

INFORMATION BULLETIN

Babergh Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 22nd April 2024

Car Parking Charges - Call In



Background

This update concerns the call in of Cabinets decision 8th April 2014 to vary the existing car parking tariffs and arrangements within the Councils own off-street car parks, including the current 0-3 hours free tariffs within Sudbury, Lavenham and Hadleigh, by members to O&S.

The monitoring officer has outlined the scope of the call in as being:

*'Your reason relating to the failure of Cabinet to sufficiently consider the breadth and depth of the various public engagement / consultations, to reflect this in their decision making, and to amend their proposals as a result of the engagement has been deemed a **valid** reason for Call-In. It is clear that aspects of the engagement have been reflected in the final decision, but the Chairman is of the view that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee should explore this in more detail as a result of your Call-In.'*

Whilst there is no constitutional requirement to provide a report, this information bulletin provides additional information which may provide assistance when members of the committee carry out the function for call in and reach their agreed action.

Addressing the recommendations made by O&S to Cabinet

In order to provide immediate feedback to O&S on how their recommendations had been addressed by officers and cabinet, a report was previously provided to committee.

Appendix 1 is the report of the actions taken to address each one of the 11 recommendations made by O&S to cabinet 18th March 2024 and this was sent to O&S committee members 9th April, the day following the cabinet decision on 8th April.

Recommendations were addressed by either:

- a) steer at a meeting between officers and Cabinet Members on the 19th March
- b) inclusion in the report for Cabinet 8th April
- c) discussion in the Cabinet meeting 8th April
- d) defeated vote to accept 1 hour free amendment in the Cabinet meeting 8th April
- e) amendment to officer recommendation in the Cabinet meeting 8th April by the monitoring officer at the beginning of the cabinet meeting 8th April.

Addressing the reason for Call In

The valid reason accepted for the call in examines the potential ‘failure of Cabinet to sufficiently consider the breadth and depth of the various public engagement / consultations, to reflect this in their decision making, and to amend their proposals as a result of the engagement.’

In Appendix 1 the response provided to recommendation 2, directly lists a range of amendments that were informed by the engagement process and made to the Cabinet proposal that was reviewed by O&S on the 18th March.

They include:

- Reducing the all day charge from £3 to £2.50 to support workers and visitors
- Not extending the restricted periods to include Sundays and bank holidays as is the case in many of our neighbouring authorities car parks
- Not removing the ability to pay by cash
- Recognising a desire to separate visitors and residents parking and allowing this to be developed in the future as technology develops to support
- Looking at a Community Interest Company and deciding this was not viable

Further to these at the cabinet meeting it was discussed and agreed to:

- task officers with investigating how more powers may be devolved to town and parishes – including through the use of community interest companies (CICs) – and report back to cabinet over coming months.
- agreed for officers to proceed with further discussion with Lavenham Parish Council around the constructive engagement that had taken place to date.
- Progress a School Parking permit scheme

During the Cabinet meeting there was then further discussion of point 2.6 under Options Considered for different tariff options, notably retaining 1 hour of free parking. This was noted in the meeting to be estimated to reduce income by £205-262,000 p.a. and the details for this were questioned, with answers provided. The non-financial complications of free periods were also highlighted. A proposed amendment to include a 1 hour free period was voted down 6-2 in the meeting and the officer was not tasked to take this option forward as a recommendation.

In order to be transparent and provide additional information on Tariff Option C - 1 hour free, Appendix 2 has been provided which shows the detailed financial modelling (an update to Appendix C of the parking report).

Under Tariff Option A the Babergh Council Budget Variance benefit is modelled as £395,754 for 2024/25 increasing to £725,374 by 2026/27 and the cumulative benefit over this period is modelled as £1.865m.

Under Tariff Option C the Babergh Council Budget Variance benefit is modelled as £277,610 for 2024/25 increasing to £458,511 by 2026/27 and the cumulative benefit over this period is modelled as £1.221m.

Tariff Option C would result in a budget pressure over Option A of £118,144 for 2024/25 rising to £266,863 in 2026/27 and cumulatively over this period is modelled as a further £644,097 needing to be met by reserves. This was deemed as being unaffordable, especially when considered in context with the results of the local price benchmarking carried out.

Cost of Delay

For the avoidance of doubt and as an example, the lost positive Babergh Budget variance from delaying a decision to implement Tariff Option A is approximately £2,014 per day.

