

Appendix 3 - Introduction to the Parking Proposal

Covid-19 Pandemic

- 1 In March 2020, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council was the first in Kent to remove all parking charges across the District Council's Car Parks, encouraging the use of those local businesses, which remained open, and allowing Sevenoaks District Council staff to support the community with food deliveries and welfare visits. Sevenoaks District Council was one of the last Councils in Kent to reinstate Car Park charges across its car parks, supporting residents and the local economy to recover, with charging resuming in all car parks by 23 July 2020.
- 2 The cost of these supportive measures amounted to a reduction in income to the council of £946,000.
- 3 When conducting the Annual Review of Parking Management for 2021/22, the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee recommended a freeze on all parking charges, both on and off-street, across the District. This approach was endorsed by Cabinet and adopted by the Council.
- 4 People are now returning to our town centres and car park usage is in line with the expectations set out in the 2021/22 Budget.

Environment

- 5 The Council has committed to Net Zero 2030 and is dedicated to helping the community achieve this too. At its January meeting, the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee received a progress report on its work on Net Zero 2030 and considered the Council's Air Quality Action Plan. For consideration alongside this item are reports on the rollout of Electric Vehicle Charging Points and the Council's Movement Strategy.
- 6 Other recent work has included: free parking provided for two weekends leading up to Christmas in Sevenoaks town and Westerham in off-street car parks on Saturdays and Sundays, 11 & 12 and 18 & 19 December 2021. The £17,000 cost in terms of loss of income for free Christmas parking was met by the Council.
- 7 The contribution private cars make to carbon emissions and air quality in the district is recognised and the Council is keen to promote the use of more environmentally considerate alternatives where possible.

Investment

- 8 In addition to operational costs such as business 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. Improvements have included new safety barriers, increasing capacity, resurfacing, renewing drainage and upgrading lighting.

- 9 The Council has complemented these works by investing in service improvements, for example improved enforcement following customer feedback, better cash collection services and improvements to cashless parking services.
- 10 And it is working on delivering electric vehicle charging hubs for residents without access to electric charging points, pay on exit, utilising barrierless automated number plate reader (ANPR) technology, improving on-street safety outside schools and improvements across its car parks including car park resurfacing, landscaping etc.

Financial

- 11 Within the 2021/22 budget, there was a Service Change Impact Assessment (SCIA) for car park income inflation of £118,000 that was deferred by Members for one year. This will now need to be achieved in 2022/23.
- 12 For the financial year 2022/23, the car park income inflation figure will be a further £89,639.
- 13 This gives a total pressure of £207,639, which will need to be generated within the financial year 2022/23.
- 14 The Council operates a number of public car parks and on-street pay and display facilities in towns and villages across 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.

Proposal

- 15 The following proposals have been developed to support the local economy, further advance the District Council's move to Net Zero 2030 and support the local economy, they embrace the most up-to-date thinking on parking management.
- 16 The traditional approach to parking sees price used as a means of maintaining a high turnover of short stay spaces, maximising the usage of each bay. However, shopping habits have evolved following the pandemic and high streets continue to move towards focussing increasingly on experiences in favour of solely traditional retail. These shifts see people seeking long stay parking, who, in turn, can then spend more time taking advantage of all our towns have to offer. Furthermore, it is recognised the encouragement of lots of short visits would promote vehicle movements, thus risking having an adverse impact on air quality. We are therefore eager to keep abreast of these changes and support our town centres by rebalancing parking charges in favour of longer stays, whilst also ensuring there remains something for everyone.

17 It is important the services and our assets continue to receive investment as described earlier in the report. It is also important that the burden of changes to parking charges should not fall on one or two car parks.