

## **BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH CABINET** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 8 April 2024

### **PRESENT:**

Councillors:	Jessie Carter	Sallie Davies
	Derek Davis	Alastair McCraw
	Daniel Potter	Deborah Saw
	John Ward (Chair)	Helen Davies

### **In attendance:**

Councillor(s): Simon Dowling  
Kathryn Grandon  
Ruth Hendry  
Mary McLaren  
Adrian Osborne  
Alison Owen  
Brian Riley

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)  
Interim Monitoring Officer (JR)  
Director – Operations & Climate Change (ME)  
Director – Housing (DF) – via hybrid  
Housing Transformation Manager (DW)  
Parking Services Manager (MS)  
Sustainable Transport Officer (KD)  
Finance Business Partner (JB)  
Governance Officer (BW)

### **Apologies:**

Councillors: David Busby (Chair)

### **95 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS**

95.1 None received.

### **96 BCA/23/47 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 MARCH 2024**

**It was RESOLVED: -**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 March 2024 be confirmed and signed as correct record.**

**97 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME**

97.1 The Governance Officer advised the Committee that a petition had been received on Council Car Park Charges with 7825 validated signatures. The petition has been debated at Full council in accordance with the Council's petition procedure rules.

**98 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS**

98.1 None received.

**99 MATTERS REFERRED BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OR JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

99.1 There were no matters referred from the Overview and Scrutiny or the Joint Audit and Standard Committees

**100 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST**

100.1 There were no comments made by Councillors.

**101 BCA/23/48 CAR PARKING CHARGES AND ROAD TRAFFIC ORDERS**

101.1 The Chair introduced the report as Acting Leader of the Council.

101.2 Councillor John Ward proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Derek Davis seconded this motion.

101.3 The Chair invited the Monitoring Officer to advise Members of the Cabinet on predetermination.

101.4 Councillor Derek Davis questioned why Community Interest Companies (CICs) were not allowed to take over the running of individual car parks. Councillor John Ward responded that there was little appetite for people to run CICs. Councillor Deborah Saw added that she had spoken to the Community Interest Company Regulator and there were few examples of CICs running car parks across the country and the ones that do exist all charge for parking as there was a need to maintain the car park. Additionally, there were issues with taxation for CICs as whilst Babergh could give business rates relief Suffolk County Council and central government would need to agree to give business tax relief. The Director – Operations & Climate Change added that paragraph 2.5 of the report covered the findings on CICs and the risks involved, also there were other costs that needed to be covered from charges.

- 101.5 Councillor Jessie Carter highlighted that she had spoken to the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce who were open to the possibility of a CIC to run car parks.
- 101.6 Councillor Sallie Davies questioned whether town and parish councils were consulted on the use of CICs. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that town and parish councils were not approached on the use of CICs as it was raised by the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce and officers looked into the feasibility of CICs and determined that the use of CICs for the primary purpose of avoidance of business rates would not be possible, and that enforcement responsibilities would be complicated, resulting in less economy of scale and was not consulted on throughout the district for this reason.
- 101.7 Councillor Derek Davis questioned whether the use of ANPR had been explored for short term parking at leisure centres and medical centres. The Parking Services Manager responded that the use of technology would be explored and for medical centres MiPermit would be used for users to check in their vehicles digitally.
- 101.8 Councillor Deborah Saw questioned whether the use of demand pricing had been considered. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that the current proposal was designed for workers and visitors to towns and that the data on usage would need to be understood to see if this was possible going forward.
- 101.9 Councillor Sallie Davies asked for detail on the implications of an element of free parking. Councillor John Ward responded that a free parking period of an hour would create a loss between £200,000 and £260,000 which would have a cumulative impact in future years. The Director – Operations & Climate Change added that a free parking was not an option that Cabinet wanted to take forward in the previous proposal considered by the Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024, however it had been questioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the figures for this had been included in the report, based on loss of 1 hour income and loss of 10-20% of 2 hour income by migration to free 1 hour tickets. Also, if free parking was implemented this would affect the ability to improve the car parks and it would encourage behaviour that would make enforcement more difficult.
- 101.10 Councillor Jessie Carter highlighted the effect that charges would have on residential streets and referred to point 11.3 in the report and questioned whether the funds for these possible projects could be used to subsidise parking. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that the Council did not currently have the money for these projects, however there

was resourcing to commence some surveys for on-street parking and results could be taken to Suffolk County Council regarding resident parking zones, which might be able to be funded if charges are increased.

101.11 Councillor Daniel Potter questioned why the Quay Theatre car park in Sudbury was not charged. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that the Quay Theatre car park was further out than the main car parks and it was not proposed to add charges into this car park to maintain an element of free parking.

