

Agenda Item No: 11 **Report No:** 93/14
Report Title: Off-Street Car Parking in Lewes District
Report To: Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 26th June 2014
Cabinet Member: Cllr Howson
Ward(s) Affected: All
Report By: Gillian Marston – Director of Service Delivery
Contact Officer(s)-
Name(s): Bee Lewis
Post Title(s): Contracts Manager, Leisure & Facilities
E-mail(s): bee.lewis@lewes.gov.uk
Tel No(s): 01273 484404

Purpose of Report:

To respond to the Notice of Motion submitted to Council in February 2014 by Councillor Edmunds in relation to off-street parking charges and to update the Committee on the proposed service improvements.

1 Notice Of Motion

In February 2014, Cllr Edmunds proposed the following motion:

- a) That this Council commit to ending all charges for off-road car-parking across Lewes District by the end of this Council Term, that is, by May 2015.
- b) That the car parks in the District which had their maximum stay reduced from 72 hours reduced to 10 or 24 hours in 2012, be restored to a 72 hour maximum stay.
- c) That this council write to East Sussex County Council to ask them to consider either abolishing on-road car parking charges, or, at the very least, making the first hour of parking free on-road.”

Information

2

- 2.1 Parking revenue is used to fund essential services to the town to ensure it is attractive visitors and businesses, for example street cleaning, waste & recycling services, provision of public toilets, and public facilities such

as the leisure centre, all of which are important to residents and business and the future prosperity of the town.

- 2.2** The Council regularly receives requests for periods of free parking and the underlying assumption is that free parking will not have an impact on the provision of other public services and will increase trade by encouraging people to shop in Lewes. There are however, a number of factors which impact trade such as ease of access; the shopping offer; and advertising and promotion.
- 2.3** There is an ongoing perception that it is difficult and/or expensive to park within the district. It is true that at times, there are more calls on parking spaces than at others. However, recent analysis has shown that there are an average of 10-12% of spaces available in 2 hour (shopper) car parks on a Saturday and around 27% of spaces free in the 4 hour (medium stay) car parks.
- 2.4** The parking tariff was set in 2004 when parking was decriminalised. It was not reviewed for many years, during which time, inflation rose cumulatively by 28%. Throughout the most severe years of the recession, there were no increases to parking charges.
- 2.5** In November 2012, Cabinet approved the recommendations to simplify the parking tariffs and to uplift them by an average of 10%. The resulting charges are still considerably lower than all neighbouring authorities, with the exception of Wealdon District who don't charge for parking at all, as the following table demonstrates:

Comparator Towns			
Location	1 hour	4 hours	All Day
Battle	£1.00	£4.50	£7.00
Bexhill	£1.50	£5.50	£6.50 (average)
Rye	£1.00	£4.50	£7.00
Burgess Hill	£0.80	£4.00	£6.00
Lewes	£0.70	£2.60	£3.70
Newhaven & Seaford	£0.70	£1.60	£2.00

- 2.6** The changes were implemented in July 2013 along with changes to the charging hours. It is now free to park across the whole district between the hours of 1700-0900 as well as on Sundays and all Public Holidays.
- 2.7** There is a significant amount of anecdotal evidence, opinion and speculation over the relationship between car parking provision and town centre prosperity. The Association of Town & City Management and the British Parking Association commissioned a study into the relationship

between parking and High Street prosperity which was published in 2013. (Re-Think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centre; Ojay McDonald, 2013).