This will equate to a total of £28,196 during this 14-day period between cabinet decision and O&S examining the call in, and currently this will need to be met by reserves until additional necessary budget savings are made outside of car parking.

The Council has budgeted a general revenue fund gap for the three years 2025/26 to 2027/28 of £6.7m in total, whilst it only has £2.4m of useable reserves available to fund this gap. An acceptance of Cabinet's decision 8th April could assist by around £2.5m of this total, but it will not solve the whole budget challenge ahead and the council will still need to make further difficult service decisions.

Mark Emms, Director of Operations
Matt Smith, Parking Services Manager
Jack Burton, Finance Business Partner

Appendix 1

Report To:	BDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members
Report on:	BDC O&S Recommendations to Cabinet 18 th March re: Car Park Charging
Report by:	Mark Emms, Director of Operations and Climate
Date:	09.04.24

Background

This report details the actions that have taken place in addressing the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on March 18th in respect of the Car Parking Report to Cabinet which they examined at length.

During this meeting the committee focussed on examining the details of the engagement process and received the full report as intended for Cabinet to examine.

There were 11 recommendations made by the committee, with recommendations 8 and 11 being for the Monitoring Officer to address.

A meeting was held between officers and Cabinet Members on the 19th March, the day after O&S, to provide feedback on the recommendations and discuss these in respect to making amendments to the report and providing further information.

The Recommendations were all covered off by either inclusion in the report by the lead officer and/or discussion in further detail at the Cabinet meeting 8th April when the report was heard and examined at length, with the minutes reflecting this.

The role of O&S in examining the report before going to Cabinet was much appreciated, and this good governance step provided some useful corrections and challenges to consider when questioned and debated at Cabinet.

Recommendations and Responses

1. That the Director for Operations and Climate Change takes on board the comments made by the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

[This was noted with minor corrections and clarifications to the report being made after O&S, discussion carried out with cabinet, and the amended report questioned and debated at Cabinet 08.04.24.](#)

2. That Officers provide more detailed clarification on the amendments made to the information and proposals set out in the Cabinet report as a result of the consultation process.

This was discussed in the O&S meeting. On consideration of this request, whilst perhaps not questioned and answered in full in the meeting before the recommendation were made, the following examples were noted as already being included in the report for cabinet:

- Reducing the all day charge to £2.50 to support workers and visitors
- Not extending the restricted periods to include Sundays and bank holidays as is the case in many of our neighbouring authorities car parks
- Not removing the ability to pay by cash
- Recognising a desire to separate visitors and residents parking and allowing this to be developed in the future as technology develops to support
- Looking at a Community Interest Company and deciding this was not viable

At the cabinet meeting it was agreed to task officers with investigating how more powers may be devolved to town and parishes – including through the use of community interest companies (CICs) – and report back to cabinet over coming months.

3. That Officers be requested to set out in the report to Cabinet a proposed range of tariffs that include a free parking period of 1 hour and its associated costs.

This was discussed informally by cabinet after O&S and further details added into the report under options considered 2.6.

98% of current transactions are less than 3 hours and we have made an apportionment of these across the new hourly tariff bands (after factoring a general drop off 20% short stay and 10% long stay) in the income modelling. Free parking of 1 hour might reduce income by £205 - £262k (based on losing 1 hour modelled income and either 10% or 20% migration from 2 hour to 1 hour).

Officers' advice on this is that this could represent approx. 1/3rd of the £725k projected nett budget benefit through varying the chargers. We have included repayment on £1m of further parking and sustainable travel investment in the expenditure budget for 26/27 and this would be less likely to be affordable.

Enforcing free periods is difficult for CPE officers and makes the time they do have available less productive for other enforcement work including on-street.

The option of continuing to offer a free period was discussed further during the cabinet meeting. A proposed amendment to include a free one hour period was voted down 6-2 in the meeting and officers have not been tasked to take this forward.

4. That Officers further explore with Suffolk County Council the possibility of introducing on-street resident parking permits across the District, that more information on this type of scheme be included in the report to Cabinet, and investigate implementing an appropriate policy.

Recommendation 3.9 includes looking at the possibility of residents parking zones and 4.7 includes some detail on this. This was discussed at cabinet where the process and expectations on RPZs were addressed. Any policy would be reliant on participation by SCC and funding to make any changes which were publicly supported and agreed via a process.