101.12 Councillor Derek Davis questioned whether on street parking spaces could be reduced to half an hour to allow for short visits. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that this was a sensible suggestion and that if resources allowed detailed work with the towns could be undertaken and on street enforcement could be used to help turn over these spaces by introducing some appropriate time restrictions.

101.13 Councillor Deborah Saw queried the use of revenue to fund public transport and asked for more detail on what options would be. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that whilst the Council could not solve all public transport issues, the revenue generated from parking could be used to obtain match funding for Government bids and would put the Council in a better position to resource writing bids. The Sustainable Transport Officer added that if funding was available the Council could make contributions to the current community transport provision such as the previous match funding to Go Start for an electric minibus and similar contributions could help to expand the fleet for hopper bus provision.

101.14 Councillor Sallie Davies asked for clarification on the consultation responses and the 48% of respondents that were against the charges. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that the consultation had been done carried out by the strategic policy team and they looked at mentions of themes in each response made, therefore themes may cross over and percentages would not add up to 100%.

101.15 Councillor Jessie Carter questioned why the responses in the consultation were not shown by town and village. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that the consultation was not a referendum on whether people wanted free parking or not and highlighted constructive themes and information from responses.

- 101.16 Councillor Jessie Carter further questioned where in the report the effect on the effect on businesses and health and wellbeing was considered. Councillor John Ward responded that the Council was looking at setting tariffs that did not affect businesses and in towns that have similar parking charges had thriving businesses. The Director – Operations & Climate Change added that appendix E of the report contained an Equality Impact Assessment screening form which had been signed off by the strategic policy team. Additionally, the Council was aware that there was the need within the car parks to consider the accessibility of the car parks for users with disabilities and mobility issues in terms of navigation.
- 101.17 Councillor Deborah Saw queried whether there was a way to mitigate school drop off and pick up traffic. The Parking Services Manager responded that there was the possibility to introduce a school permit that would allow a short period of parking at the beginning and end of the day.
- 101.18 Councillor Jessie Carter questioned what the cost of school parking permits would be. The Parking Services Manager responded that if agreed this cost would be investigated but it would be an administrative fee.
- 101.19 In response to questions from other Members present on how the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been considered by the Cabinet Councillor John Ward responded that a full response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be provided and of the 11 recommendations, 2 had been addressed by the Monitoring Officer during the meeting, 5 had been agreed in full and included in the report, 3 had been addressed in the report on why they were not possible and 1 had been accommodated partially.
- 101.20 In response to questions from other Members present regarding permits for residents Councillor John Ward responded that Babergh was not comparable to Tendering Council in relation to funding free parking permits for residents as they had larger car parks that had a high turnover for visitors which provided the funding for resident permits.
- 101.21 In response to questions from other Members present on the effects from tariffs on businesses Councillor John Ward responded that comparable towns had not been effected by car parking charges and vacancy rates were comparable to the towns in Babergh, however this would be monitored.
- 101.22 In response to questions from other Members present regarding the possibility of a free parking period of an hour Councillor John Ward responded that the possibility of a free parking period addressed in the report and would be considered in the debate.

- 101.23 In response to questions from other Members present on the cost increase on season tickets for shop workers Councillor John Ward responded that the costs of season tickets had not risen for some time however this would be monitored to see if the proposed rise is sustainable to ensure it is set at the right level.
- 101.24 In response to questions from other Members present regarding the consultation and engagement process the Director – Operations & Climate Change that a meeting was being arranged with Great Cornard and an email response had been received in January.
- 101.25 In response to questions from other Members present on the increased overhead costs the Finance Business Partner outlined that the budget figures in the report were different from the budget book figures as it was made up from contributions of all departments involved in parking.
- 101.26 In response to other Members questions regarding when charges would be reviewed Councillor John Ward responded that they would be reviewed every 2 years.
- 101.27 A short comfort break was taken between 12:32 – 12:46pm.
- 101.28 During the debate Councillor Alastair McCraw highlighted 4 groups that would be affected by the introduction of parking charges: the users of the car parks, the businesses, the non-users across the district, and the Councils.
- 101.29 Councillor Jessie Carter highlighted that those who lived in rural villages had no option but to rely on a car as there were little options for public transport, and the introduction of charges would impact those on lower incomes. Additionally, there was interest from the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce on the use of CICs for Sudbury car parks and other town councils may not have wanted to come forward with these proposals until after the Cabinet decision had been made. She added that in relation to arguments on non-users having to subsidise free parking that all residents paid for services that they did not use.
- 101.30 Councillor Daniel Potter referred to page 91 of the report and issues of sustainable transport and the lack of public transport in the district created a reliance on cars for residents and he was reluctant for subsidies on for sustainable transport options to come from car park fees.
- 101.31 Councillor Derek Davis outlined that the decision to not to implement the parking charges agreed by the previous administration had an impact on the budgets as it created losses, and it would be a mistake not to implement the proposals in the report, including no free parking period. Additionally, he did

not believe that the introduction of charges would not have an impact on businesses as residents would pay if the offer of the town was good and businesses were resilient and would factor in the impact of tariffs. He added that the introduction of tariffs had an impact on the District as a whole not just the towns and surrounding villages.

