

Agenda Item No: **Report No:**

Report Title: **Car Parking Petition Response**

Report To: **Council** **Date:** **17th July 2014**

Cabinet Member: **Cllr Howson**

Ward(s) Affected: **All**

Report By: **Gillian Marston, Director of Service Delivery**

Contact Officer(s)-

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Purpose of Report:

To respond to the petition submitted to Council on 4th December 2013 in relation to free parking on Saturdays in Lewes Town centre.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1** To approve the recommendation that officers develop a marketing and promotion plan and work with local businesses, to showcase the shopping, tourism and leisure offer within the district.
 - 2** To assess the impact of cashless parking and incremental charging after 12 months of its operation and report back to Council
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Reasons for Recommendations

- 1** At the meeting on 4th December, 2013, Council received a petition jointly from Councillor Wischhusen (Catlin) (Lewes Town Council) and Councillor O’Keeffe which contained in excess of 2000 signatures. It called for the Council and East Sussex County Council to immediately change parking policy so that it included free parking for up to 30 minutes on School Hill, Lewes, from Monday through to Friday, in addition to free on and off-road parking on Saturdays in Central Lewes where practicable.

Information

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- 2.1 Councillor Catlin addressed the Council on the subject matter of the petition and the number of signatures. He reported that a copy of the petition had been presented to East Sussex County Council at its meeting on 3 December 2013.
- 2.2 On-street parking is the responsibility of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and so this report will deal with the matters relating to off-street car parking only.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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:
 - (a) Ease of access
 - (b) Shopping offer
 - (c) Advertising and promotion

Ease of Access

- 2.5 There is a persistent perception that it is difficult to park in Lewes and that this is one of the reasons that people do not come to the town to shop. In 2010, Mott MacDonald, an independent consultancy firm, was commissioned by the Council to undertake a study of car parking within Lewes Town. The review considered:
 - (a) Existing and potential car parking sites, assessing current performance and options for improvement;
 - (b) Consultation with interested parties to confirm the current problems and establish attitudes to future options; and
 - (c) A commercial review of selected existing sites to understand the viability of development for alternative uses.
- 2.6 The report did not take into account the pattern of car park use and of the current spaces and recommended that there should be a review of the stay designation (ie maximum stay and whether there is sufficient

short, medium and long term parking where it is most needed) as a next step. Officers undertook a desk-top review in July 2012, analysing usage data and parking habits using ticket receipt data for 2011-12. The review found that there were 1,540 spaces in total within Lewes Town which was above that recommended by Mott MacDonald. By aligning the existing spaces to the parking habits of residents and visitors in terms of location and length of stay, there would be sufficient parking within Lewes town.

2.7 Cabinet approved the re-banding of a number of car parks within Lewes in November 2012, with the aim of encouraging space turnover and providing the correct maximum stay designations where it was most needed.

2.8 The changes were implemented in July 2013 and officers have now reviewed the ticket sale data for four car parks within the central area of Lewes to analyse how busy each of the car parks was on a number of Saturdays in March and April 2014. The results are shown in the following table:

Car Park	Maximum Stay	% of time space was available
Friars Walk	2 hours	12.1%
West Street	2 hours	10.8%
East Street	4 hours	35.9%
Little East Street	4 hours	21.4%

2.9 The table shows that on the dates sampled, none of the car parks surveyed were at full capacity. Initial indications are that the short stay, 2 hour 'shoppers' car parks are turning over spaces quickly, which in turn gives a boost to trade.

2.10 The longer stay, 4 hour car parks, have more spaces available, although the tariff is slightly cheaper in these car parks to encourage people to stay longer.

2.11 It would seem from the initial findings that the parking scheme is working well and that with the exception of two car parks, The Maltings and Pinwell Road, the changes to maximum time limit and the tariff are effective as there are sufficient spaces available.

Shopping Offer

2.12 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).

- 2.13** 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.
- 2.14** 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.
- 2.15** With the exception of Wealdon District Council, car parking tariffs across Lewes District are significantly lower than other East Sussex authorities.
- 2.16** 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.
- 2.17** The Council has recognised the importance of the parking scheme and continues to make improvements to it. The parking scheme was implemented in Lewes in 2004 and was not reviewed until 2012. As a result of that review, a number of significant changes were made:
- (a)** The hours where charging applied were reduced from 0800-1800 to 0900-1700.
 - (b)** Parking on Bank and Public Holidays was removed.
 - (c)** The number of tariffs was simplified and reduced.
 - (d)** Motorists were given more choice about where to park and which tariff to pay.
- 2.18** Cabinet has also recently approved recommendations to implement a cashless parking option across the district. Cashless parking will enable the motorist to pay for or top-up parking fees, allowing for greater flexibility and freedom. In addition Cabinet has approved the introduction of incremental charging which is a fairer charging system for visitors.
- 2.19** There is no simple formula that can be given on determining the right kind of tariff to be introduced because every location is exposed to an

individual set of dynamics and factors. For local authorities, a properly managed and well-defined parking scheme fulfils a number of criteria. It is a service to the public, residents and visitors alike. It contributes to support businesses as part of a wider economic development strategy and also subsidises other Council services.

Advertising and Promotion

- 2.20** 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.
- 2.21** 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.
- 2.22** It is recommended that officers develop a marketing and promotion plan, in conjunction with local businesses, to showcase the shopping, tourism and leisure offer within the district. The cost of this plan is anticipated to be up to £5,000, which can be funded from the existing budget for Economic Initiatives.

Financial Appraisal

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- 3.1** 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. There is no statutory requirement to ring-fence any surpluses generated for transport improvements (as is the case for on-street parking charges) but instead go towards supporting the cost of the Council's overall delivery services for residents, business and visitors.
- 3.2** Offering free parking in the off-street car parks on Saturdays in Central Lewes would cost the Council at least £184,000 in lost revenue (based on ticket sales in 2013/14) which would increase the Council's cumulative savings target of £2.958m through to 2019/20. The impact of this requested change should also be seen in the context of a projected £100,000 shortfall in parking revenue compared with the current budget, as reported to Cabinet in July 2014.

Legal Implications

The Legal Services Department has made the following comments:

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- 4.1** In the event that the officer recommendations are approved there are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 4.2** In the event that Cabinet wishes to offer free parking for a period of time the Council will need to publish prior statutory notice to this effect.

Sustainability Implications

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- 5.1** Shaping parking provision can contribute to achieving many objectives including economic and environmental objectives. LDC's parking provision, in partnership with ESCC, aims to strike a balance between encouraging turnover of spaces but reducing environmental impact caused by congestion and pollution.
- 5.2** The Council ran a free parking trial in Seaford over the Christmas 2012 holiday period. Anecdotal evidence from shops and business owners was that spaces in the car parks did not turn over efficiently and the only people who benefitted were the employees of the businesses who were able to park all day, close to their place of work. In turn, this type of arrangement leads to congestion which then impacts of air quality and road safety.

Risk Management Implications

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- 6.1** As stated in para 3.1 and 3.2, offering free parking off-street on a Saturday would have a financial implication for the affordability of the parking scheme and would also impact other Council services. Mitigation options include considering an increase to the current parking tariff or extending the operating hours where charges apply.

Equality Screening

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- 7.1** Offering free parking on a Saturday may assist with reducing inequalities faced by certain socio-economic groups. However, those in the lower income brackets may not either have cars, or choose to use them, and it

is therefore less certain that lower income households would benefit from the initiative.

- 7.2** Blue badge holders do not pay for parking anywhere in the District and so would be unaffected by the proposal.

Background Papers

8 None

Appendices

9 None