

Cabinet – 24 October 2012

Parking Review

Portfolio: Councillor Tom Ansell –Transport & Environment
Councillor Adrian Andrew - Regeneration

Service: Neighbourhood Services

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary

The Council controls approximately 25% of car parks in Walsall town centre. This report will make recommendations for the permanent implementation of the reduced parking charges operated under the previously approved trial. The report will further outline a range of recommendations relating to pay and display parking, permit parking arrangements and the introduction of electric vehicle charging points.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the continuation on a permanent basis of the current trial price reduction of the up to 4 hour pay and display parking charge.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the introduction of a new parking charges trial that will reduce all day parking charges from £5 to £3 in all Council operated long stay car parks. Cabinet is further requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to either cease, or continue, on a permanent basis the trial price reduction following evaluation of the actual financial implications arising from the trial.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approve a reduction in cost of general pay and display season tickets as detailed below, to reflect a reduction in the all day parking charge should item 2.2 of this report be approved.
 - 1 month £50
 - 3 month £150
 - 12 Month £600

- 2.4 That Cabinet approve the continuation on a permanent basis, of the current trial pay and display & permit parking arrangements applicable to the Council car parks in Premier and Town Wharf business Parks.
- 2.5 That Cabinet approve the introduction of a new trial of town centre business employee discounted parking permits with charges to be set at £35 per month. Cabinet is further requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to either cease, or continue, on a permanent basis following evaluation of the actual financial implications arising from the trial.
- 2.6 That Cabinet approve the introduction of 2* electric vehicle charging points on Day Street car park through the provisions of the Plugged in Midlands project sponsored by the Department for Transport and Office for Low Emission Vehicles.
- 2.7 That Cabinet approve the removal of on street pay and display parking arrangements to be replaced with free, 2 hour maximum stay parking in Ward Street, Wedge Street, Warewell Street, Ablewell Street, Tantarra Street and Bott Lane.
- 2.8 That Cabinet approve the introduction of permit parking arrangements for certain health care professionals providing an emergency medical response. Cabinet is further requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to agree the terms of any such scheme.
- 2.9 That Cabinet approve the removal of the current monthly permit parking charges and provision of more accessible parking for disabled Council employees who as a result of a reasonable adjustment assessment are determined as needing improved parking arrangements. Cabinet is further requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to agree the terms of operation and allocation of parking spaces in the Civic Centre Underground car park.
- 2.10 That Cabinet note that the current car parking base budget is being reviewed and the level of car parking income budget is expected to be amended as part of the 2013/14 budget setting process.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 Cabinet will recall in September 2011 approving the introduction of a trial price reduction in the up to 4 hour pay and display parking charge from £3.80 to £2.80. The impact of this change has been closely monitored and shown to be positive. Customers have benefited from lower parking charges and overall income generation has increased from this parking charge band by approximately £3k. The continuation of this trial on a permanent basis would secure these benefits for the foreseeable future.

- 3.2 As a result of significant development over recent years, the Council's share of the off street parking market currently stands at just 25% with typical occupancy levels hovering around 40%. A number of higher quality car parks are available to potential customers, some being at a lower cost than those of the Council and others completely free of charge. The introduction of a trial price reduction in the all day parking charge from £5 to £3 will encourage more customers to consider using Council car parks. However, the financial implications of such a trial would need to be closely monitored as there is potential for reduced levels of income should the trial fail to attract additional customers.
- 3.3 Any reduction in the all day parking charge would need to be reflected in the cost of season tickets sold to the general public. However, the practical and financial implications of such a change are expected to be minimal given the extremely low take up of season ticket facilities.
- 3.4 Cabinet will recall approving the introduction of business permit parking and pay and display parking arrangements in the Council car parks located in Brook Street, Frederick Street and Frederick / Charles Street.

The new arrangements were intended to address business parking concerns with the Council car parks being used as a free park and ride for individuals commuting by train to Birmingham and the lack of employee and visitor parking for businesses located on the business park.

The current arrangements allow employees of businesses located on the business parks to purchase discounted monthly parking permits at the same £30 rate as the Council applies to its employees, strategic partner agencies and elected members. Whilst this was initially welcomed by representatives of the business parks, only 10 permit applications have been received and processed.