101.32 Councillor Sallie Davies highlighted that this was a hard decision, but she hoped that it could be nuanced for residents on low incomes and for school drop offs. She added that town centres and businesses failed for a number of reasons unrelated to car parking. Additionally, whilst all residents pay for services they do not use they were mandatory services such as homelessness support. Also, this was an opportunity to invest in sustainable transport which the Council did not have previously and would allow for the use of match funding. There was a responsibility for the car parks to cover their costs.

101.33 Councillor Deborah Saw outlined that whilst she was not enamoured with the introduction of parking charges, she was also not prepared to see cuts to leisure centres, enabling residents to heat their homes, and reductions to homelessness support. She added that the introduction of parking charges was not the only thing the Council would need to do in order to help with the future budget pressures. She added that she was prepared to look at ways to help residents with financial difficulties in relation to parking to mitigate the impact on those who are vulnerable.

101.34 Councillor Helen Davies suggested that permit systems for school drop offs and for residents on universal credit be included in proposal. Additionally, it would be useful to monitor the impact of the introduction of charges on town centres. She added that any profits from tariffs needed to be ringfenced for sustainable transport options.

101.35 In response to queries on free parking for users of medical centres the Director – Operations & Climate Change clarified that the health centres in Lavenham and Hadleigh and the screening facility at the Kingfisher Leisure Centre to set up virtual permit panels to allow those with appointments or collecting prescriptions to park for free in that period. He clarified that this would only be for medical centres that were directly accessed via Council owned car parks.

101.36 Councillor Jessie Carter highlighted that a review on the impact of charges on towns was necessary as it would deter people from visiting the towns and would have an impact on residential parking. She added that whilst Councillors needed to make hard decisions, they also needed to consider the views of the residents that they represented. Additionally, it was the role of

Councillors to provide alternatives of services that may need to be cut and these options should be made aware to the public.

101.37 Councillor Daniel Potter suggested that a free parking period of an hour be considered by the Cabinet. He also raised concerns that without a free parking period that people would go to supermarkets instead of the high street.

101.38 Councillor John Ward drew Members attention to the proposals from Lavenham including bank holiday and Sunday charging between 9:00am and 17:00pm, charging blue badge holders, and using the income from these charges to fund reduced rate permits for residents and workers.

101.39 Members discussed the proposal to charge of blue badge holders in Lavenham and were against the proposal.

101.40 Councillor John Ward summarised that Members were happy with the proposals from Lavenham to charge on Sundays and bank holidays and would discuss with Lavenham the use of this income to subsidise resident and worker permits.

101.41 Councillor Deborah Saw raised the issue of on street parking for residents and asked officers to talk to Suffolk County Council to consider a scheme for residents. The Director – Operations & Climate Change responded that under the proposals in the report there was additional officer resource to carry out a parking study in towns, and officers were in an open dialogue with Suffolk County Council on these issues.

101.42 Councillor Alastair McCraw suggested that the Council undertook an engagement process to look at the potential use of CICs and their financial arrangements and the transfer of assets in parallel with the report.

101.43 Councillor Jessie Carter stated that she would like the possible use of CICs to be explored to allow towns and parishes the opportunity to get involved.

101.44 Councillor Deborah Saw outlined that it would be useful to explore the use of CICs and have discussions with potential groups who would be interested in running CICs.

101.45 The Chief Executive suggested that the review of CICs be expanded to town and parish councils to consider the use of devolved powers.

101.46 Councillor Deborah Saw welcomed the expansion of the review as due to the Council's financial position the way the Council delivered services needed to be looked at and this approach could help bridge the budget deficit.



101.47 Councillor Jessie Carter proposed an amendment to the recommendations to maintain one hours free parking. Councillor Daniel Potter seconded the motion.

By a vote of 2 votes for, and 6 against.

101.48 The amendment motion was lost.

By a vote of 6 votes for, and 2 against.