- 2.8** The report reviewed primarily off-street parking tariffs in around 90 locations across the UK, cross referencing data from a number of sources on footfall, spend and offer - which are indicative of town centre health and prosperity - to examine whether it is possible to establish the extent of the relationship between car parking and town centre performance. This report used data on footfall, spend and centre quality to group these locations and assess their relationship to the quantity of spaces and the cost of parking for the first two hours.
- 2.9** This analysis concluded that there is no clear relationship between car parking charges (set by parking owners/operators) and the amenities on offer in a location. However, the mid-range and smaller groupings of centres that charge more than the national average in accordance with their offer, suffered a higher than average decline in footfall for 2011.
- 2.10** These findings come a year after research carried out by The Means and commissioned by several London Boroughs demonstrated that people who access town centres on foot or by public transport spend more per head than motorists and visit more frequently. LDC Officers asked The Means whether this research could be extrapolated to semi-rural/lower density areas such as Lewes and the conclusion was that the same findings would apply.
- 2.11** The Council has recognised the importance of the parking scheme and continues to make improvements to it. Cabinet will hear a report on 7th July recommending the implementation of cashless parking (pay by phone) and incremental charging.
- 2.12** Cashless parking will enable the motorist to pay for or top-up parking fees, allowing for greater flexibility and freedom. In addition Cabinet will be asked to approve the introduction of incremental charging which is a fairer charging system for visitors. The parking machines do not give change and so anyone who does not have the correct money to pay for their parking will, in future, receive additional parking time.
- 2.13** There have been a number of occasions where the Council has offered free parking to support certain events. Christmas parking is one example, but there are others, mainly in Newhaven where free parking supports events such as the Fish Festival, the RNLI festival and the specialist French markets. Offering free-parking may be counter-intuitive as the Council has in the past, received complaints from local traders that commuters block the spaces intended for shoppers.
- 2.14** There is also the likelihood that people who will be shopping in the district, would be shopping there in any case and so offering free parking is not an incentive. Instead of subsidising parking, a proportion of the budget would be better spent encouraging new people into the district,

through a targeted advertising campaign at local rail stations, in the newspapers and advertising banners in surrounding towns.

- 2.15** It is recommended that officers develop a marketing and promotion plan, to be funded from parking revenues, in conjunction with local businesses, to showcase the shopping, tourism and leisure offer within the district.
- 2.16** If Members wish to offer free parking, there will be implications for the affordability of the parking scheme and implications for other Council priorities. Revenue generated from off-street parking charges pays for the cost of the enforcement scheme. Any surpluses generated do not have to be ring-fenced for transport improvements in the same way that on-street charges do, but instead go towards supporting other Council priorities.
- 2.17** A good parking scheme aims to keep traffic moving, turnover spaces effectively and improve road safety. The tariff is designed so that it is more expensive to park on-street, with the aim of encouraging motorists into the off-street car parks. Offering free parking on-street, even for just the first hour, risks diluting and confusing those aims.
- 2.18** There is no straight-forward answer to the parking scheme. Cllr Edmunds is correct in her statement that the scheme is universally hated. However, with no parking scheme in place, Lewes town in particular would become gridlocked and the air quality would suffer along with trade.
- 2.19** Parking tariffs are one of the levers for influencing travel patterns and fulfilling the council's ambition to create a safer, cleaner and more sustainable environment. There is strong evidence that effective parking controls can have a positive influence on promoting more sustainable travel choices.
- 2.20** The Notice of Motion also requests that car parks that were amended from a 72 hour stay in July 2013 to a 12 or 24 hour stay are reinstated to 72 hours. It is not possible for technical reasons to enforce overstaying of more than 72 hours which was the impetus for the change.
- 2.21** The affected car parks were mainly coastal, but there were two rural car parks affected, Ditchling and Barcombe. Residents from both villages expressed concern that they would have nowhere to park if the maximum length of stay was reduced and 40 objections were received. However, after a period of negotiation, it was agreed that any residents affected would be able to apply for a dispensation permit. Four permits have been issued in Ditchling and none in Barcombe. One was offered in Barcombe, but the resident declined it.
- 2.22** Since the change to the maximum stay, there have been fewer incidents of overstaying or people camping overnight. The Council has also been able to consider enforcement against an unauthorised traveller camp in

Seaford and was alerted very quickly to an abandoned vehicle in Barcombe car park.

