

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

Date: 15th October 2014

Report Title: Town Centre Car Parking

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Portfolio: Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres and Environment & Recycling

Ward(s) affected: Town

Purpose of the Report

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.

Recommendations

- (a) That Members note the delivery of the Nipper Parking and the planned introduction of cashless parking including the automatic number plate recognition in a number of our car parks.
- (b) That the Just The Ticket refund scheme continues to be supported.
- (c) That Members note the decision to offer free town centre parking after 3pm for the 5.4 weeks prior to Christmas and the use of the free parking day by the Town Centre Partnership for the Christmas Lights Switch on.
- (d) That the enhanced free parking days of 5 days to support town centre events and Christmas free parking equivalent to 5.5 weeks after 3pm are included in the calculation for the fees and charges for 2015/16 and budget setting process.

Reasons

Last year the Council reviewed a range of options as part of the town centre car parking management regime with the aim of increasing footfall in the town centre for reasons of economic well-being. A range of proposals were approved including pilot schemes, Scrutiny have reviewed progress and recommended ways to take forward the schemes with the Town Centre Partnership.

1. Background

- 1.1 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.

- 1.2 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 and an ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) system at no cost to the Council.
- 1.3 The Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee (EDESC) considered the above initiatives at its meeting on 3rd September 2014. They recommended that:
- The Portfolio Holder should agree with the Town Centre Partnership the preferred free parking arrangements for the 2014 Christmas Period.
 - To continue supporting the Just the Ticket refund scheme.

2. Issues

2.1 Nipper Parking

Nipper parking has been implemented by the County Council 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. Merrial Street retailers completing transactions which are not time consuming have highlighted that this scheme is benefitting them.

The Town Centre Partnership has expressed an interest in Nipper parking being introduced in Bridge Street, this would be a County Council decision and the TCP can approach the County direct.

2.2 Just the Ticket refund scheme

The double ticket refund scheme “Just the Ticket” was 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 is then able to redeem the first hours parking by a retail member of the scheme.

The Just the Ticket first hour refund scheme was launched with 12 local retailers, this has had 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 and is bringing new retailers into the scheme with a re-launch this month, it is anticipated that this will include 15 shops (9 of which were in the original scheme).

EDESC considered this and recommended to extend the current scheme for a further 12 months beyond the current 3 month period for which the retailers have committed to.

2.3 Free parking to support events

To support the regeneration of the town centre increasing footfall through events is a key objective, there are clearly advantages of offering free parking on these events and this can be promoted with the event publicity. The Council has therefore provided 5 days which would be determined in liaison with the Town Centre Partnership. This approach has been received well by traders and town centre users and is recommended to continue. The final day of the current allocation can be used by the TCP to cover the 2014 Christmas Light Switch on.

To assist with planning for the 2015/16 budget and to provide some certainty to enable the TCP to plan it is appropriate that the Council establishes the level of support for free parking for 2015/16. It is therefore recommended that the Council continues to offer 5 free parking days to be used when the TCP choose to maximise the success of special events over 2015/16.

2.4 Free parking pre-Christmas

It is known that a significant proportion of the trade in town centre retail businesses is made in the period running up to Christmas and it is acknowledged that many businesses depend upon this trade. It is therefore appropriate that the Council acknowledges the lead up to Christmas as a key element in the economic fortunes of the town centre. In terms of the offer of free parking to support the pre-Christmas period 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.

The TCP has decided to have the Christmas shopping launch on 15th / 16th November this means that the period leading up to Christmas is slightly over the previous 5 weeks. It is recommended that the free parking commences in line with this date so it is clear to customers and can be easily promoted.

The Scrutiny Committee considered options to offer free parking taking into account the benefits and financial implications. The committee considered that free parking every day after 3pm would provide an easily marketable campaign that customers could understand and would encourage shopping over the weeks running up to Christmas. By including Fridays it also further supports the food and beverage businesses, along with the wider night-time economy, consistent with the regeneration objective of encouraging diversity in the town centre user (including those who drive into the town for an evening meal or to go to the cinema). The Scrutiny Committee understood why local businesses may want alternative options and therefore recommended that the decision be taken by the Town Centre Partnership in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. This was on the understanding that if the TCP wished to offer free parking which had greater financial implications then these costs would be met from the TCP.

