, in Swanley and in Westerham, an increase of 10p is proposed to the shorter stay tariffs of 30 minutes, 1 hour and 2 hours, and an increase of 20p to the longer stay periods of 3 to 4 hours and all day.
- 22 In Option 2, the increases for the Buckhurst 2 car park have been reduced to 10p for all day parking and to £10 for season tickets, and no increases are proposed for the 30 minute and 1 hour periods in the Sevenoaks St Johns Hill, Swanley and Westerham car parks. However, this means that higher increases need to be applied elsewhere, as can be seen. It could be argued that the same consideration ought to be given to the long stay charges in these car parks, but they are currently significantly lower than the charge in Buckhurst 2.
- 23 In Option 3, by generally applying larger increases to the longer periods of stay, the car parks at Sevenoaks St Johns Hill, Swanley and Westerham can be less effected. Because of increased pressures upon long stay parking in the Buckhurst 2 car park and, consequently, the unpredictability of short stay use in the car park, any likely income from short stay in the car park has not been included in the overall income calculation. However, any increases approved in relation to the Buckhurst 1, South Park and Suffolk Way short stay car parks will automatically be applied to Buckhurst 2 as this will remain as joint short/long stay use.
- 24 The two-day ticket in the Bradbourne car park will be automatically adjusted so that its twice the day ticket rate.
- 25 In relation to the Vicarage Hill car park in Westerham, because of its central location and close proximity to on-street parking areas, we have traditionally adopted the on-street tariff structure in the car park. There are no proposals to vary this policy.
- 26 The cost of altering ticket machines and signing has been taken into account in the budget figures provided.
- 27 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 2014, the proposals would need to be advertised in January so that any objections received could be reported to Cabinet for consideration in February to facilitate implementation on, or as soon after, 1st April 2014.

Car Parks – 30 Minute Free Parking

- 28 The option of 30 minutes free parking has been raised and consequently the implications of providing this have been investigated as part of this review. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide free parking during the day on an ad-hoc basis without it having a significant impact upon parking income.
- 29 If 30 minute free parking were to be provided, it would follow that those people currently parking for 30 minutes in the Blighs car park would not need to buy a ticket. There would be similar implications in respect to the other town centre car parks where, if it were to be assumed that, say, one third of people parking for 1 hour would take advantage of 30 minute free parking, the resultant loss of income could be in excess of £100,000.
- 30 In addition, from a parking management point of view, it would be difficult to effectively control such a scheme and ensure that the free parking concession was not abused.

Car Parks – Evening Charge

- 31 The evening charge was introduced in the Sevenoaks town centre car parks in 2004 and has not been amended since. Although Sevenoaks is one of a few Councils in Kent with an evening charge, they may be scope to consider a small increase. Alternatively, the evening charge could be replaced by an extension of the day-time tariff into the evening period. Ticket sales are approximately 54,000 annually, so even a small increase could achieve significant additional income.

Car Parks – Council Office Car Park

- 32 Members may be aware of the increasing popularity of the Council office car park which is available to the public free-of-charge and without time limitation on Saturdays. Whilst it is acknowledged that this provides a useful parking facility to supplement those in the town centre on Saturdays, it is believed that the car park is being increasingly used for long stay parking which effectively reduces availability for short stay shopping use, as originally intended.
- 33 The introduction of pay and display charges could be considered to better manage and control the use of the car park. If this were to be considered, we would need to be mindful of possible displacement onto the surrounding residential roads where there is free parking for up to two hours and care would need to be taken in setting the level of charges to reduce any likely impact.

Car Parks – Sunday Charges

- 34 The inclusion of Sunday charges had not been previously considered in any great detail and does not form part of the proposals within this report. However, asking people who park on Sundays to contribute towards the parking facilities they are using would be a means of raising further income. The evening charge was introduced on the basis that people who were using the car parks during the evening period were not contributing to the upkeep of the facility in the same way as those parking during the day. The same argument could be said to apply to the use of the car parks on Sundays.

- 35 Survey data would need to be collected to enable an assessment to be undertaken, but it is understood that many of the car parks are well used on Sundays. The impact to surrounding residential areas would, of course, need to be taken into account.
- 36 Sunday charges are gradually becoming more the norm with many local authorities and this may be something that Members feel may warrant further investigation as a means of contributing to the budget and easing the burden upon the main areas of parking charges.