It is acknowledged that post implementation of pay and display / permit parking; the car parks are operating on low occupancy levels. However, this has provided the expected opportunity for visitors to the businesses to now have some security of being able to source parking near their final destination. This is demonstrated by 55% of all parking being in the up to 2 hour band and a further 19% taking place in the up to 4 hour band.

Following a recent meeting with the Town Wharf Business representatives, the Council has received correspondence requesting the availability of free car park permits for Business Park employees. However, it was accepted that this was not feasible on the grounds that the Council need to generate income to offset its operational costs and also that a free facility may be abused. The Council was requested to consider a reduced price of £10 per month for Business Park companies and their employees.

Setting the monthly permit cost at this level would be difficult to justify when the Council currently sets the permit cost for its employees and those of partner agencies at £30 and then only for those employees eligible to apply for subsidised parking arrangements.

- 3.5 Walsall town centre business champions have been working with a range of officers to ensure the ongoing vitality and regeneration of the town centre. One area that has been specifically highlighted is the need to support local businesses through more favourable parking arrangements that will assist their businesses to maintain their presence in the town centre.

Currently most town centre employees have no access to any form of subsidised parking arrangements. The introduction of a trial town centre employee business parking permit would be in accordance with national guidance that encourages local authorities to form their parking arrangements in a way that supports the local economy.

The introduction of a town centre employee £35 per month parking permit would demonstrate the Council commitment to supporting and facilitating the growth of the local economy.

- 3.6 The roll out of a national charging infrastructure for electric and plug in hybrid vehicles is becoming a reality, with government agencies, local authorities and private businesses all playing their part. The Department for Transport through the UK's Centre of Excellence for low carbon and fuel cell technologies (CENEX) is seeking organisations in the Midlands to host and operate electric vehicle charging points as part of the Plugged in Midlands project.

Following an evaluation of suitable locations under Council control, Day Street car park has been identified as an ideal location for the installation of 2 * electric vehicle charging points. The installation costs of approximately £10k can be offset by a 60% grant from central government. The remaining 40% could be found from existing Local Transport Plan funding.

To qualify for the 60% grant, the facilities need to be provided for at least 3 years with parking and electricity provided free of charge whilst the vehicle is parked for charging purposes. These conditions could be met without any significant adverse implications for the operation of the car park or budgets used for their management and maintenance.

Currently, significant electric vehicle charging infrastructure exists within Birmingham and Coventry. Other West Midlands authorities are either considering its installation or already committed to its installation in the near future.

- 3.7 As part of the Councils statutory network management duty to review the operation of the public highway, the effectiveness of the current on street pay and display parking arrangements have been reviewed.

It was found that the current arrangements were generally effective in delivering their original aims. Turn over of parking space use has increased and hence assisted with customer footfall for businesses. The use of off street car parks as a first choice has increased and a reduction in double parking that often unnecessarily created traffic congestion has reduced.

However, it was found that the original traffic management aims for Ward Street, Wedge Street, Warewell Street, Ablewell Street, Tantarra Street and Bott Lane could now be delivered without the need for continuation of the existing on street pay and display parking arrangements provided it was replaced with free 2 hour time limited parking.

The capital cost of removing the above on street pay and display parking arrangements and replacement with time limited parking could be achieved within existing budgets. There would be a small reduction in revenue currently realised from these locations but income generation should not be the purpose of any on street measures to manage the operation of the highway network. Any surplus pay and display machines would be kept for replacements or spares required for the remaining scope of on street pay and display.

- 3.8 The Council is expected to consider the impact of its parking enforcement regime on health care professionals required to make emergency visits to a patient's home. Without appropriate arrangements that recognize these emergency needs, the health authority may be unable to deliver, or be hindered in the delivery of its emergency care responsibilities.

The introduction of a suitable form of permit parking arrangement needs to be considered for Doctors, Nurses and Midwives engaged in the delivery of emergency care in a patient's home.

Such a scheme would allow authorized staff to park in a restricted parking area, without payment, for the duration necessary to deal with the medical emergency. The design of any scheme will need to be undertaken in conjunction with the Health Authority to ensure its scope is restricted only to those staff actively engaged in delivering emergency care.

- 3.9 Under the Equality Act the Council has a responsibility to agree and implement reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. The disabled employee is not expected to contribute to the cost of a reasonable adjustment.