This approach enables the Council to meet the 2014/15 budget and engages local businesses in the process. The TCP have decided that offering free parking after 3pm is the best offer and also supports the planned late night shopping the week prior to Christmas. In order to start production of the Christmas marketing literature this decision on Christmas parking for 2014 was supported by the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres. It is recommended that this approach to free parking should be continued for 2015/16 as it would enable the Council to plan as part of the main budget setting process. Launching the Christmas period over a weekend has proven more successful than a weekday, for 2015 the free parking between the launch and Christmas day would require 5.4 weeks of free parking.

2.5 Pay on foot and cashless parking

It is recognised that people are increasingly paying for goods by using payment cards and electronic transfers rather than cash. In line with this change in customer behaviour it is appropriate that the Council seeks to offer a range of payment mechanisms including payment via mobile phones.

Increasing the length of time that town centre visitors stay is also a regeneration objective and it is acknowledged that some visitors may leave due to the pending expiration of their car parking ticket, so an option to easily extend their stay is required.

In order to take these forward 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 and an ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) systems at no cost to the Council. The ANPR records number plate information 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. This arrangement provides a virtual pay on foot/exit system (which the town centre businesses have requested in the past) and minimizes the risk of customers incurring fines for non-payment. On a

broader note the system will provide valuable information on customer usage that will inform future car park management initiatives.

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 to launch at the end of October. It is therefore recommended that a separate report on the success of this pilot is considered after 6 months of operation.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 It is appropriate that the Council continues to consider the balance between supporting the town centre with the expectation of direct benefit being achieved by town centre businesses and the potentially adverse impact upon the Council's revenue budget.
- 3.2 Continuation of the Just The Ticket refund scheme is recommended to support local retailers who are actively seeking to encourage customers into the town centre.
- 3.3 In order to support the important Christmas period and in line with the Council's budget setting process it is recommended that for 2015/16 the Council offers free parking for 5 days per year to support town centre events and free Christmas parking equivalent to the 5.4 weeks after 3pm offer.

4. Outcomes Linked to the Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Provision of appropriate car parking schemes contributed to the corporate priorities of creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough and creating a borough of opportunity.

5. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 5.1 With regard to procurement issues the Council is entitled to proceed with the proposed cashless parking trial for the Midway without the Council entering into a competitive procurement process. Clearly any longer term initiative of the nature referred to would require procurement.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 This report does not lead to any equality impacts.

7. Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The supplier of the cashless parking, including the automatic number plate recognition system trial for a number of car parks offered the Council a grant of £50,000 to enable the trials of their systems to take place and this was been accepted. As part of the Cabinet approval in July 2013 it was agreed to earmark £30K of the latter grant offer to cover the anticipated cost to the Council of implementing the initiatives (including a contingency of £5K to cover the cost of any enabling works).
- 7.2 The cost of changing the parking restrictions in Merrial Street to 'Nipper Parking' was funded by the County Council.
- 7.3 The introduction of double ticketing (Just the Ticket) in the Midway and Goose Street car parks required new software and signage to be installed at a cost of £600. The additional cost

of the double tickets is £2400 per year.

- 7.4 Resources now been directed to implementing the cashless parking specifically the collation of car registration numbers and owners details for those with parking permits, to enable the automatic number plate recognition cashless parking scheme to be implemented.
- 7.5 Loss of car parking income over the 5 enhanced free days costs circa £12,500 and free Christmas parking for afternoons after 3pm is estimated to cost £10,000 (which is equivalent to the previous offer of free parking after 2pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays).

8. Major Risks

- 8.1 Failure to implement some parking concessions could contribute to the demise of the town centre economy. Equally the implementation of some initiatives may result in a higher than anticipated loss of income to the Council thereby jeopardising delivery of a balanced revenue budget.

9. Key Decision Information

- 9.1 This is not a key decision.

10. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 10.1 In July 2013 Cabinet agreed to implement nipper parking in consultation with the County Council, enhanced free car parking days and the double ticketing refund scheme with Newcastle Town Centre Partnership and the cashless parking scheme in conjunction with the national supplier of automated car parking systems.
- 10.2 The Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny and Overview Scrutiny considered the issues on 3rd September 2014.

11. List of Appendices

- 11.1 None.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1 None.