

SUBJECT:	Car Park Charges Review
REPORT OF:	Officer Management Team - Director of Services Prepared by - Head of Environment

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report back on the results of the consultation exercise recently undertaken in relation to the Council's pay and display car parks.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1 SBDC's public car parks contribute to the Council's medium term aim of planning for a thriving and sustainable South Bucks, with vibrant towns and villages.
- 2.2 This matter also contributes to the Council's aim to deliver value for money services that are driven by customer and community needs.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's pay and display car park charges were reviewed in September 2013 and the PAG agreed to advise the Portfolio Holder to consult on the following proposals:
- A general increase of 10p per transaction;
 - A modest increase in season ticket prices;
 - To have free parking in the Council's car parks on one or two Saturdays in December 2013 at an approximate cost of £3,000 per Saturday.
- 3.2 The Council provides off street car parking in order to meet its obligations to secure good traffic management. The proposed increase in car parking charges is to compensate for inflation so that SBDC can continue with this provision.
- 3.3 The general increase in charges of 10p per transaction is estimated to provide an additional £61,000 in a full financial year. As a suggestion, an increase of 5% in season ticket prices is estimated to provide an additional £4,500.
- 3.4 The predicted car park income for 13/14 is £876,000 against a budget of £916,000 i.e. a shortfall for 13/14 of £40,000. The shortfall is due to lower ticket sales than anticipated and fewer excess charge notices being issued.

- 3.5 The PAG supported the proposal that the car park income budget for 2014-15 at this stage and for budgetary purposes should be set at £934,300, that is to say an increase of 2% in line with the Council's general increase in charges. Therefore to stay on budget for next year there needs to be an increase in income of at least £58,320. The current charges and suggested new charges are shown in Appendix A. Appendix B shows the charges going back to 2004.
- 3.6 There is to be an extensive survey shortly of parking requirements in both Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross.

4. Response to Consultation

4.1 Letters were sent out to consult on the charging proposals to all parish and town councils and various statutory consultees as well as a number of local business organisations and newspapers. The consultation ended on 8th November. The comments received are summarised at Appendix C. The actual letters and emails may be found in the Member's Room prior to the PAG meeting.

4.2 There were responses from seven consultees: four from Burnham and three from Gerrards Cross.

General increase

4.3 Respondents were against this increase. The prevailing view is that free short term parking would generate more business for local shops and reduce congestion caused by on street parking.

Season tickets

4.4 Respondents were also against this proposal, except for one resident who felt that season ticket prices should be increased as their users were not contributing to the local economy. The view from a local business however was that more and cheaper season tickets would be desirable for their staff.

Christmas

4.5 The proposal to allow free parking in all the Council's car parks for one or two Saturdays in December 2013 in order to encourage the use of local shops was welcomed though not mentioned by several respondents. It was felt that free short term parking was more important. (This proposal was considered by Cabinet on 19th November.)

Burnham

4.6 The largest response to the consultation was from Burnham. It was felt that increases in charges would be damaging to businesses in the High Street and that some form of free parking should be introduced such as one day a week or early/late in the day. There was also reference to an announcement by the parliamentary select committee on Transport on the subject of local authority parking enforcement. Respondents felt that fines were excessive.

Summary

- 4.7 Members' views are therefore sought, in light of the comments received, as to whether the proposed 10p general increase and the suggested 5% increase in season ticket prices should go ahead in order to meet the proposed budgeted income figure of £934,300 in 14/15.

5. Timetable to report/implement changes

- 5.1 The timetable for implementing any amendments to the charges is as follows:

- Report back all comments following consultation to the Environment PAG - 4th December 2013;
- Portfolio Holder recommendations to Cabinet - 10th February 2014;
- Full Council to consider proposals - 25th February 2014;
- New charges come into force 7th April 2014.

6. Financial and other implications

- 6.1 The predicted car park income for 13/14 is £876,000 against a budget of £916,000 i.e. a shortfall for 13/14 of £40,000. The shortfall is due to lower ticket sales than anticipated and fewer excess charge notices being issued. The proposed budgeted income for 14/15 is £934,300, including 2% growth. Therefore to stay on budget for next year there needs to be an increase in income of at least £58,320.
- 6.2 The estimated additional income for the new charges is £65,500. This would cover the shortfall of £40,000 plus the 2% budget increase of £18,000 plus some contingency in case of falling revenues.
- 6.3 Car park usage should increase as the national economy recovers and on street enforcement progresses. Officers anticipate that revenue will increase by 2.5% in 2015-16, that is to say by an additional £23,700.

7. Risks

- 7.1 Following the recent case of Attfield -v- Barnet Council which has attracted attention in the media and at DCLG, it is clear that the Council cannot use parking charges as a way of raising revenue to subsidise general revenue balances. The Council is entitled to cover the costs of providing off street parking through its parking charges. However, Barnet were successfully challenged over an increase in on-street parking charges because they already made a surplus on their parking charges.
- 7.2 In exercising its off-street parking functions under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (which includes the setting of parking charges) the Council is required to "to secure the expeditious, convenient and

safe movement of vehicular traffic (including pedestrians) and the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities, on and off the highway”. Provided the Council sets its charges to meet these traffic management benefits an increase can be justified even if this would make a surplus.

- 7.3 The PAG will therefore need to be satisfied that any increase in charges can be justified on traffic management grounds. In this regard it is relevant to note that parking charges do need to be set in comparison to other public and private sector providers otherwise you get displacement parking and traffic congestion as drivers try to find/use the cheapest alternative.
- 7.4 Following any increase in charges, some customers may seek to park elsewhere, at least for a few months after the event. There is therefore a risk that revenue may decrease. Tickets sales are the lowest they have been for five years, so clearly any increase in price could reduce numbers further.
- 7.5 The economic situation remains uncertain and this may also affect predicted revenue.

8. Summary

- 8.1 Members of the PAG are therefore asked to note the contents of this report and advise the Portfolio Holder as to whether the suggested increases in charges and season tickets detailed in Appendix A should be recommended to Cabinet for implementation.

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Background Papers:	None