**It was RESOLVED: -**

- 1.1 Tariff Option A Table 6.7 for short and long stay, hourly and daily parking charges, is implemented as soon as is practically possible.**
- 1.2 Parking Permit (season ticket) changes in 6.24 - 6.27 are implemented as soon as is practically possible, the charges as already agreed under the annual fees and charges report.**
- 1.3 Changes from Short Stay to Long Stay designations in 2 car parks as indicated in table 6.22 are implemented as soon as is practically possible.**
- 1.4 Blue Badge Holders will continue to be allowed to park for free for up to 3 hours in any bay of all public car parks.**
- 1.5 The current hours, days of the week and bank holidays where off-street restrictions apply are amended as per 6.15 as soon as is practically possible.**
- 1.6 The Director of Operations and Parking Services Manager are delegated authority to put in place suitable refund arrangements with Abbeycroft Leisure for users of the Councils' Leisure Centres (Sudbury and Hadleigh) and agree arrangements with Roys Sudbury store to co-inside with new tariff introduction.**
- 1.7 The Director of Operations and Parking Services Manager continue to engage with health, mobile health screening and village community centres which are accessed via or occasionally sited on council car parks, as to the feasibility and appropriateness of utilising the councils' virtual permits and enforcement in managing parking for their patients and visitors.**
- 1.8 That delegated authority be given to the Director of Operations in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to make changes to the councils' off-street parking orders and put in place suitable resources to implement the recommendations, including any minor amendments resulting from any subsequent dialogue and agreements with Lavenham Council, in this report in compliance with all statutory obligations and**

law.

- 1.9 The Director of Operations and Parking Services Manager continue to engage with the councils where council car parks are located and any groups making representation, and carry out more detailed local survey work to bring forward proposals to continue to improve parking as set out in the council's car parking strategy, which may include residents parking zones.**
- 1.10 The Director for Operations and Parking Services Manager continues to consider how to enhance the councils offer for contactless, longer term parking permits, using intelligent parking control processes that benefit and offer value to residents.**

## **REASON FOR DECISION**

**In order to deliver the approved parking strategy, move towards full cost recovery, remove the budget burden of subsidising parking, protect other essential services, transfer cost and choice to the parking service user and to be better funded to assist with meeting sustainable travel and environmental objectives, varying existing parking charges is proposed.**

### **Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:**

Outsourcing of car parks to an external private provider was considered and rejected by Cabinet 9th January 2024.

Not varying the charges was considered and rejected by Cabinet 9th January 2024.

A range of options have been considered from the engagement process and led to amendments being incorporated within this proposal;

Increasing the long stay all day parking tariff from the current £3 per day has been rejected and replaced by a proposed reduction to £2.50 for Tariff Option A and £2.70 for Tariff Option B. This is intended to support local residents of the district working in our towns and villages, and visitors who have travelled from further afield to spend the whole day in the location.

Outsourcing of car parks to a Community Interest Company comprised of the local Town and Parish Councils where car parks are located, has been considered and rejected. The primary funding model underpinning a CIC proposal would be the avoidance of paying business rates to fund a continuation of free parking. The Council can award discretionary rate relief where properties are occupied by organisations not established or conducted for profit whose main objectives are charitable or are otherwise philanthropic or religious or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts or premises occupied by organisations not established or conducted for profit and wholly or mainly used for purposes of recreation. 40% of the cost of awarding discretionary relief is borne by

the Council, 10% Suffolk CC and 50% Central Government. It is not considered that a CIC for car parks meets any of these objectives. If it was to be considered, the Council would need to be aware of any precedent set. Regardless, the level of relief awarded would not be enough to maintain free parking, along with paying for cost increases, delivering the parking strategy, sustainable travel and environmental aims. Consideration would need to be given to breaking up the on street and off-street enforcement responsibilities and end to end parking system resulting in higher costs.

Different tariff options have been considered that would fall under the agreed general principle of a modest tariff scheme set at a level not to compete with neighbouring local authorities. Options including an initial free period have been ruled out as they will not get anywhere close to providing full cost recovery. With 98% of existing transactions being for less than 3 hours, offering up a free period directly and significantly reduces available income. A universal 1 hour free period has been modelled as initially reducing total income by full year £205,000 to £262,000 per annum. This is approximately one third of the total projected positive budget variance, and would make the delivery of parking and sustainable travel strategy aims unaffordable. Furthermore, free periods complicate off street enforcement, which can negatively impact on street enforcement productivity. The benchmarking showed that in Suffolk and Essex only East Suffolk Council offers 30 mins free parking in some selected car parks, and this could be subject to review.

Sunday and bank holiday charging have been considered as an option as this is commonplace in several of the benchmarked authorities. This new charging option has been rejected as approaching full cost recovery can be achieved without the need to introduce these charges.

It is not easy to separate residents parking from visitors and commuters as residents can also be both visitors and commuters to other locations. We are not proposing a tariff scheme which tries to make this distinction and any future offer of reduced rates or free parking to residents would need to be made universally across the district to be fair, unless the designation of a car park has been allocated for residents only.

Cashless payments have been considered as a default (the only payment type across all car parks) option and this would involve promotion of the digital payment mobile application or making payment via card at a machine. This option has been rejected as full cost recovery can be achieved without the need to do this. The government is developing a National Parking Platform aimed at giving parking users the ability to use their preferred app everywhere and driving down mobile application costs to local authorities and we are monitoring its progress closely.

**Any Declarations of Interests Declared:** None

**Any Dispensation Granted:** None

DRAFT