

REPORT TITLE **Town Centre Car Parking**

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Portfolio: **Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres**

Ward(s) affected: **Town**

Purpose of the Report

To recommend to the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee the task and finish group recommendations for town centre car parking initiatives.

Recommendations

- a) **That Members consider the contents of the report and the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.**
- b) **That Members decide which of the recommendations they wish to propose to Cabinet.**

Reasons

To increase the footfall in the town centre.

1. Background

The Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee has received a number of requests to reduce the parking charges in the expectation that this would assist with the town centre economy. Prior to Christmas the Committee resolved to set up a task and finish group to investigate and recommend suitable parking initiatives taking account of the potential adverse impact on the Council's income. The task and finish group members consisted of Cllrs Baker, Studd and Peers, the Town Centre Manager and the Roebuck Centre Manager.

2. Issues

As a result of the general economic situation and changes in shopping habits the town centre has suffered a reduction in footfall which, in turn, has worsened trading conditions. The business community has requested that the parking charges be reviewed to encourage additional visitors to the town centre and/or to increase the length of time that customers stay in the town. In section 3 Members will see the range of options that the sub-group reviewed.

3. Options Considered

1) Cashless Parking

An additional method of payment is to use mobile phone technology to pay for parking; this allows for the customer to extend their payment period whilst away from the car park. The customer would incur an additional charge, over and above the normal parking tariff, of 20p per visit. The Borough Council would lose income due to the debit and credit card charges.

The cost for introducing such a system comprises £950.00 for the alterations to the hand-held devices used by the civil enforcement officers and approximately £1000 for the signage.

The loss of income would be in the order of £1100 per 1% of the tickets issued (based on an average debit/credit card charge of 15p). Where similar systems have been introduced at local Staffordshire authorities, approx. 1% of customers have chosen to use this method of payment. Of course if there was an increase in patronage as a result of introducing cashless parking then there would be a subsequent increase in income.

2) Pay on Foot (Midway Car Park)

In this system our customers take a ticket on arrival at the car park (by a barrier) and pay for the time stayed on the car park at a payment station prior to leaving the car park.

The difficulty in implementing a traditional pay on foot system is the lack of queuing space before the exit barrier of the car park, causing potential log jam of the car park.

To reduce the potential log jam in the car park it would be necessary to install a hybrid barrier system. The capital cost for introducing such a system would be approximately £125,000.

3) Free parking after 6pm (All Car Parks)

Due to the limited data available it has been difficult to produce an accurate potential loss; based upon proxy data officers estimate that it could be in the order of £40,000.

It is noteworthy that the task and finish group considered that it is more important to implement initiatives which stimulate the day time economy.

4) Free parking after 2pm on Thursday (Midway Car Park only)

Following two consecutive parking surveys undertaken on Thursdays, it has been estimated that the minimum potential annual loss would be £27,500 (excl. VAT). This has not taken into account any displacement from other charging periods.

5) Free Parking All Day on Thursdays (Midway Only)

Using the same data as in item 4, it has been estimated that the minimum potential loss is £71,500 (excl. VAT per annum). This has not taken into account any displacement from other charging periods.

6) Free Car Parking Pass Competition

The task and finish group discussed the possibility of introducing a quarterly competition to win a quarterly free parking pass. The Town Centre Manager indicated that he would incorporate this with other initiatives that the Town Centre Partnership will run.

7) Nipper Parking

Nipper parking is normally 30 minutes free parking, generally near to the centre of the town centre.

Nipper parking was considered by the task and finish group for High Street and Bridge Street. Presently these parking spaces are Staffordshire County Council assets and the income generated by the on street charging is used to self-finance the on street enforcement throughout the Borough. Without this income it would not be possible to self-finance the on-

street enforcement. It is understood, therefore, that the County Council would not support nipper parking in these locations.

However, the County Council have indicated that the spaces outside the former Police Station on Merrial Street may be converted into limited waiting spaces. There is a cost associated with any change to these spaces, which would be in the order of £4,000 and this funding would have to be sought.

8) Other Options

A number of variations to the above options were considered along with other ideas. However, the task and finish group concluded that these would be better considered after the implementation of other recommended options.

4. Proposal

Having reviewed the above options, Members of the task and finish group recommend that initially the following be implemented:

a) Cashless Parking

That cashless parking be introduced as soon as practicably possible. This would encourage customers to stay longer in the town as they could extend their length of stay without returning to the car.

b) Pay on Foot (Midway Car Park)

Whilst Members support the introduction of such a system, they acknowledge the significant capital cost required. The task and finish group therefore recommend the scheme be implemented should capital funding become available.

c) Free parking On Thursdays (Midway Car Park only)

Of the two proposals for free parking on Thursdays (all day or after 2pm), the task and finish group members recommend free parking all day. However, the Members acknowledge the current financial situation, and would accept free parking after 2pm, if free all day parking was not achievable.

5. Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

- creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough
- creating a Borough of opportunity

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

Any changes to the parking regime require a modification to the Off Street Parking Order.

7. Financial and Resource Implications

Implementation of recommendations 4(a) and 4(c) would potentially result in an annual loss of income to the Council of about £30,000. Whilst the introduction of pay on foot facilities at the Midway MSCP would cost the Council about £125,000 of capital expenditure. There is no provision made for any of these initiatives in either of the approved revenue or capital budgets.

8. Major Risks

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.