5. That Officers review whether a rebate system could be implemented in Hadleigh, Sudbury, and Lavenham in car parks serving doctors surgeries and medical centres.

Recommendation 3.7 already covered this in the report and during the cabinet meeting this was discussed at length.

Whilst we are not 'obligated' to provide rebates to patients of the Lavenham GP Surgery (accessed via Cock Horse Inn car park) and the Hadleigh Medical Centre (accessed via Topsfield car park), we will enter into dialogue to explore doing this and have backing from cabinet.

We can provide a tablet in the building where users would tap their car registrations. This would create a virtual permit to park on the Mi Permit system which would be picked up by the CPE officers handheld device when they enter the car registration outside to check. Mi Permit already support this solution across the country. This would also require the car park to be included in the councils off street parking orders and to be enforced, and this addition may lead to an unknown additional charge from our enforcement partners.

There may be challenges including whether these businesses should benefit in this way over other local businesses, and what happens with staff and patients parking so this does not cause us knock-on issues to be resolved. The council has no statutory obligation to manage health centres private car parks and they do benefit from their own internal health funding for this purpose. In Lavenham we also have the community centre and pre-school accessed off the back of the Cock Horse Inn car park and they would want a similar arrangement.

Cabinet agreed for officers to proceed with further discussion with Lavenham Parish Council around the constructive engagement that had taken place to date.

6. That the Director for Operations and Climate Change continues to consider and create shared value for residents by enhancing the councils offer for non-contact, long term parking permits using intelligent parking control processes such that residents are recognised as community stakeholders.

This is noted and although this is difficult in practice, this will be continue to be considered in light of the governments National Parking Platform (which is still developing) and any other advancement in parking technology, and as such we have not felt the need to specifically included a section in the report. Recommendation 3.10 added in to cover this.

7. That Officers include more information and context about the rural setting of the districts, the current reliance on car use to travel, and the accessible parking provisions needed to adequately meet this need.

This was discussed during the cabinet meeting. Cabinet members raised both concerns that cars were essential due to rurality and lack of public transport, and noted that Babergh was no different to many more rural authorities across the country in this respect.

‘Reliance’ implies it is necessary to have free parking because the car is the only option of travel and there are then no free spaces available to park in.

It was noted we do have some public transportation, we do have comprehensive home delivery options (and many drop box options for more environmentally minded shoppers), we do have some free on-street and off-street parking, and we have reduced the price of all day parking.

A potential request for Blue Badge holders to not received free parking in Lavenham was discussed, but cabinet agreed all blue badge holders will continue to be able to park for free for up to 3 hours in all council car parks.

Investment to maintain the accessibility of car parks to users with restricted mobility, visual impairment, heavily pregnant mothers, was mentioned in respect of additional funding would allow further improvements to be more readily made to the fabric of our car parks.

8. That the Monitoring Officer be asked to investigate allegations of pre-determination raised by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in regard to members of the Cabinet.

The monitoring officer addressed this in full at the start of the cabinet meeting as they had done previously at the start of the O&S meeting, with no evidence being found of any predetermination by members of the Cabinet.

9. That Officers give further consideration to the issues raised concerning school pick-ups and drop-off as well as carers and medical staff visiting patients.

Officers will continue to give further consideration to these issues.

In respect of the school drop off issue. This was discussed at length by cabinet in the meeting. This issue of school drop off and collections is a national problem. Within the car parks concerned this is a minor issue in Hadleigh and we are aware the police have carried out checks and taken no action on road safety enforcement grounds.

Cabinet would like officers to explore a school parking permit scheme with the school and this will take place. The basics of this being the school is involved in a process of putting forward car registrations for parents whose children are entitled to universal primary school free meals and a permit allowing to park in the High Street Car park at drop off and collection times would be issued on an administration cost basis.

We are not convinced parents who may be nuisance parking already will take up this offer and walk the approx. 150m as opposed to be tempted to nuisance park adjacent the school.

Improved on street enforcement due to the changes will also be able to help, and as part of our ongoing work we would investigate any physical barriers that might be effective or not and bring proposals forward if we thought these would help and were economically viable.

This problem is a short-term Mon-Fri issue in term time that occurs for around 30mins twice a day.

10. That Officers are encouraged to retain the cash and card system for paying parking permits to avoid moving to a cashless system.

