

Executive

Car Park Provision and Charges

26 July 2011

Report of Strategic Director Environment & Community

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the recommendations of the joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board regarding car park provision and charges.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To consider the recommendations of the joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board regarding car park provision and charges.
- (2) To determine how it wishes to proceed.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 In considering various car parking issues carried forward from the 2010/11 scrutiny programme, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 June recognised the concerns expressed by members and the public to the car park charging changes introduced from 4 April 2011. As a consequence, it agreed to hold a joint meeting with the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board to consider these matters in more detail.
- 1.2 This report outlines the outcomes of that joint meeting which was held on 12 July 2011 and recommendations for further change to car park charges.

Proposals

1.3 The recommendations for change from the joint scrutiny meeting include the following:

- That the current charges for evening parking be changed to charging to 1900 hrs only on current hourly tariffs and free thereafter;
- That there should be free parking for blue badge holders in designated disabled spaces but blue badge holders should be charged in all general parking spaces;
- That there should be a 10 minute maximum period of grace for parking period expiry and non purchase of tickets;
- That the discount for early payment of excess charge notices within 14 days be increased to 50% for all contraventions; and
- That the effects of the redevelopment of Bicester Town Centre warrant an adjustment to the current charging regime until the new development is complete (anticipated summer 2013 by reducing the current charges by 10p per hour.

Conclusion

1.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board have recognised the need to make some adjustments to the new car parking charges and policies in light of the concerns expressed by members and the public to the car parking charging changes introduced in April. This does acknowledge that any adjustments must balance real benefit to car park users and town traders with the accepted effects on the Council's limited and reducing finances.

Background Information

- 2.1 This report follows a joint meeting of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board on 12 July 2011 into car parking and in particular, the effect of the new charges introduced from 4 April 2011. A copy of the cover report for that meeting is attached at Annex 1.
- 2.2 The meeting also considered a range of options primarily around evening charges, charging Blue Badge Holders, specific Bicester measures and excess charge notices. These are attached at Annex 2.
- 2.3 Arising out of the meeting was a number of recommendations to the Executive which are reproduced here in full. They are:
 - That there is a need to make some adjustments to the new car parking charges and policies in recognition of concerns raised by Councillors and the public;
 - That any adjustments must try to balance real benefit to car park users and town traders with the accepted effects on the Council's limited and reducing finances;
 - That the current charges for evening parking be changed to charging to 1900hrs only on current hourly tariffs and free thereafter;
 - That there should be free parking for blue badge holders in designated disabled spaces but blue badge holders should be charged in all general parking spaces;
 - That there should be a 10 minute maximum period of grace for parking period expiry and non purchase of tickets;
 - That the discount for early payment of excess charge notices within 14 days be increased to 50% for all contraventions;
 - To note the withdrawal of the current £16 administration charge for appeals which are upheld but where the ECN was issued correctly;
 - That the effects of the redevelopment of Bicester Town Centre warrant an adjustment to the current charging regime until the new development is complete (anticipated summer 2013) by reducing the current charges by 10p per hour;
 - That officers determine the earliest implementation of the changes agreed by the Executive according to the appropriate legal processes;
 - That a detailed communications plan be compiled to signify these changes which takes into account the lessons learnt from the April changes; and

