

**DRAFT MINUTE FROM BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL 19 JANUARY 2021 –
PETITION FOR DEBATE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION
SCHEME.**

FREE PARKING HADLEIGH (Draft and subject to changes)

- 40.1 The Chair read the Petition as detailed in the Agenda.
- 40.2 The Monitoring Officer outlined the process to be followed for the debate, detailed under Part B of Section 3.1 of the Petitions Scheme contained in the Constitution.
- 40.3 The Monitoring Officer advised Members that questions had been received from Hadleigh Town Council and a member of the public regarding the subject matter of the petition and the Chairman had agreed to vary the order of business on the Agenda to take these questions at the same time as the petition.
- 40.4 The Monitoring Officer also advised that as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recently considered the proposed Parking Policy report the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to present any comments from the Committee which were relevant to the debate.
- 40.5 The Chair invited the petition organiser, Mr Laing, to present the petition.

Mr Laing made the following presentation:

Whilst other Councils across the Country are introducing periods of free parking to try and encourage footfall in the high street, this Cabinet, having established that the average parking time is 64 minutes, has cynically sought to charge after only 30 minutes. Babergh's own Q and A page has a link to the Association of Town and City Management, to a report they clearly attach some weight to. From that report Rugby Council are working with retailers to shape parking. The retailers can issue permits to customers for 4 hours free parking. Another example, not from the report, Tees Valley has just these months introduced free parking for a minimum stay of two hours, up to a maximum of three hours. This policy to be in place for two years.

Tees Valley's Mayor has said that everyone across our region deserves a vibrant and thriving high street, that can still flourish in an age of online shopping. They are the life blood of our area and introducing free parking can help make them an even more dynamic and vibrant place to live and do business.

From the statutory guidance for Local Authorities on Enforcing Parking restrictions, the Secretary of State recommends that enforcement authorities, should consult locally on their parking policies when they appraise them, they should seek the views of people and businesses with a range of different parking needs, including the views of the police. The appraisal should take account of the impact on the local economy and the viability of local shops and high streets. To my knowledge none of this has happened.

The British Retail Consortium has warned of conditions getting worse for non-essential shops and the high street generally. Retail figures for 2020 are the worst on record except

for food and online shopping. The Centre for Retail research has said that 2020 was the worst for high street job losses in 25 years.

This proposal in its present form fails. It fails for not engaging with town and parish councils. It fails for not engaging with local businesses or the general public and it fails to not take into account the demise of the high street and the need to rebuild.

This meeting can and should be the start of that engagement and collaboration, so I urge the cabinet to think again and to delay any decision until a more inclusive proposal is forthcoming.

40.6 The Chair invited the Mayor of Hadleigh, Frank Minns to ask his question:

Question 1

Councillor Minns on behalf of Hadleigh Town Council to ask the following question to Councillor Malvisi, Cabinet Member for Environment:

In the light of the widespread opposition to the introduction of short-term parking charges in Hadleigh, illustrated by the petition the Council is to consider, does BDC now agree that the proposal should be withdrawn and a coherent plan for parking across the town be developed through consultation with HTC and residents?

Response from Councillor Malvisi, Cabinet Member for Environment:

As I explained to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee yesterday, I carefully listened to their debate and I will listen to this debate this evening and I note Councillor Minns comments and suggestions, I do anticipate that the proposal being considered by Cabinet in February will differ greatly to the current proposal.

The Chair invited Mr Young, a Hadleigh resident to ask his question:

Question 2

Mr Roger Young to ask the following question to Councillor Malvisi, Cabinet Member for Environment:

I start by noting that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are suggesting that the parking management and principles as mentioned in Appendix A be implemented no sooner than September 2021.

How is it sensible to implement the changes in Appendix A before the results of the comprehensive parking strategy review is completed and publicly reviewed surely, implementation should wait for the result of the review, otherwise time and money might be spent unnecessarily and create confusion for the public.

Response from Councillor Malvisi, Cabinet Member for Environment:

The difference between the Parking Strategy Review (including future paths steered by development requirements) and what we are doing now, is that this is a 'Current Needs Analysis'. Appendix A is what we need to be doing right now; the Strategy looks ahead at future needs, our needs in 5-10 years if not longer.

Supplementary Question:

I come from a base where in management you need to first get the facts. None of us know **now** what the new normal will be when Covid subsides.

We don't know how the public's shopping habits will change, or what the High Street will look like.

Can Council abort the current parking proposals until we have reliable data, that the strategy document should produce?