On-Street Proposals for 2014/15

- 37 The approved 10 year budget strategy assumes income will increase by 3.5% each year. For 2014/15, this would amount £19,101.
- 38 Three options to achieve this are provided in Appendix C for consideration.
- 39 The outcome of last year's review was that an increase of 10p was applied to all the 30 minute tariffs. These have, therefore, been excluded from consideration in this year's review. Similarly, as the charging structure for residents' and business permits was amended in 2012, these are not considered as part of this review.
- 40 In Option 1, a 10p increase is applied to all 1 hour and 2 hour charges throughout.
- 41 Option 2 has a 20p increase to all 2 hour charges.
- 42 Option 3 mainly concentrates on the longer stay periods by proposing a 20p increase to the 4 hour and all day charges, although a 10p increase to the 2 hour charge is also included in order to achieve the target.
- 43 When the Knockholt station parking scheme, which is actually in Halstead parish, was introduced in October 2011, it was intended to align the charges with those for the Swanley area, but this was not recommended at last year's review because the scheme was subject to a review. This review has now been undertaken and there are no outstanding amendments pending to the scheme. Therefore, as part of this parking charge review, it is recommended that the Swanley charging structure is adopted for the Knockholt station area. This will have the benefit of overcoming issues with people currently using the pay by phone system to buy multiples of the 4 hour charge (60p) to obtain cheaper all day parking.
- 44 In last year's review it was suggested that the charging structure for the on-street pay and display areas in Westerham be standardised with others elsewhere in the district, however, Members were not minded to approve the proposal. It is recommended that this be reconsidered as part of this year's review.
- 45 Any on-street proposals 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 2013

- 46 In previous years, to encourage people to shop locally and to help support local businesses in the face of competition from other shopping areas in the region, the Council provided free parking in all car parks and on-street parking areas on two Saturdays before Christmas. Members are asked to consider repeating the free parking concession this Christmas.
- 47 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.
- 48 Coincidentally, we have received a joint request from the Government's Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Department for Communities and Local Government to support the first ever "UK Small Business Saturday" on 7 December, which is being promoted nationally. The request, attached as Appendix D for information, 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, which fits well with our traditional Christmas free parking concession.
- 49 In view of this, and although the day is early in the month, Members are requested to consider supporting this event and to confirm that the 7 December should be adopted as one of the free Christmas parking days. Should this be recommended, we would then need to determine the most suitable day for the second free Saturday we normally provide, and Members are asked whether the 21 December would be the most suitable.
- 50 We are in the process of inviting the views of the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce, the Sevenoaks Town Council and the Westerham Town Council regarding the Small Business event and the preferred dates for the free parking concession, and will report any responses received at the time of the meeting.
- 51 It should be noted that the provision of free parking will enable people to park up to the maximum period of stay should they so wish, which is likely to reduce the turnover of spaces. However, all parking areas will be enforced as normal to ensure compliance with general conditions of use.
- 52 As last year, all ticket machines would be closed-off with suitable signing provided to advise users that they do not need to pay.
- 53 The parking areas operated by Sencio at the Sevenoaks leisure centre form part of the Suffolk Way car park. Sencio will be requested to confirm its support for the Christmas free parking concession again this year.
- 54 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 £8,000. Therefore, the total cost of providing free parking for the two Saturdays is estimated at £16,000. It is suggested that should free parking be made available for Christmas 2013, it be funded from the Supplementary Estimates.

Christmas Lights Events 2013

- 55 Members are advised that the provision of free parking in connection with Christmas Lights events being held in Westerham on 28 November (free parking from 5pm) and in Sevenoaks on 29 November (free parking from 6pm) is being considered by the Council's Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development. The Council is pleased to support these events. It should be noted that the Sevenoaks event is also traditionally supported by Sencio Leisure.

Key Implications

Financial

- 56 Proposals to increase parking income are required to meet the Council's budget targets set in respect to car park and on-street parking.
- 57 The financial implications are evident in the report and appendices.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 58 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.
- 59 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

- 60 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.

Community Impact and Outcomes

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

Human Rights

- 62 There are no human rights issues or implications.

Conclusions

- 63 Proposals and options to meet the budget income targets 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, which are appended to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Parking Charges for Neighbouring Authorities

Appendix B – Options for Car Park Charges

Appendix C – Options for On-Street Parking Charges

Appendix D – Request regarding “UK Small Business Saturday”

Mr Richard Wilson

Chief Officer Environmental and Operations Services