The report as drafted for O&S reflected this already. As we have previously stated this will lead to continued increased administration costs in this area, but does continue to make the service more accessible to drivers who don't want to/refuse/cannot access the mobile app.

We will continue to monitor government advice in this area.

11. That Cabinet are made aware of the committee's concerns regarding the process followed during the handling of the parking petition considered by Full Council on 20th February.

Cabinet was made aware after the O&S meeting. The monitoring officer addressed this in full again at the start of the cabinet meeting as they had done previously at the start of the O&S meeting, with no evidence being found of the process not having been followed.

Appendix 2

Tariff Bands	Tariff Option A		Tariff Option B		Tariff Option C	
	Short Stay	Long Stay	Short Stay	Long Stay	Short Stay	Long Stay
Upto 1 hour	£1.00	n/a	£1.20	n/a	£0.00	n/a
Upto 2 hours	£1.50	£1.00	£1.70	£1.20	£1.50	£1.00
Upto 3 hours	£2.00	£1.50	£2.20	£1.70	£2.00	£1.50
Upto 4 hours	£2.50	£2.00	£2.70	£2.20	£2.50	£2.00
All Day	n/a	£2.50	n/a	£2.70	n/a	£2.50

Car Parks General and Civil Parking Enforcement Babergh D C

Subjective Type	Subjective Code	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
		Budget Book	Full Cost Forecast	Full Cost Forecast	Full Cost Forecast	Option A Half Year Implement	Full Cost Option A	Full Cost Option A	Option B Half Year Implement	Full Cost Option B	Full Cost Option B	Option C Half Year Implement	Full Cost Option C	Full Cost Option C
Employees	Direct Officer Employee Costs and Travel	40,764	84,990	89,156	93,530	91,040	142,606	115,500	91,040	142,606	115,500	91,040	142,606	115,500
Premises Expenses	Revenue Repairs, Business Rates & Utilities	258,308	313,771	340,890	371,150	353,029	361,311	390,277	353,029	361,311	390,277	353,029	361,311	390,277
Supplies & Services	Equipment, Merchant Fees and Enforcement	130,602	135,060	142,685	148,734	200,667	268,755	276,398	206,518	281,628	289,658	187,557	252,210	259,358
Support Services	Corporate Overhead & Public Realm Costs	142,110	313,080	327,913	342,656	329,655	367,721	360,998	329,655	367,721	360,998	329,655	367,721	360,998
Capital Financing Costs	Capital Investment Costs to Revenue	0	33,797	38,443	68,058	33,797	53,887	181,884	33,797	53,887	181,884	33,797	53,887	181,884
Total Expenditure		571,784	880,698	939,087	1,024,127	1,008,188	1,194,280	1,325,057	1,014,040	1,207,153	1,338,316	995,078	1,177,735	1,308,016
Income	H9131 Car park income	(112,100)	(112,100)	(115,000)	(120,000)	(473,931)	(877,550)	(903,877)	(529,961)	(995,213)	(1,025,069)	(342,677)	(601,916)	(619,973)
Income	H9132 C park permits/season tickets	(30,530)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(32,057)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(32,057)	(30,530)	(30,530)	(32,057)
Income	H9161 General Fees & Charges	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)	(6,080)
Income	H9172 Legal/Prof Costs & Fees Rec'd	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)
Income	H9161 General Fees & Charges	(62,392)	(62,392)	(67,392)	(72,392)	(67,734)	(83,395)	(87,564)	(67,734)	(83,395)	(87,564)	(67,734)	(83,395)	(87,564)
Total Income		(213,602)	(213,602)	(221,502)	(231,502)	(580,775)	(1,000,055)	(1,032,077)	(636,805)	(1,117,718)	(1,153,270)	(449,521)	(724,420)	(748,174)
Total Subsidy (Amount adrift from full cost recovery)		358,182	667,096	717,585	792,625	427,413	194,225	292,979	377,234	89,435	185,046	545,557	453,315	559,842
Babergh Council Budget Variance		-	-	50,489	75,040	(395,754)	(744,731)	(725,374)	(445,933)	(849,521)	(833,307)	(277,610)	(485,641)	(458,511)
Babergh Council Budget Variance (Cumulative)					125,530		(1,865,859)			(2,128,761)				(1,221,762)

Option C Assumptions: merchant fees adjusted, 1 hour income removed, 20% reduction to 2 hour income