- 2.23 There have been no complaints about the reduction in the maximum stay.
- 2.24 Car parking remains an emotive subject for many. Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council work in partnership to deliver a scheme that is safe, affordable and accessible and which contributes to the economy of the district.

Financial Appraisal

3

- 3.1 The table below sets out the income generated from off-street car parking which is used to fund to Council services to residents and businesses in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 along with the budget for 2014/2015:

	2012/2013 actual £	2013/2014 budget £	2013/2014 actual £	2014/2015 budget £
Parking Charges	774,400	940,000	789,400	890,000
PCNs	111,900	125,000	84,000	100,000
Parking Permits	2,500	2,600	2,400	2,600
	<u>888,800</u>	<u>1,067,600</u>	<u>875,800</u>	<u>992,600</u>

- 3.2 Even offering free parking for the first hour would cost the Council at least £150,000 in lost revenue which would have to be made up from savings elsewhere in the Council's budget. This would place increased pressure on other service areas to meet the savings target of £500,000 in 2015/16.

Legal Implications

4

- 4.1 The introduction, amendment, or deletion of tariffs for on-street parking must be implemented by way of a number of Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO). Tariffs/charges for off-street parking can be varied following the publication of a notice issued in pursuance of section 35(C) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Regulations made under that section require the notice to be advertised for 21 days and a copy of that notice to be displayed in all affected car parks. Once the 21 days have elapsed, the Off-Street Parking Order can be amended to include the new charges.
- 4.2 More fundamental changes to the Order must follow the procedure set out in the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure)(England and

Wales) Regulations 1996. Such changes require consultation and advertising.

Sustainability Implications

5

- 5.1** Parking tariffs are one of the levers for influencing travel patterns and fulfilling the council's ambition to create a safer, cleaner and more sustainable environment. There is strong evidence that effective parking controls can have a positive influence on promoting more sustainable travel choices.
- 5.2** The majority of locally derived pollution comes from either diesel engines or older petrol vehicles. Generally vehicles are more polluting to the local environment if they are heavier, older or run on diesel. Therefore promoting travel choice has to be part of a much more comprehensive air quality action plan. Parking controls are a positive contribution. The Council is reviewing the car parks with the aim of providing electric vehicle charging points and bicycle racks.

Risk Management Implications

6

- 6.1** ESCC already have Lead Member approval to introduce cashless and incremental charging across the county including Eastbourne and Hastings. LDC would face reputational risk and criticism from residents if it was possible to use a cashless payment method on street, but not off-street. To mitigate this, the Director of Finance and the Lead Member for Parking Management will reach agreement with ESCC about implementation.
- 6.2** Residents and visitors may see the transaction fee for cashless parking as a stealth charge, as was the case in Brighton & Hove. In mitigation, the option to pay for parking via an electronic method will be offered in addition to paying at the machine and there is no obligation on motorists to use the service.
- 6.3** Introducing incremental charging brings with it a potential financial risk. The machines will cost up to £10,000 to re-programme and it is prudent to assume that revenue will reduce by at least the amount of over-vending received in 2013/14 (£33,500). As it is not possible to model the potential effects of incremental charging, the financial risk could be higher. In mitigation, not every motorist will take advantage of incremental charging. There will also be a proportion of motorists who do not stay for the full length of time they have purchased, allowing for a more efficient turnover of spaces.

- 6.4** The cashless parking service will only be accessible in those parts of Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven where network coverage exists. Maintaining the existing coin payment option will ensure that motorists are able to use the parking service at all locations.

Equality Screening

7

- 7.1** The recommendations have a positive impact on equalities. All motorists who have to pay to use the car parks will have more choice and methods of payment. Incremental charging will also have a positive impact on people on lower incomes.

Background Papers

8

<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=3424>

<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=5760>

<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=6218>

Appendices

9 None