Response from Councillor Malvisi, Cabinet Member for Environment:

Earlier last year the Council passed the Climate Change Action Plan and the Biodiversity Action Plan and that we need to incorporate, adopt, recognise new modes of transport. Our parking provision for bicycles, to start to provide facilities for electrical vehicles whether it be electric cars or electric bicycles and ordinary pedal bikes, we have a very poor provision for these services in our car parks and we need to get that done and we need to do that now, not in five to ten years.

40.7 The Chair invited the Ward Member for Hadleigh North Ward, Councillor Dawson to speak:

Councillor Dawson thanked the Hadleigh resident, who brought forward this petition. She fully understood and realised there was need to balance Babergh's budget, but it was not the right time to introduce these hard-hitting parking tariffs hidden in the budget. Any decisions that affect so many businesses and people should be assessed following proper consultation as discussed by Mr Young, and an understanding of the local issues and how this has come about. She felt that issues were not properly addressed in the report, which she outlined as follows:

- Why was there no consultation with stakeholders i.e. local businesses, shoppers or residents?
- Why was there no communication with county councillors, local district councillors, town councillors or even the Mayor?

She questioned the value of the information and the timing of the snapshot study on which the proposal was based, and she thought that this kind of decision should not be based on informal observations taken in February. There was no evidence of the algorithms used, of the displacement of cars to side streets, the environmental damage and the generation of further carbon emissions, which we are meant to be reducing and most importantly, the effect it had on the local economy in Hadleigh.

Councillor Beer and she had over a year ago requested a comprehensive parking strategy review, which to date, neither of them had been consulted on. She thought that this parking review with increased tariffs had been 'slipped' into the annual budget and it seemed that the proposal had been pushed forward to provide a plug for the £45K debt in Hadleigh.

40.8 The Chair invited the Ward Member for Hadleigh South, Councillor Fraser to speak.

Councillor Fraser thanked Mr Laing for raising the petition, and the Hadleigh residents for signing it, The Petition showed the strengths of feeling in the town He commented that free parking was a unique selling point of Hadleigh and that the residents of Hadleigh were concerned over the survival of the economy of the town.

Councillor Fraser thought that the reason the report had not been well received was because of the way in which the Council had communicated the plans.

Councillor Fraser continued that the two main points from the e-petition were that new parking charges would have an impact on new outlets which had recently been opened and also existing, well established businesses. He agreed with the Mayor of Hadleigh that a full consultation was needed with input from the Town Council, businesses, the Mayor and the Chamber of Commerce. He also advised that a full impact statement of the effect of businesses emerging from Covid-19 pandemic was required.

Councillor Fraser commented that businesses in the area had already been negatively affected by other policies such as the 'Safer Places Scheme' which had not been subject to proper consultation and that business say unanimously that free parking will affect their businesses. He summed up by confirming that the petition had his full support.

40.9 The Chair of the Council, Councillor Grandon, then responded to the petition in her capacity as Ward Member for Hadleigh South and emphasised that she was not speaking in her role as Chairman.

40.10 Councillor Grandon expressed her support for the petition and commented that the planned parking charges would have an effect on the whole town. Councillor Grandon went on to state that the proposal was purely for economic reasons to support Babergh District Council's budget with no regard for the economic health of Hadleigh. The Parking deficit for Hadleigh was only £45K.

40.11 She supported the call for consultation, local Members were not consulted. She did not support any change to short term parking fees, as it would lead to future price increases. She highlighted that while other local authorities were ceasing parking charging, Babergh was introducing charges and this would have an effect on the recovery of businesses from the Covid-19 pandemic and many businesses were operating on slim margins anyway. She felt that the timing of the implementation of the parking charges should be delayed until April 2022 or until after the completion of the Strategic Parking Review. The shortest period of free parking she found acceptable was 2 hours churn is not an issue in Hadleigh. She also felt that parking

fees for Hadleigh should be lower than Sudbury. For some a parking charge of £1 was a lot of money.

- 40.12 Councillor Malvisi responded to the petition and informed Members that the petition asked to maintain free car parking in Hadleigh, however the free car parking in both Hadleigh and Sudbury were a subsidised and a discretionary service provided by the Council. She reiterated that the report going to Cabinet in February would be revised and would take the comments made both at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and this meeting into account. However, the car parks in Hadleigh required updating to include bike parking and electrical vehicle charging points. She assured Members that people did not drive to a town because it provided free parking but for what people needed in town. Hadleigh also had a lot to offer tourists.
- 40.13 She continued that a revised policy was needed to enable car parks to be financially sustainable and that any revenue from the car parks would be spent for projects associated with car parking.
- 40.14 The Chair of the Council invited the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak.
- 40.15 Councillor McCraw referred to the amended proposal and the substantiated proposal and recommendations in the tabled minutes. He outlined the scrutiny process to Members and explained the differences between the two proposals. He pointed out to Members that a Parking Strategy Review would take 18 months and that it appeared that the Council did not have this option available due to budget constraints. He stated that the tabled draft minutes and recommendations were sufficient to explain the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and he commended the paper to Council.
- 40.16 The Chair of the Council then outlined the rules for debating the petition in Council.
- 40.17 Councillor Ward did not see the purpose of the petition. The Council could no longer justify the subsidy of car parks in the District, especially as this was a burden for all residents in the District. The Council needed to free up the funding which covered the upkeep of the car parks as the Government was cutting funding for local authorities forcing the Council to cut costs in some areas and diverting the funding to maintain vital services for residents. It was generally expected that car parks were self-sustaining. There was no evidence that parking charges reduced footfall as footfall was based on the demand of shoppers. In the current climate free services were no longer possible. It had always been the intention to introduce parking charges once the Covid-19 Pandemic was in decline, as part of future plans to ensure that the car parks could support the demand for parking. There is confusion over the long term strategy review being undertaken. This will support plans for our vision work and have the capacity to support population work.
- 40.18 Councillor Adrian Osborne understood the concerns raised; however, the Council needed to balance the budget to ensure that all services could be delivered and driven forward. An implementation date in late 2021 or early 2022 had been suggested. He thought the decision had been based on facts and not assumption.

He would like the Strategic Parking Review to include a review of residents parking permits in our car parks.

- 40.19 Councillor Beer referred to the Motion on the 22 September 2019 which called for a review of parking in Sudbury and Hadleigh. This included talking to partners and stakeholders such as Suffolk County Council, Babergh District Council and the Town Councils. He had asked for a working group to be set up but that had so far not happened. He thought the car parking scheme would be charging more for less car parking spaces and that shoppers would have less time, hitting motorists with increases and charges. There was a risk that shoppers would drive further to the larger town in the County, if they had to pay for parking anyway or drivers would drive around looking for free parking spaces and this would have an impact on Council's wish to reduce carbon. He agreed that there was a need to provide better disabled car parking spaces.
- 40.20 Councillor Owen thought that three hours free parking helps to maintain the footfall, which helped employment and town management. There would be far reaching impact on retailers because of the anticipated decrease in footfall. Free car parking was a way to attract visitors to the towns apart from the friendly and sociable people. Sudbury could not offer the larger outlets that other towns could, and offering free parking was a main attraction along with social tolerance. She thought that the implementation of parking charges would result in losing shops, lower employment, more families on lower income, less business rates and lower Babergh income. She continued, when would congestion and air quality be reduced and by how much.
- 40.21 Councillor Fraser focused on the damage the parking charges would do to Hadleigh and that there had been a lot of damage to the economy and that the high street was fragile. Hadleigh was to lose one of its larger outlets. The High street was unique in what it delivered and could not be compared to other towns in the area. The Country was in crisis due to the pandemic and this had an impact on the footfall. He thought that parking charges should be introduced later and that there should not be any change to parking arrangements until a post Covid-19 impact assessment could be conducted. He thought that the one-hour free parking would not be enough and although there was a fair amount of car parking spaces available there was a risk that the parking charges would result that shoppers would look for free parking in side streets and clog up the streets. He thought that a consultation should take place along with engagement with businesses and that members were here to support businesses and he therefor supported the petition.
- 40.22 Councillor Barrett was disappointed that this was not a full debate and only responding to the petition, but pleased that the Cabinet had listened. However, changes to reduce free parking should be considered carefully, as it could have an adverse impact, and this was not the time to discourage shoppers to come to Hadleigh. There was no justification for introducing the parking charges now, as money had been found in the budget for the next year and could not be considered urgent. There had already been a removal of parking spaces in Market Hill, which had had an impact on footfall. She highlighted the point that there had not been a full assessment to understand the footfall and she had a resistance to support

paying for parking and queried how much income the Council would actually receive.

- 40.23 Councillor Lindsay raised a point of clarification in respect of Councillor Beer's comments regarding the Motion agreed by Council and advised that this had been amended to examine what level of car parking capacity would be appropriate.
- 40.24 Councillor Lindsay highlighted the Council's plans to reduce carbon emissions by 2030 and the role of sustainable travel plays in this plan. He went on to comment that he agreed with the principle of parking charges in general and felt that free parking should not be subsidised by all taxpayers. He considered Babergh needed to make it clear much would be it spend on sustainable trave if car parking charges were introduced.
- 40.25 Councillor Jamieson commented on the lack of consultation and felt that the proposal should be looked at as part of a wider transport strategy. Increasing traffic churn would have detrimental impact on the carbon reduction, and he reminded Members that the Council was committed to carbon reduction. He thought the report was being brought forward to Council at the wrong time.
- 40.26 Councillor Ayres raised concerns over the effect of parking charges on future footfall figures in the town. Councillor Ayres felt that two hours of free parking was necessary to allowed families and elderly enough time to park and go shopping and added, especially now because of the longer queuing times as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 40.27 Councillor Maybury responded to a query from Councillor Fraser regarding the car parks in Lavenham and confirmed that Lavenham Parish Council wished to take over ownership of car parks in the parish.
- 40.28 Councillor Maybury went on to state, in response to Councillor Malvisi's comments regarding residents subsidising free parking, that this argument could be applied to many projects. Councillor Maybury raised the issue of potential annual increases if parking charges were introduced and that these annual increases should not take for place for at least three, if not five years and concluded by stating that that she believed this was the wrong time to introduce charges.
- 40.29 Councillor Cresswell commented that Sudbury and Hadleigh should not be divided but work together on this issue. He thought that a survey conducted in February would provide a different result than one conducted in July. The free parking from Saturday noon and all-day Sunday, encouraged families to come to Sudbury and spend the day in town. He therefore felt that the current status should be maintained to encourage people to come to Sudbury. He thought that this was the wrong time to introduce parking charges due to the current climate, and that this had nothing to do with green policies. More strategic work should be conducted to invest in infrastructure to get people from the villages into Sudbury and he supported the petitions.

- 40.30 Councillor Carpendale was pleased to hear that the report would be changed regarding timings and costs when the report went back to Cabinet. She sympathised with the concerns raised for the reality of the impact on the high street charges, which might put people off coming into town. She endorsed the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, namely the one-hour free parking and the deferred implementation date for Hadleigh and Sudbury. However, residents and Councillors must face the realities of the present and future for the costs and financing. She thought it was a pity that the report had surfaced ahead of a comprehensive Parking Review and lacked a transport strategy which should be integrated with the environmental aims for carbon reduction in the District. She added that the handling of the matter had been unfortunate, and she hoped the process would be reviewed, including the lack of consultation and involvement of local businesses.
- 40.31 Councillor Plumb asked Members to consider the options of Hadleigh and Sudbury taking over the management of the car parks similar to Lavenham or if that was not possible, then perhaps the Town Council would be interested in subsidising the second hour to provide two hours free parking in the towns.
- 40.32 Councillor Dawson **PROPOSED** that Council supported the petition, which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Beer.
- 40.33 Councillor Owen requested a recorded vote, which was supported by Councillors Maybury, Beer, Ayres and Cresswell.

NOTE: The meeting adjourned between 7:14 pm and 7:25 pm.

Members voted on the proposed recommendation.
By 14 votes for and 14 votes against and 2 abstentions.

The Chair used her casting vote, and the vote was **CARRIED**.

It was RESOLVED :-

That Council supports the petition.

For	Against	Abstain
	Cllr Clive Arthey	
Cllr Sue Ayres		
Cllr Melanie Barrett		
Cllr Peter Beer		
Cllr David Busby		
	Cllr Sue Carpendale	
Cllr Trevor Cresswell		Cllr Derek Davis
Cllr Sian Dawson		
Cllr Mick Fraser		
Cllr Honor Grainger-Howard		
Cllr Kathryn Grandon		
	Cllr Ric Hardacre	
	Cllr Michael Holt	
Cllr Bryn Hurren		
Cllr Leigh Jamieson		
	Cllr Robert Lindsay	
	Cllr Elisabeth Malvisi	
Cllr Margaret Maybury		
	Cllr Alastair McCraw	
	Cllr Mary McLaren	
	Cllr Mark Newman	
	Cllr Zac Norman	
Cllr John Nunn		
	Cllr Adrian Osborne	
	Cllr Jan Osborne	
Cllr Alison Owen		Cllr Lee Parker
	Cllr Stephen Plumb	
	Cllr John Ward	
14 Votes FOR	14 Votes AGAINST	2 ABSTENTIONS