

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Cabinet	REPORT NUMBER: BCa/23/33
FROM: Councillor David Busby, Leader of the Council	DATE OF MEETING: 09/01/2024
OFFICER: Mark Emms, Director of Operations	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB451

FEES AND CHARGES - CAR PARKING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Babergh Council has an approved Parking Strategy for 2022-2042 and this report proposes the next action for the charge's theme within this strategy.
- 1.2 Subsidising the current 3-hour free parking in council car parks in villages and towns including Sudbury, Hadleigh and Lavenham, cost the council approximately £425K this year. The cost is set to increase further next year and given a budget gap of at least £1.5m, the Council cannot continue this level of subsidy if wants to deliver its approved car parking strategy and to continue delivering other essential services for residents and communities.
- 1.3 This report considers options and makes recommendations for the decision-making process to vary car park charges, giving due consideration to engagement, expediency, and risk.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Options that have been considered and shared with cabinet include outsourcing of car parks to an external provider, not varying the charges and varying the charges.
- 2.2 Outsourcing to another provider has been rejected based on factors such as diminished control of tariff setting and road traffic order requirements, distracting focus on contract management and contract value versus strategy delivery, and incompatibility between on-street and off-street enforcement delivery not leading to any perceived savings.
- 2.3 Not varying the charges has been rejected as this will make delivery of the agreed strategy unaffordable, and this option was previously rejected by cabinet in 2021.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Carry out engagement and consultation with the four town and parish councils which the council owned car parks are located in, and with Babergh Councillors and with any other recognised groups making representation over the engagement period.
- 3.2 A proposal for varying car parking charges and road traffic orders across Babergh Council car parks will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their examination and advice to Cabinet.

3.3 Proposals will be brought to Babergh Cabinet (after presenting to O&S) for varying car parking charges and off-street road traffic orders across Babergh Council car parks.

REASON FOR DECISION

Varying car parking charges had previously been agreed by Cabinet. To deliver the approved parking strategy and remove the budget burden of subsidising this service from other non-parking income, varying charges must now be urgently considered.

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 Babergh Cabinet approved and published its long-term Parking Strategy for 2022-2042 in October 2022 and has since started to make changes to the service over the last year, including the introduction of on-line purchasing of digital permits to park, commencing the roll out of new car park signage required and required car park enhancements and updating the car park website pages.
- 4.2 The approved strategy recognises a range of service themes including enforcement, technology, land use, sustainable transport, designation, quality, capacity and charges.
- 4.3 To progress delivery of the approved strategy funding is required, and the strategy theme of varying charges needs to be progressed from the current postponed decision position.
- 4.4 The parking service is subsidised by other non-parking derived income and this is neither fair to non-car users or financially sustainable to the Council. Parking for the first 3 hours is currently free of charge (other than Pin Mill, Chelmondiston), and is free all day in Lavenham, despite tariffs being set lower than other local councils.
- 4.5 It is proposed that targeted engagement and consultation will be carried out by officers with Sudbury, Hadleigh, Lavenham and Chelmondiston Town and Parish Councils, District Councillors, County Councillors, and any other recognised groups making representations over this period, which is expected to run during January and into early February 2024. It is envisaged that this part of the process may take 4-6 weeks to complete, with views and evidence being sought that will inform proposed variations to tariffs and associated off-street road traffic orders.
- 4.6 Detailed consultation has already been carried out to inform the councils approved parking strategy and this further short piece of engagement and consultation work is aimed at obtaining any additional local intelligence or recent changes that will minimise any unintended operational consequences of proposed changes. Any evidence that that is presented or obtained from site survey will be considered.
- 4.7 Communication releases were made on Friday 15th December to the press, District Councillors and the four town and parish councils where council car parks are located.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 Whilst the Councils corporate plan is about to be updated, and this report is to agree a process as opposed to the actual proposal to vary charges, clear links from a future proposal to the corporate plan can be assumed.
- 5.2 Sustainability - this is a core theme in the Councils proposed new corporate plan, and it should be noted that the car parking service financial position is currently 'not' sustainable.
- 5.3 Environment and Sustainable Travel - see section 11 Environmental Implications.
- 5.4 Economy - ensuring car parking spaces are appropriately used to support the town centres and their vitality, whilst also providing spaces for workers and commuters and making sure the car parks, which are often a gateway to the town centres, are attractive and welcoming.
- 5.5 Development and Regeneration - supporting delivery of key town centre projects and active travel cross-town links.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Subsidising the current 3-hour free car parking in place in most of the Councils car parks will cost approximately £425,000 this year (revenue and corporate overhead only), with costs set to increase further in 2024-25. This cost is subsidised through other non-parking income, and considering predicted budget pressures this subsidy is no longer sustainable.
- 6.2 The proposals will include details of all current and projected service expenditure, including inter service impacts, along with proposed tariff variations and projected income levels.
- 6.3 It should be recognised that due to the required legal and operational change processes, it is likely to take around 6 months from a decision to the point of implementing any agreed new tariffs. The level of in-year benefit would need to be considered against this and any presented transformation costs.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Any agreed variation to charges is expected to require the councils off-street road traffic order to be updated. This is a statutory process which must be carried out in accordance with law. The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, together with the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England & Wales) Regulation 1996, set out the procedure the Council must follow. The Council is required to publish the proposed (updated) order in the car park and in the local press. The Council must also consult with the County Council (who must consent to the order) and other appropriate organisations including the Police. Cabinet must consider all representations received before making the order.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The Key corporate risk which the recommendation in this report could contribute to a reduction in likelihood is:

Key Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Key Mitigation Measures	Risk Register and Reference
Babergh District Council may fail to be financially sustainable	3	3	Robust Medium term financial strategy, shared integrated workforce with Mid Suffolk.	Strategic Risk Register SRR08BDC

- 8.2 A significant risk the Council faces is not being financially sustainable if it does not adequately address budgets shortfalls in its medium-term financial plan. As a significant council income line, varying parking charges is key to delivering the agreed car parking strategy, as well as reducing the future predicted shortfall.
- 8.3 Risk associated to the proposal will be covered fully in the next reporting stage. For the purposes of the recommendations in this report, officers and leaders have been transparent in producing early communications, have committed to further targeted engagement and consultation, and bringing the proposal back via the Overview and Scrutiny committee before Cabinet.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 This is covered in section 4. Key Information and forms a key part of the proposal and recommendation.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 There are no specific equalities implications that directly affect any groups with protected characteristics at this stage. The report proposes a consultation on parking charges only. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will be carried out at the next stage for the proposal.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Environment - tariffs can influence driver behaviour and encourage modal shift to other, more sustainable forms of transport. This could reduce traffic congestion and cruising for spaces, and lead to associated improvement in local in town air quality issues. Modal shift to other types of transport into town will likely include multi-modal journeys with elements of active travel, which in turn brings additional public health and well-being benefits
- 11.2 Sustainable Travel - additional funding could contribute to a range of sustainable transport initiatives and interventions. BDC is developing a pipeline of potential projects that could be implemented if funded, including, but not limited to;
- increasing provision of electric vehicle charging points in car parks,
 - increase provision of cycle parking, e-bike charging, bike maintenance facilities and e-bike rental pilots

- new passenger transport provisions
- delivering active travel infrastructure
- behaviour change engagement to encourage and enable modal shift

11.3 If progressed and subject to further investigation and feasibility assessments, these interventions would focus on balancing the needs of all road users and would support Local Transport Plan priorities (including junction improvements), Pinch Point mitigation, the council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13.1 The Council's Parking Strategy can be viewed on our website <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/w/parking-strategy>

14. REPORT AUTHORS

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