

**Agenda Item No:** 12

**Report To:** CABINET

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016

**Report Title:** Parking Charges Review

**Report Author:** Jo Fox, Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager

**Portfolio Holders:** Cllr Bradford – Portfolio responsibility for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety

Cllr Shorter – Portfolio responsibility for Finance, Budget & Resource Management

Cllr Galpin - Portfolio responsibility for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics



**Summary:** The report addresses car parking charges within the Borough. Specific proposals are set out concerning the removal of evening parking charges within Ashford Town Centre in support of economic development and the night time economy, an increase in on-street and off-street parking charges, the introduction of a new overnight flat rate of £1, and a mechanism to review parking charges on a three yearly basis is set out.

**Key Decision:** Yes

**Affected Wards:** All

**Recommendations:** The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- i. Agree the removal of parking charges in the High Street, Bank Street and North Street in Ashford Town Centre from 6pm to 10pm (only charging period) to support economic development and the night time economy. An initial trial period of six months will operate with delegated powers to the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety, and Head of Service to agree permanent removal or not after the trial period.
- ii. Agree an increase in on-street and Council run off-street parking charges, from 1st April 2017, across the borough by approximately 10% on current tariffs

(e.g. £1.00 to £1.10, £2.00 to £2.20 etc.) and in accordance with the specific rates detailed within the report.

- iii. **Agree to introduce a new flat rate £1.00 charge overnight in all available overnight Council car parks Monday to Saturday. Data to be collected on type and number of users over the next 6 months. Delegated power to the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety, and Head of Service to implement on a permanent basis or not as appropriate.**
- iv. **To agree to a policy to review the parking charges every three years as part of the Council's regular fee and charging processes.**

**Policy Overview:** Links to the Five Year Corporate Plan. In terms of ensuring an effective, efficient and sustainable financial, resources, service delivery and enforcement environment.

**Financial Implications:** There are costs associated with changing the terminal parking software of approximately £250 per terminal. Based on current numbers (and taking into account the planned reduction of machines over this financial year i.e. the five terminals within Ashford town centre, as addressed in this report, and the reduction due to the Commercial Quarter developments) this equals 48 terminals. There is therefore a total 'one off ' cost therefore of £12,000.

There is a loss of income of approximately £20,000 per annum associated with the removal of the Ashford town centre machines.

The additional income from the implementation of increased parking charges, based on current usage, will be approximately £144,000 per annum for car parks (off-street) and approximately £15,000 per annum on-street.

The introduction of the £1.00 overnight will provide an increase in income, but as this is a new tariff, there is no current data and the expected increase in economic development a figure cannot be determined. Data to be collected on type and number of users over next six months with delegated authority as outlined within the report to implement on a permanent basis.

**Risk Assessment:** Yes - Addressed within the body of the report.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:** Yes

**Other Material Implications** Yes – Legal implications relevant to car park leases and amendments to Traffic Regulation Orders are addressed within the body of the report . There are no staff implications.

**Background Papers:** None

**Contacts:** [jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk) – Tel: (01233) 330566

### Report Title: Parking Charges Review

#### Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to address car parking charges within the Borough. Specific proposals are set out concerning the removal of evening parking charges within Ashford Town Centre, an increase in on-street and off-street parking charges, and the introduction of a new overnight flat rate of £1. The recommendations take into account current and anticipated economic developments for the Borough.
2. Cabinet approval is also sought to agree to review the parking charges every three years, the next review to come to Cabinet during 2019 with implementation dates of any agreed changes from April 2020.

#### Background

3. There is a need to review the parking tariff charges that have not changed since 2011. This review of charges ensures that the Council's arrangements are fit for purpose in the current economic climate, reflect costs associated with operating the service and are supportive of wider corporate objectives.
4. New parking terminals that offer the ability to pay using 'contactless' will be rolled out across the borough during this financial year and will be in place for April 2017. This is in addition to the ability to pay by cash, card and phone. This flexibility gives the Council the opportunity to review the tariffs whilst the customer has ease of payment.

