

Cherwell District Council

Executive

7 June 2021

Car Parking

Report of Assistant Director Environment Services

This report is public

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to update the Executive on the Car Parking Strategy & Action Plan and propose new car parking charges to be implemented by August 2021

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the progress on delivery of the car parking strategy & action plan.
- 1.2 To approve changing Bolton Road car park to a short stay car park once Cherwell Drive long stay car park is completed.
- 1.3 To approve the change of Chapel Brook car park to a long stay car park.
- 1.4 To increase car park charges by August 2021 (Appendix 1).
- 1.5 To note the progress on the move to Civil Parking Enforcement.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 In October 2020 this Council approved the current car parking strategy. This strategy was developed through the involvement of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and having carried out consultation with key stakeholders and a public consultation.
- 2.2 With the strategy an action plan was developed. Since the development of the action plan progress has been made in a number of areas. This includes the joint application with Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse for the implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement. The application is currently with the

Department of Transport and it is likely that implementation will commence from November 2021

- 2.3 Other areas of development include the change of Bolton Road car park from pay & display to pay on exit and the commencement of work on the conversion of the coach waiting area in Cherwell Drive to a long stay car park. The current action plan is set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.4 The car park charges have been reviewed by benchmarking charges against surrounding towns. Current hourly charges are set out in Appendix 3. In summer 2020 the charges for Bicester were brought into line with the charges in Banbury. The charges in Banbury have remained unchanged since 2011.
- 2.5 Since late March 2020 car parking has been severely impacted by changes in footfall in the three urban centres due to coronavirus. Income virtually disappeared in April 2020 as key workers were allowed to park for free. Since April 2020 usage, as measured by income, increased each month until the second & third lockdowns occurred. However, since January 2021 usage has increased each month with a step change on 12 April 2021.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 This Council operates a large number of car parks in Banbury, Bicester and in Kidlington. They generate a substantial source of income, around £1.9 million per annum in 2019/20 but there are also significant operating costs to ensure the car parks are operated safely and meet the needs of all the different users.
- 3.2 In June 2017 the operation of the car parks was outsourced to Apcoa for an initial five year period. The implementation of this new contract has meant some significant changes such as new car parking machines which not only allow card & contactless payment but also provide much more data on car parking usage.
- 3.3 The current contract comes to an end in May 2022 and options for retendering the contract are starting to be explored including looking at a possible joint contract with Oxfordshire County Council to cover both on street & off-street parking.
- 3.4 The current car parking strategy considers the different stakeholders including businesses in the three urban centres, the users and the Council who own & operate the car parks. The aim of the strategy and the action plan is to balance the needs of the main stakeholders.
- 3.5 The main area of disagreement can often be car parking charges. Some businesses and individuals want the Council to offer free car parking. However, the car parks cost a significant amount to operate & maintain to ensure safe standard are achieved. Consequently, offering free car parking would be a very significant cost to the Council and would effectively subsidise car parking. Even options such as making the first hour or two hours free would substantially reduce income by up to 70%.

- 3.6 Free car-parking would not support the Councils commitment to climate change action, where a significant modal shift to walking, cycling and public transport is required.
- 3.7 The Council's car park charges are benchmarked each year against surrounding towns and consistently show that charges in Banbury & Bicester are below most surrounding towns. The only town cheaper being Witney. The charges compared to nearby towns are set out in Appendix 3 and show that current charges In Banbury & Bicester are low.
- 3.8 The data and information which the Council has built up shows that prior to the pandemic most of the car parks in Banbury & Bicester are busy and have limited spare capacity.
- 3.9 The belief that the Council's car parking charges deter visitors to the town centres are not backed up by the data. Two of the busiest car parks are Market Place in Banbury and Market Square in Bicester where a premium is paid for car parking. The data shows these car parks are extremely busy with users being prepared to pay the premium for the added convenience for their location.
- 3.10 In Bicester, despite car parking being free for the first two hours at Sainsburys other Council car parks in the town are busy. Clearly for many, location and convenience for the businesses people wish to visit are often more important than overall charges.
- 3.11 It is proposed that since car parking charges are below the levels of key nearby towns that the hourly rate rises to £1/hr. The detailed proposed charges are set out in Appendix 1. This will be the first rise in charges in Banbury in ten years. Blue badge holders are unaffected by the price change. The expected change is charges will raise around £400k in a full financial year. Since the charges are likely to be implemented during July, but before August, the changes will increase income by up to £260k in 2021/22 and £400k in 2022/23.
- 3.12 With the extension to Castle Quay opening in 2021 and much of the development being around the night time economy it is proposed that to encourage the growth in this area that the charges in both Banbury and Bicester which currently run until 7pm are amended and charges cease at 6pm. The changes on income on this move is relatively small and the changes will bring the car park operating hours in line with Castle Quay's car parking.
- 3.13 Pay on exit is proving popular with Cattle Market in Bicester & Bolton Road in Banbury being in operation. Pay on exit means that users do not have to hurry back to their vehicles if their intended visit turns out to be longer than planned, as they pay for their parking just before they leave. Pay on exit also means a reduced need for enforcement inspections as there are no pay & display tickets to check. The intention in the car parking action plan is to extend pay on exit further with the new car park in Cherwell Drive also planned to be pay on exit and the intention is to convert at least one other car park to pay on exit during 2021/22.
- 3.14 The pandemic has helped people move away from cash and both card and payment through phone payment through Apcoa connect. Moving away from cash reduces the need for cash collections and potentially reduces damage to machines from individuals attempting to gain access to the cash box. However, contactless

payment on some machines is taking too long for authorisation of payment and work is taking place to improve response times. This delay varies by location, with some machines the response is good, others are much slower taking up to 40 seconds. The delay is related to the 4G signal strength and some processing delays. Apcoa are working to try and improve matters to help further encourage card payments being made.

3.15 The table below sets out the impact of coronavirus on car parking as measured by income levels in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20

	2019/20	2020/21	Change	% reduction
April	£159,968	£21,090	£138,878	-87%
May	£170,791	£27,809	£142,982	-84%
June	£145,976	£54,472	£91,504	-63%
July	£169,120	£112,560	£56,560	-33%
August	£152,439	£125,064	£27,375	-18%
September	£172,264	£126,680	£45,584	-26%
October	£166,579	£132,368	£34,211	-21%
November	£164,009	£84,136	£79,873	-49%
December	£168,505	£130,105	£38,400	-23%
January	£163,059	£55,074	£107,985	-66%
February	£156,296	£62,177	£94,119	-60%
March	£119,218	£85,703	£33,515	-28%
Total	£1,908,224	£ 1,017,238	£890,986	-47%

3.16 The overall usage in the whole year is 47% down. Even in the best month October 2020 income was 21% below 2019 levels. Although short stay parking was good, it appears that long stay parking, often associated with people working in the urban centres was lagging behind with many people still working from home.

3.17 A number of improvements can be made to our car parking mix. Firstly, it is proposed Bolton Road moves to a short stay car park once the new long stay car park in Cherwell Drive is complete. This will help increase the footfall into the centre of Banbury. Currently the car park is often full with cars parking all day. By moving to short stay the number of vehicles using the site will increase and hence the footfall into the town centre should further improve.

3.18 Secondly, it is proposed that Chapel Brook car park in Bicester is changed to a long stay car park. The car park is under utilised as a short stay and its location makes it more suitable for a long stay car park.

3.19 The Park & Charge project is underway with charging units in operation in the Cattle Market in Bicester. Other car parks are expected to follow this summer. The vehicle charging facilities will provide an opportunity for those who have no driveway to park their car overnight at a safe location and pick up their fully charged vehicle in

the morning. It will also allow visitors and those who work in the urban centres to charge their electric vehicles during the day.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Car Parking Strategy and the associated action plan has been developed with the input of elected members and other key stakeholders. The strategy was approved last autumn and the action plan is regularly reviewed & updated
- 4.2 The number of pay on exit car parks are gradually increasing, Civil Parking Enforcement will be implemented in late 2021 and electric charging facilities are starting to be installed. The charges in car parks have been reviewed and are below comparable nearby towns
- 4.3 The recommended changes in charges brings the charges in line with towns in the neighbouring areas. This change if it had been implemented from April 2021 would have raised £400k during 2021/22. The proposed change during July will generate around £260k in 2021/22 and £400k in 2022/23 subject to car parking numbers recovering after the pandemic. To achieve higher levels of increased income in 2021/22 would require steeper rises in charges which would move parking charges above some neighbouring towns and even some other existing providers in the district.

5.0 Consultation

Public Consultation to the Strategy in 2019

Public Consultation to the Business proposal to review charges in 2021

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To adopt the recommendations.

Option 2: To reject the recommendations and to ask officers to review matters including the revised parking charging levels

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial and Resource Implications

Car Parking is a significant source of income to the Council. The increase to £1/hour should raise £400k in a full financial year. The proposed changes in charges during July should raise up to £260k in 2021/22 and £400k in 2022/23.

This will result in an in-year shortfall of £140k against the original budget proposals. The service will need to look for in-year mitigations to address this shortfall, which will be identified as part of the budget monitoring process.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

- 7.2 Officers will need to be conscious of the need to calibrate the council's parking orders with the proposed changes, which will entail further statutory consultation in accordance with The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and associated Regulations.

Comments checked by:

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Risk Implications

- 7.3 Car Parking can be an area of significant comment from users and businesses. It is important a balance exists between the different stakeholders. The shortfall of income will be managed closely as part of regular reviewing of the deliverability of the budget. The risks are managed as part of the services operational risk register and escalated to the leadership risk register as and when necessary.

Comments checked by:

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Equalities & Climate Implications

- 7.4 An equalities and climate impact assessment has been carried out on the proposed changes including increasing charges. The changes have no negative impacts but positively supports car parking for those with mobility disabilities and ensures the car

parks remain safe for all those in the community. The introduction of charging facilities will help in the move from the Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) to electric vehicles

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: Yes

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

An enterprising economy with strong & vibrant local centres

Lead Councillor

Councillor Dan Sames Lead Member for Clean & Green

Document Information**Appendix number and title**

- Appendix 1 Car Parking Charges
- Appendix 2 Car Parking Action Plan
- Appendix 3 Car Parking Charges comparison

Background papers

None

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