The Council already operated a form of reasonable adjustment that recognizes the additional parking needs of disabled employees. Currently the majority of its town centre parking provision for disabled employees is located on the Register Office and Challenge building car parks. However, for a limited number of employees, this provision is unsuitable and use of the Civic Centre underground car park should be considered as a more suitable reasonable adjustment.

The current usage of the underground car park will need to be reviewed to ensure appropriate, parking for disabled employees can be provided when required as a result of a reasonable adjustment assessment by the relevant manager in conjunction with Occupational Health.

Any disabled employee provided with staff parking arrangements as part of a reasonable adjustment should not be expected to pay for the provision of parking. This will be a change to the current arrangements where a monthly charge of £30 is made.

- 3.10 Cabinet is aware that as a result of significant regeneration of the town centre the Council's share of the parking market has fallen over the last 5 years from 32% to approximately 25%. At the same time, as a direct result of the provision of higher quality car parking and the current economic climate, average occupancy levels have fallen from 69% to approximately 40%. This has resulted in current income targets from pay and display parking arrangements no longer being achievable.

Whilst the income generated by the parking service continues to be marginally higher than expenditure, overall income generation is significantly below the level set as part of the medium term financial plan.

Cabinet will note that the car parking base budget is being reviewed as part of the 2013/14 budget setting process and a realignment to reflect achievable income levels is expected to take place.

The actual level of realignment to be requested will be determined once the full financial implications of this report can be determined.

4. Council priorities

4.1 Communities and Neighbourhoods

4.1.1 Addressing local parking concerns is vital to ensure local people feel they have a voice that can influence local decisions. The views of a range of stakeholders have been considered through feedback provided in the recent town centre survey and those expressed by the business champions.

4.2 Health and well-being

4.2.1 The provision and management of suitably priced parking facilities will assist with a reduction of instances of illegal parking that often creates unnecessary traffic congestion and associated air pollution.

4.2.2 The provision of permit parking arrangements for professional health care workers engaged in the delivery of emergency health care provision in residents homes will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

4.3 Economy

4.3.1 The implementation of lower parking charges coupled with specific parking permit arrangements designed to assist local businesses maintain their presence in the town centre, will assist with providing or maintaining jobs that are vital to the economic success of the borough.

4.4 Marmot objectives

4.4.1 The proposals contained within this report reflect the objective 'create fair employment and good work for all'.

5. Risk management

5.1 Failure to address the known problem associated with underachievement of parking income targets will jeopardise the delivery of the Council's medium term financial plan.

- 5.2 Any reduction in existing parking charges or income streams may not be offset by additional customers generated through more customers attracted by lower parking charges.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The introduction of a town centre employee £35 per month parking permit would need to be closely monitored for its potential financial implications as those likely to take up the offer could already be all day pay and display parking customers of the Council.
- 6.2 The reduction in cost of all day pay and display parking from £5 to £3 will have the potential for a loss of £42k. This would only materialise if no new customers are attracted, something that is not anticipated given the feedback received from town centre users. Detailed monthly monitoring will be undertaken to quantify the financial impact of the change and delegated authority used to cease the trial should an ongoing loss of income materialise.
- 6.3 The removal of on street pay and display parking as detailed in this report will result in a reduction of approximately £14k of income. However, legislation requires that income generation should not be the primary purpose for introducing, or retaining, on street pay and display arrangements. This potential reduction in income may be offset by an increase in overall income generated from new customers attracted to the reduced all day parking charges detailed in this report.

7. Legal implications

Any approved changes to parking charges or the introduction of permit holder parking will need to be introduced through the statutory procedures detailed in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

8. Property implications

None directly associated with this report.

9. Staffing implications

None directly associated with this report.

10. Equality implications

The recommendations contained within this report will ensure the Council complies with its duties under the Equality Act. Permit parking for emergency Health care professionals will enable them to get to people in need more quickly. These are more likely to be older or disabled people, expectant mothers and parents with children.

The provision of underground car parking as a reasonable adjustment for disabled employees will help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, and advance equality of opportunity where otherwise they may not be able to travel to and from work.

11. Consultation

This report has been produced in consultation with the Council's Equality and Diversity Advisor, Legal and Financial services.

Background papers

None arising from this report.

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12 October 2012

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