#### Proposals

##### ***Recommendation (i) the removal of on-street parking charges in specified locations in Ashford Town Centre – namely Bank Street, High Street and North Street***

5. This recommendation was initially requested by the Portfolio Holder for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics and supported by the Economic Development Team in that it would assist businesses within the Ashford Town Centre and the night time economy.
6. The businesses that operate during the evening who will be directly affected by the removal of the charges have been consulted and there is significant support for the proposal. One business advised that they pay the parking charges for their customers to gain trade and another advised that they have paid half towards any parking fines for their customers to assist with repeat trade.

7. Some resident permits allow parking in the Town Centre bays, however observations over the last three months have shown that residents are not using these bays.
8. It is recommended that the initial trial period will be for 6 months and will involve the payment terminals being covered, notices displayed and press communications advising of the free parking. The trial will allow time for feedback to be gathered on whether there are any negative impacts on offering free parking such as an increase in anti-social behaviour or the loss of parking availability for business customers if the spaces are used by residents or workers parking free of charge, thus not creating the desired effect for the businesses.
9. Based on the outcome of the findings of the trial it is recommended that the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety, and Head of Service decide whether to continue the trial further and then ultimately decide whether to remove the machines permanently or re-introduce the charges.
10. As all parking terminals within the Borough are currently being upgraded there would be an initial one-off saving of £30,000 associated with not replacing these terminals. There would be a yearly net loss (income minus maintenance, cash collection and software changes) of approximately £20,000.
11. The Civil Enforcement Officers time that is currently used for patrolling this area could be directed to areas of greater need such as lorry parking enforcement and residential areas that have parking controls.

***Recommendation (ii) to increase parking charges across the borough by approximately 10% on each tariff***

12. Specific recommendations as follows:

Current Tariff's in Short Stay car parks (except Civic Centre/Stour Centre) to be increased as follows:

<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
£ 1.00 up to 1 hour	£ 1.10 up to 1 hour
£ 2.00 up to 2 hours	£ 2.20 up to 2 hours
£ 3.00 up to 3 hours	£ 3.30 up to 3 hours
£ 4.00 up to 4 hours	£ 4.40 up to 4 hours
£10.00 over 4 hours	£11.00 over 4 hours

The current tariff for Civic Centre/Stour Centre is as above with the exception of the first 2 hours. This was originally implemented for the visitors to the Customer Contact Centre, this has recently been reviewed and customers who have booked appointments can be offered visitor parking permits free of

charge. In addition there are 15 minute bays, with no charge, for the public dropping off documents or for a quick query.

<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
80p up to 2 hours	£1.50 up to 2 hours

Current tariffs in Long Stay car parks are as above with the only exception as follows:

<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
£4.50 over 4 hours	£5.00 over 4 hours

On street charges to be increased in line with above tariffs e.g. 10p per hour or an overall approximate of 10%.

13. The increase in income based for on-street parking based on current usage will be approximately £15,000 per annum. Increase in income from car parks (off-street) based on current usage approximately £144,000 per annum.
14. The proposed increases are in line with the charging structure agreed for Elwick Place Car Park and the NCP car parks within Ashford town centre. All long stay car parks remain cheaper than the station car parks.
15. A discount is being applied to the Civic Centre/Stour Centre Car Park to mitigate impact on customers. Up to 2 hours will be reduced from £2.20 to £1.50 as detailed above.

***Recommendation (iii) to agree the introduction of an overnight flat rate charge of £1.00 in all car parks that are accessible overnight***

16. The introduction of the £1.00 overnight will provide an increase in income, but as this is a new tariff, there is no current data and until the expected increase in economic development a figure cannot be determined.
17. It is recommended that further data to be collected on the type of user and the number of users over next 6 months. The decision as to whether and when to introduce should be delegated to the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety and Head of Service to implement based on the findings.
18. It should be noted that there is a £1.00 overnight proposed charge for the new Elwick Road car park expected to be operational late 2018/early 2019.

***Recommendation (iv) to agree to review the parking charges every 3 years***

19. It is proposed that Cabinet agree to a policy to review the parking charges every three years. This will ensure that the parking charges are kept in line with the economic development and are supporting the agreed local plan and

transport plan commitments for the Borough. This would form a part of the Council's regular fee and charging processes.

## **Timescales**

20. It is anticipated that the recommendations would be implemented in accordance with the following timescale:
  - Removal of charges in Bank Street, High Street and North Street in Ashford Town Centre - six month trial to start with effect from the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016. To review success or otherwise and determine on-going policy by the end of 2016.
  - Increase tariffs on parking charges as detailed within the report with effect from 1st April 2017.
  - Introduce a £1.00 overnight charge in all car parks available overnight following a six month research period with data collection starting with effect from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016. Success or otherwise to be reviewed and decision to be made on whether to introduce on a permanent basis from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.
  - Review of parking charges every three years. Next review reported to Cabinet in 2019 with any agreed changes to be implemented from April 2020 and every three years there after.

## **Handling and Implications**

21. The leases for land currently used for car parking contractually allows the Council to set the charges as they see fit. The same is naturally true of those car parks solely owned by the Council.
22. A communications plan will be delivered to ensure the residents, workers and visitors of the borough are informed of the changes.
23. There are refund arrangements in place within both Ashford Leisure Trust and Tenterden Leisure Trust, and both trusts have been advised on the proposed increases.
24. The proposed changes will require amendment to Traffic Regulation Orders and this will take place in accordance with statutory procedures.
25. Any change off-street parking opening times would be made having reference to relevant planning restrictions and where necessary supplementary planning permission applications would be made.

26. It is stressed that the off-street car parking proposals only relate to Council run car parks. The Council does not set the charges in other operators or private car parks.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

27. The increase in charges are being applied across the borough and are have an equitable impact, they are not discriminatory to any individual protected group.

## **Other Options Considered**

28. The options that have been considered are detailed in the report. There is an option to do nothing and keep the same charges that have been in place for the last five years. This does not, however, support the current development context and wider corporate objectives.

## **Conclusion**

29. The parking charges have not been reviewed in their entirety since 2011. An introduction of 'free after 3' and 'free on Sundays' was implemented in 2014. The introduction of this incentive coupled with effective communications has proven effective and achieved the aim of increasing footfall and trade into the town centre.
30. The proposed changes, within this report, provide an overall review of the tariffs in addition to addressing the current economic climate within Ashford Town Centre.
31. It is appropriate to have a review period for parking charges to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' on an on-going basis. It is therefore recommended that a review is completed every three years to ensure that the charges address the current needs of the Borough.

## **Portfolio Holder's Comments**

32. This represents the first increase in parking charges for five years. A 10% increase is entirely reasonable in consideration to this. Removing evening parking charges for Ashford town centre users will give a boost to our businesses and the night time economy and the parking charges reductions at the Stour Centre enforces our commitment to support the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Borough.

### **Cllr Bradford - Portfolio for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety**

33. These charges have not been altered for some years and this is an appropriate time to amend the charges as outlined by way of funding the new technologies being introduced. I am particularly in favour of the



encouragement of the evening/night time economy of the town centre by removing evening parking charges; this should be seen by businesses and entrepreneurs as the Borough Council supporting their efforts in making the town a lively and enjoyable place to spend time relaxing and generally improving the well-being of our residents.

**Cllr Shorter - Portfolio for Finance, Budget and Resource Management**

34. As the evening economy becomes more important to Ashford Town it is important that we as a Council do what is practicable to assist businesses. The removal of the on-street charge after 6pm is an excellent response to the restaurateurs' and evening establishments' requests. I commend officers for their flexible approach. I note the £1 overnight charge which brings the car parks in line with the upcoming Cinema car park. In addition I believe this may act as a significant tool in dealing with groups of young people congregating in their cars and creating a nuisance. Finally, no-one wants to see prices rise, but Ashford's parking charges have been static for some time and inflation alone outstrips the rises proposed. I commend this report and its recommendations to the Cabinet.

**Cllr Galpin - Portfolio responsibility for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics**

**Contacts:** Jo Fox

**Email:** [jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk)