

Report to the *Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

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Town Centre Car Parking



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Introduction

To review the progress of town centre parking initiatives which were introduced in an attempt to generate greater footfall in the town centre with the express aim of improving its economic fortunes and to consider extending the pilot schemes in order that they are reviewed annually as part of the annual fees and charges setting.

Background

In 2013 the Council received a number of approaches from the business community (via the Town Centre Partnership) to review its town centre parking charges in the hope that concessions may help to generate greater footfall with the consequent benefit to businesses and the overall town centre economy. The Council considered it appropriate to review options and decided upon a range of actions to strike a balance between the potentially adverse impact upon the Council's revenue budget and the expectation of direct benefit being achieved by town centre businesses.

The Council approved 3 key initiatives; Nipper Parking, Double Ticket refund scheme and Enhanced Free parking days. Alongside an offer from a national supplier of car park management systems to install, as a 12-month trial, cashless parking with an ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) systems at no cost to the Council.

Questions to be Addressed

Does the Council wish to continue to support the double ticket refund scheme 'Just the Ticket' ?

The scheme was launched with 12 local retailers, with mixed successes dependent on the retailer. For instance those retailers selling small items of say £1 found that customers were wanting a refund not understanding that the minimum spend in that shop was £5. Other retailers have highlighted that there is little awareness of the scheme with more marketing required and a greater number of retailers involved. The TCP has taken this on board to bring new retailers into the scheme with a relaunch this month, it is anticipated that this will include 15 shops (9 of which were in the original scheme).

The scheme costs the Council £2,400 per annum for the additional refund tickets.

Scrutiny may wish to consider if to extend the current scheme for a further 12months beyond the current 3month period for which the retailers have committed to.

Does the Council wish to offer Enhanced free days?

The current support from the Council for Christmas shopping is to allocate 5 weeks of 4 afternoons free parking.

The TCP has decided to have the Christmas shopping launch on 15th / 16th November this means that there will be 2 extra days before Christmas whereby they wish to offer free afternoon parking should it be offered on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Should the Council wish to continue to offer 5 enhanced free parking days then 1 of these could be allocated to cover the 2 additional afternoons, which in effect would leave 4 days for other special events in the town centre over the forthcoming 12 months.

If this is considered for the remaining of 2014/15 then this could be covered by the current allocation of free days and then 5 days could be provided for 2015/16.

There is also the option to alter the days / times when free parking is provided. The Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider alternative options:

- A) Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons requires 23 half days (equivalent to 11.5 days).
- B) Wednesday after 2pm could be promoted to tie into the promotion of Christmas Late night shopping and all day Saturday for prime shopping time. This requires 6 full days and 6 afternoons, however it is estimated that offering the Saturday mornings will be the most expensive as this is the peak period. Actual figures are not available however officers estimate that this could cost in the region of £10k which would need to be found from another budget. Should Scrutiny consider this appropriate; then members may wish to highlight where the funding should be found.
- C) Every afternoon after 3pm could be offered, this would require 35 sessions, there would be a marketing logic to this as it could be easily advertised and understood by customers. There would not be a significant impact on the budget. It is questionable however how this may contribute to the Christmas visitors as fewer shoppers think about coming Christmas shopping after 3pm.

Outcomes

It is anticipated that the views of Scrutiny will be taken forward to a Cabinet report in October to approve the town centre parking charging approach. Should Scrutiny be supportive of the concessions for Christmas then it would be advantageous to confirm these in order that the Portfolio Holder can agree the 2014 position, thus enabling the marketing literature for Christmas to be produced.

Supporting Information

Nipper parking has been implemented outside of the old Police station enabling town centre users to park for free for 30mins which allows them to nip in and out of town to make a targeted visit.

The double ticket refund scheme "Just the Ticket" has been launched in conjunction with the town Centre Partnership. The Council altered the tickets machines on the Midway and Goose Street car parks to enable them to produce double tickets, which allowed the machine to print a refund voucher as the second ticket.

The customer purchases a parking ticket as normal; the ticket machine issues an additional ticket which is the refund voucher that enables the customer to redeem the first hours

parking by a retail member of the scheme. The Town Centre Partnership worked with local businesses to establish the scheme on the basis that the company offers the ticket redemption for the 3 months.

The Council also offered to the Town Centre Partnership enhanced free parking days. It has become customary in recent years that the council offers free parking on the five weeks leading up to Christmas from 2pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday. To encourage visitors to the town centre on special event days it was agreed that the Council would increase the number of days by 5, (in addition to the days currently given leading up to Christmas). The allocation of these days would be determined in liaison with the Town Centre Partnership.

In addition the Council approved to accept an offer from a national supplier of car park management systems to install, as a 12-month trial, cashless parking, an ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) systems at no cost to the Council. The ANPR is used to record when a vehicle arrives and departs from a car park which is used to enable the customer to park and pay anytime up to midnight, it also provides valuable information on customer usage.

The cashless parking system enables customers to use mobile phone technology to pay for parking; this also enables the customer to extend their payment period whilst away from the car park. The customer incurs an additional convenience charge, above the normal parking tariff, of 20p per transaction.

Due to the complex nature of this offer involving the receipt of funding (outlined in the financial implications section of this report) the contract with Bemrose Booth was signed in July 2014 with an approximate 2 month implementation plan. It is therefore recommended that a separate report on the success of this pilot is considered 12 months from implementation.

Invited Partners/Stakeholders/Residents

Town centre businesses offering the 'Just the Ticket' refund scheme were consulted and this information was used by the TCP to develop the second round of the scheme with some new companies participating.

Constraints

This report has been timetabled in order that the Council can make a decision on the charging approach in relation to Christmas, this is in order that the TCP can plan marketing to maximise Christmas sales.

Scrutiny are reminded that the Council has financial restrictions on offering financial incentives and that any new initiative needs to be financed from service cuts.

Conclusions

Having a vibrant town centre is important for the local economy and the overall Borough as people feel more satisfied living in the area. Car parking charges are a key issue for town centre users however this needs to be balanced with financial resources. Scrutiny are asked to consider the issues to recommend an appropriate way to support one of the Council's key priorities.

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres and; Environment & Recycling

Local Ward Member

Classification: NULBC **UNCLASSIFIED**

Town

Background Materials

None

Appendices

None

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