

Agenda Item No: 7



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report To: Joint Transportation Board

Date: 14th September 2010

Report Title: Payment of parking charges by phone and proposed amendments to the On and Off Street Parking Places Orders

Report Author: Operations Manager Parking Services

Summary:

To seek Members' approval, for a trial period, to provide motorists wishing to park on street and in the Council's car parks, with the facility to pay parking charges by phone and to make alterations to the On and Off Street Parking Places Orders.

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: Victoria and Tenterden. Car parks in Ashford and Tenterden could potentially be used by motorists living in all Wards.

Recommendations: **Subject to the views of the Board:**
The Board recommend to the Executive that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to enter into a contract with the chosen 'Phone Parking' provider.
Permission be given to prepare and advertise Traffic Regulation Orders to introduce various changes to the On and Off Street Parking Places Orders.
Any unresolved objections to the proposed amendments be brought to the attention of a later meeting of the Board.

Policy Overview: In line with the requirement to confirm to legislation and for constant improvement of the service.

Financial Implications: Phone Parking
Trial period at no cost to the Council. If the trial is successful a three year 'no cost' contract to be negotiated.

Off Street Parking Order
The cost of advertising amendments to be managed within existing budget.

Risk Assessment To be complete during and at the end of the trial period.

Equalities Impact Assessment All parking policies are being reviewed to ensure compliance.

Other Material Implications: None

Contacts: John.burns@ashford.gov.uk – Tel. 01233 330641

Report Title: Payment of parking charges by phone and proposed amendments to the On and Off Street Parking Places Orders

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' approval, for a trial period, to provide motorists wishing to park on-street and in the Council's car parks, with the facility to pay parking charges by phone.
2. Following the successful completion of the trial and subject to satisfactory terms from the service provider, to seek Members' approval for the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to enter into contract, for a period of up to three years, with the chosen service provider.
3. To provide Members with details about a number of minor alterations and updates to the On and Off Street Parking Places Orders and to seek approval to prepare and advertise appropriate Amendments to the Orders.

Issue to be Decided

4. Phone Parking

- 4.1. Members are asked to consider and decide if the additional and alternative facility of paying parking charges by phone should be made available to motorists parking on street and in the Council's car parks.

5. On Street Order

- 5.1. Members are asked to consider and authorise that the following alteration is made to the On Street Parking Places Order:

5.1.1. To include payment of Parking Charges by phone.

6. Off Street Order

- 6.1. Members are asked to consider and authorise that the following alterations are made to the Off Street Parking Places Order:

6.1.1. To include payment of Parking Charges by phone.

6.1.2 Delete the definition of 'Parking Attendant' and replace it with the definition of 'Civil Enforcement Officer'.

6.1.3. Henwood car park:

6.1.3.1. Remove reference to vehicles over 3.5 tonnes from the scale of charges.

6.1.3.2. Introduce a height restriction of 2.1 metres.

6.1.3.3. Include 'Unreserved Season Ticket' in the car park scale of parking charges

6.1.4. Civic and Stour Centre car park:

6.1.4.1. Vary the car park 'Hours of Operation'

6.1.4.2. Vary the 'maximum period for which vehicles may remain' in the car park

6.1.5. Edinburgh Road multi-storey car park:

6.1.5.1. Vary the car park 'Hours of Operation'

6.1.5.2. Vary the 'Maximum period for which vehicles may remain' in the car park.

6.1.6. Ashford Library car park:

6.1.6.1. Delete reference to the car park.

Background

7. Phone Parking

- 7.1. What is 'Phone Parking'? In simple terms, on arrival in the car park or On Street location where the payment of a parking charge is required and the facility of 'Phone Parking is available, the motorist uses a mobile phone to call a local, prominently displayed number and, if not already registered and registration is desired, will be guided through a simple process. If registration is not desired credit/debit card details are taken for the current visit only. If the motorist has previously registered or pre registered by visiting the service provider's website, the required parking time is simply paid for by credit/debit card, together with service provider's fee of 20 pence.
- 7.2. Details of the parking transaction are updated and recorded location by location on the service provider's database. A text message confirming details of the parking transaction (location, amount paid, and parking duration) is sent to the motorist. The motorist can request a text message as a reminder that the parking period is about to end and, if delayed returning to the vehicle, the parking session can be extended. A charge for these additional services is generally made by service providers.
- 7.3 Checks of parked vehicles are carried out by the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers using a GPRS equipped phone or hand held computer to access the service provider's database and confirm that the parking charge has been paid. The system can also warn enforcement officers about vehicles that have either overstayed their parking time or when parking time is about to end.
- 7.4 In March 2010, Management Team considered a report submitted by the Operations Manager Parking Services about 'Cashless' or 'Pay by Phone' parking as an alternative way for motorists to pay parking charges, On Street and in the Council's car parks.
- 7.5 The report explains the concept of 'Phone Parking' and details the benefits to motorists and the Council. The report also identifies the Councils in Kent where payment of parking charges by phone was already available. These four Councils, Dover, Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells and Shepway, currently continue to offer the facility and remain the only Councils in Kent to do so.

7.6 The report provides information about four companies who were contacted by this Council and sets out details of the service each proposed to provide the Council.

7.7 The service to be provided by each company was more or less the same and, in all but one case, setting up, implementation, and training costs would be carried out free of charge. However, the cost of credit and particularly debit card transaction charges, payable to Council's Merchant account provider, were potentially significant and a matter for concern.

The payment of these charges was required under the proposals of all but one company, who made the alternative proposal, that the credit and debit card payments made by motorists, would be made via their own Merchant account provider and the transaction charges incurred would not be passed on to, or be payable by the Council.

7.8 In the report it was acknowledged that one company was the market leader in the UK and it was with this company that the four Kent Councils had begun trials or entered into contracts. Unfortunately it was this company that required the payment of significant implementation costs. The report however also acknowledged that the other companies concerned were also successfully operating 'Phone Parking' services for various Councils.

7.9 In the report's Recommendations it is noted that although 'Phone Parking' is an attractive benefit to motorists and the Council, it is not a facility that should be provided without regard to cost. In fact, as 'Phone Parking' companies are being provided with the opportunity to conduct their business in the Council's car parks and On Street parking places, the Council should not incur any costs and ideally should receive financial benefit from the arrangement.

7.10 It was also recommended that all the Councils in Kent who were investigating or negotiating the provision of 'Phone Parking' should work together as a group, with a view to securing the best possible terms and conditions. To this end the Operations Manager Parking Services is currently working collaboratively with colleagues from five other councils: Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Thanet, Swale and Dartford. Together we are considering proposals from three 'Phone Parking' service providers.

7.11 Following consideration of the report, Management Team's decision was that a trial should go ahead and roll out, to be dependant on the service provider's final terms and confirmation of handling transfers of funds with the Council's Financial Services.

8. On Street Order - The Kent County Council (Various Roads Borough of Ashford) (Waiting Restrictions and Street Parking Places) Consolidation Order 2007

8.1 If approval is given to implement 'Phone Parking' at On Street Pay and Display parking places it will be necessary to vary the Order, to include payment by phone as a method of paying parking charges.

9. Off Street Order - The Ashford Borough (Off Street Parking Places) Order 2007 as Amended

9.1 If approval is given to implement 'Phone Parking' in the Council's car parks it will be necessary to vary the Order, to include payment by phone as a method of paying parking charges.

9.2 Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004, which came into force on 31 March 2008, brought about a change of title for Parking Attendants who were from that date to be called Civil Enforcement Officers. It is therefore necessary to take this opportunity to vary the Order to reflect this change of description.

9.3 Henwood Parking Area

9.3.1. The parking area is currently designated to provide parking facilities for motor vehicles exceeding 3.5 tonnes (large goods vehicles), motor vehicles not exceeding 3.5 tonnes (motor cars/light vans), and coaches. The parking area is generally little used by any vehicles, except heavy goods vehicles that arrive in the late afternoon or after the time when parking charges are payable and remain overnight. The parking area is rarely used by coaches and ticket machine records indicate that use of the area by cars and vans is very low.

9.3.2. The parking area perimeter wall and fences have been damaged on a number of occasions, almost certainly by HGV's manoeuvring into and out of parking spaces. The wall that separates Ashford Fire Station from the parking area is the property of the Kent Fire and Rescue Service, whose insurers have recently repaired the wall at a cost of £5000. Fences at the front and back of the parking area have been repaired on a number of occasions by the Council.

9.3.3. The Officer in Charge at Ashford Fire Station has for some time called for the parking area to be closed or for HGV's to be prevented from using it.

9.3.4. Due to its low use, the of cost repairing damage caused by HGVs and requests from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service, a height barrier has been installed to exclude HGVs. It is now necessary to vary the Order to make reference to the height limitation and in Schedule 2 of the Order to delete reference to Coaches and Motor vehicles exceeding 3.5 tonnes but not exceeding 26 tonnes maximum gross weight.

9.3.5. As a consequence of a proposal to implement additional waiting restrictions in Henwood, previously reported to the Joint Transportation Board on 15 June 2010, Parking Services have received a number of enquiries about the cost and availability of parking in Henwood. Notably an enquiry has been received from the NHS seeking information about Season Ticket parking availability for their staff. As it appears likely that there will be a demand for parking in the area, it is recommended that the availability for season tickets be extended to include the Henwood

parking area, charges to be the same as those for nearby Flour Mills car park.

9.4 Civic and Stour Centre Car Park

9.4.1. The car park is closed and locked from Midnight until 5:00 am each day to prevent access by individuals who would otherwise drive dangerously, at excessive speeds, and in a manner that causes excessive noise and disturbance to nearby residents. It is therefore necessary to amend the Order to reflect the fact the car park is not available for public parking when it is closed and that vehicles may not remain in the car park.

It is proposed that Schedule 2 of the Order be varied to show the 'Hours of Operation' as 05:00 to 23:59 and the 'Maximum period for which vehicles may remain' as 19 hours or until 23:59 hours, whichever is sooner.

9.5 Edinburgh Road Multi-Storey Car Park

9.5.1. As the car park is locked and closed each day it is necessary to amend the Order to reflect the fact the car park is not available for public parking and vehicles may not remain in the car park. It is proposed that Schedule 2 of the Order be varied to show the 'Hours of Operation' as 07:30 to 20:30 hours Monday to Friday and 07:30 to 19:30 hours on Saturday and Sunday and the 'Maximum period for which vehicles may remain' as 13 hours or 20:29 hours whichever is sooner, Monday to Friday and 12 hours or 19:29 hours, Saturday and Sunday.

9.6 Ashford Library Car Park

9.6.1 As Ashford Library is closed, the car park now part of the development site and no longer available for public parking, it is necessary to vary the Order to delete reference to the car park in Schedule 2 of the Order.

Financial Implications

10. Phone Parking

10.1 The trial period to be carried out at no cost to the Council. If the trial is successful a three year 'no cost' contract to be negotiated.

11. Off Street Parking

11.1 Advertising and administration costs of approximately £1,950 will be managed within existing budgets.

12. On Street Parking Order

12.1 Amendments to the On Street Parking Places Order will be deferred until it is necessary to make other amendments to reduce the cost of advertising.

Equalities Impact Assessment

13. All parking policies are being reviewed to ensure compliance.

Conclusion

14. The introduction of 'Phone Parking' offers benefits to both the Motorist and the Council.

14.1 Benefits to the Motorist

- Alternative way to pay parking fee
- No need for change
- Easy to top up payment to extend parking time
- Simple and secure service to use
- Text reminder service available

14.2 Benefits to the Council

- Reduced operating cost due to:
 - Less demand on ticket machines (reduced maintenance cost).
 - Less cash to be collected from ticket machines (reduced cash collection cost).
- Reduced opportunities for theft and vandalism of machines.
- Clear evidence to support enforcement.
- Provides visitors with a flexible alternative method of payment.
- Possibility to introduce flexible parking arrangements to accommodate specific parking arrangements such as:
 - Residential Zones, alternative visitor parking arrangements.
 - 'Carbon Metered Parking'.

15. In the difficult financial climate that we are currently experiencing and the pressure to review and in some cases reduce service levels, the introduction of an initiative such as 'Phone Parking' to assist residents and visitors is a welcome addition to our customer services.

16. It is therefore recommended that we proceed towards a 12 to 18 month trial subject to the satisfaction of the Borough Council's, Head of Legal and Democratic Service and Finance Manager.

17. The other sections of this report relate to various amendments to the On Street and Off Street Orders that accommodate 'Phone Parking' and various operational matters relating to car parks.

Portfolio Holder's Views

18. This report seeks to move our parking provision forward in a progressive and yet cautious way by endeavouring to embrace technology and improve the service to the public.

Our Officers are mindful of the strict economic climate and will be at pains to ensure that the Authority incurs no additional costs. In this connection it is encouraging that Officers are working in collaboration with neighbouring Districts, to benchmark various service providers to ensure quality of service and value for money.

I accordingly commend this report.

Contact: Operations Manager Parking Services

Email: john.burns@ashford.gov.uk