- That the Executive consider funding the loss of income of the above (estimated to be £93,000 per annum) from the additional income and lower cost arising from the transfer of some treasury management functions in house; and the fixed term Bicester loss of income (estimated to be £80,000 per annum over two years) from the additional interest secured from the later £10m investment of the Council's contribution to the Bicester Town Centre Redevelopment Scheme due to the delay in its start.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 There is no doubt that the joint scrutiny meeting believes that changes are required to the current car park charging arrangements. The question is what, and where these create financial implications, how will this be funded.
- 3.2 The joint scrutiny meeting also considered the very latest car park usage and income figures to end of June 2011 and were made aware that any changes to the current arrangements which adversely affect overall income levels, will need a corresponding budget adjustment.
- 3.3 A key issue to consider in this matter is the ongoing uncertainty with car park income patterns. Not only are there wider economic aspects which affect car park use and income levels, but the Council does not benefit from a reasonable (minimum 12 months) trading period from which it can assess trends arising from the April changes and develop budget accuracy. There is therefore a degree of potential ongoing volatility with these budgets. Consideration should therefore be given to a risk reserve.
- 3.4 Should the Executive decide to support in whole or part the recommendations made to it, a detailed project plan to implement supported by a detailed communications plan will be required.
- 3.5 Due to the statutory legal process required for significant changes to the car parking charges, it is likely that up to three months will be required from the date of a decision to implement in full.
- 3.6 Further service comments regarding the benefits to car park users of the joint scrutiny recommendations include;
 - Evening parking be changed to 1900 hrs only on current hourly tariffs and free thereafter - this will benefit the evening economy and help to overcome the complaints from some traders that the evening charges have dissuaded people from coming into town.
 - Free parking for blue badge holders in designated disabled spaces but blue badge holders should be charged in all general parking spaces - this will help to overcome the significant adverse reaction from the introduction of blue badge charges. There are currently 35 designated spaces in Banbury and 39 in Bicester (although the closure of Crown and Crown Walk car parks will see the loss of 20 of these spaces).
 - A 10 minute maximum period of grace for parking period expiry and non purchase of tickets - this will help by providing flexibility when motorists are

unavoidably delayed in returning to their vehicles. ECN's will however be issued for any vehicle without a valid ticket beyond this 10 minute period. This is not anticipated to have any significant financial effects.

- Discount for early payment of excess charge notices within 14 days be increased to 50% for all contraventions. This brings the discount regime in line with civil parking and will hopefully be an incentive for prompt payment helping to reduce some of the burden of processing appeals. The effects of this measure are a potential reduction in income of £43,000/an. but there is some uncertainty about how many ECNs will be paid in this way.
- Bicester reduction 10p per hour. Traders have identified to the Council that the April 10p increase was the 'tipping point' that persuaded shoppers to stay away. This change shows the Council's commitment to support the town through the significant disruption of the town centre redevelopment. The effects of this measure are a reduction of income of up to £80,000.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

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| Option One | Agree the recommendations of the joint scrutiny meeting. |
| Option Two | Not accept the recommendations of the joint scrutiny meeting and to retain the current charging arrangements. |
| Option Three | Agree in part the recommendation of the joint scrutiny meeting or other changes to current charging arrangements. |

Consultations

None.

Implications

Financial: As indicated in the final bullet point of 2.3 above, the Council does currently have the ability to fund the estimated costs of the recommended change without having to review other services and approved budgets. There is also a balance of £40,000 remaining in the approved capital scheme to fund the cost of implementing the changes. The process of preparing the draft budget for 2012/13 will need to incorporate a further review of the precise financial effects of the scrutiny recommendations and the possible allocation of a risk reserve given the future uncertainty of income levels arising from some of these changes.

Comments checked by Karen Muir, Corporate System Accountant 01295 221559

Legal: There is a formal and statutory legal process to undertake to change the parking order which will require the consent of Oxfordshire County Council as Highway the Authority...

Comments checked by Nigel Bell, Team Leader, Planning and Litigation and Interim Monitoring Officer, 01295 221687

Risk Management:

There is the risk that further change relatively soon after the April 4 2011 changes could lead to some confusion but this could be mitigated in part by effective communication and the fact that if the Council is minded, the changes would be favourable to the majority of car park users. Changes could also lead to additional appeals and challenges from members of public whom have had their appeals rejected and have paid their ECN.

Comments checked by Claire Taylor, Community Planning, Performance and Partnerships Manager, 01295 221563

Wards Affected

All.

Corporate Plan Themes

District of Opportunity
An Accessible, Value for Money Council

Executive Portfolio

Councillor George Reynolds
Deputy Leader

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Annex 1	Report to the joint meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board on 12 July 2011.
Annex 2	Supplementary Information and Options on Parking Policy and Charging.
Annex 3	Summary Facts and Figures
Background Papers	
None.	
Report Author	Ian Davies, Strategic Director Environment & Community
Contact Information	01295 221698 Ian.Davies@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk