

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CAR PARKING CHARGES ADVISORY BOARD

19 July 2011

**Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure
and the Director of Finance**

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 CAR PARKING FEES CHARGES AND OPERATIONS – ANNUAL REVIEW

Summary

Fees and charges for parking in the Borough are regularly reviewed in the context of current and planned service improvements and the operational parking service.

The paper considers all current and potential charging streams and, through a careful balance of considerations of parking management objectives, support for the local economy and the need to realise a proper rate of return for the assets used, it recommends a series of proposed tariffs. In summary, proposed changes are as follows

- First hour of parking in Tonbridge to be set at £1
- A new half hour band to be introduced at 60p
- Broadly, a 20p across the board increase on other tariff bands except the all day band which is proposed at an additional 40p a day.
- Lower Castle Field charging arrangements to be retained in their current form; that is, the same as the other Tonbridge car parks except for Saturday afternoons when it will remain free to support the sporting and leisure activities.
- Annual season tickets in Tonbridge car parks to be set at £799.
- Adjusted tariffs in Borough Green car park and reintroduction of season tickets.
- Blue Bell Hill car park charges to be increased by 50p a day.
- Annual cost of a resident preferential parking permit to be increased to £35 in April 2012.
- Business permits to be increased to £130 a year.
- Visitor permits unchanged at £1 and free issue of 10 visitor permits with each RPP permit issue or renewal to continue.
- Haysden and Leybourne Lakes – an increase of 10p in the band up to four hours and an increase of 40p for the over four hours band. The annual season ticket to remain the same to reinforce the support for regular users.

- **On-street parking charges to be increased to 40p for the first half hour and other charges altered correspondingly.**
- **Continuation of the current policy of no charges early morning, late evening, overnight, Sundays and Public Holidays to be reaffirmed.**
- **Introduce a new season ticket in Tonbridge town centre to cater for resident parking needs at the start and end of the charging period each day.**

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Council regularly reviews its fees and charges for services provided for the local community and this generally takes place on an annual cycle. In 2010, there was no review of parking charges because the Council considered that the condition of the local economy merited leaving the cost of parking in the Borough entirely unchanged. Therefore this 2011 review is the first one for two years.

1.2 Continuing Investment in the Parking Service

- 1.2.1 As in previous years, the review will seek to achieve a careful balance between supporting the local economy, managing parking on behalf of residents and businesses and securing some financial return to help contribute to the cost of the parking service. Many items contribute to this cost, such as maintenance of the car parks, enforcement, rates, lighting, renewal of signs and lines and a considerable and consistent investment in the parking action plan to improve the management and convenience of parking throughout the Borough.
- 1.2.2 Over the two year period since the previous report to the Board, the Council has implemented a significant number of parking management initiatives. In the context of this review of fees and charges, it is worth setting these out so that local residents and businesses can understand the totality of the parking service beyond the purely financial considerations and obtain a better perspective on the positive impacts that the parking service has on local parking conditions.
- 1) From the Capital Plan, approximately £40,000 has been invested in Local Parking Plans at Borough Green, Snodland and East Malling and also in the phased parking management programme where parking measures at several hundred locations over the life of the Parking Action Plan.
 - 2) Improvement works have been carried out at a number of car parks including Bradford Street car park, Riverlawn car Park and at Borough Green costing approximately £35,000 from the capital budgets for this work. It also included construction of a small car park at River Walk. This was primarily aimed at freeing up access to the local businesses but also resulted in the provision of half a dozen well used spaces right in the heart of the town centre in Tonbridge. The capital provision also includes a substantial amount to cater for capital renewals, primarily the ticket machines and this averages out at around £25,000 a year.

- 3) The improvement work is underpinned by a continuing and consistent programme of maintenance work to keep the car parks safe and convenient for our customers. This programme also includes work on-street to keep all the signs and lines in the Borough clear and legible to support the enforcement work of the Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO). Annual provision for this programme of maintenance work is about £90,000 each year and in 2010/11 was further increased by the investment of almost £70,000 to build up the Council's resilience in the face of the past two extraordinarily adverse winters. The not inconsiderable cost of rates should also be considered as this amounts to almost £160,000 each year. To round off this section on maintenance and safety, CCTV should be included and this amounts to some £270,000 each year to keep the car parks safe and secure for customers.
- 4) The enforcement service, the CEOs and the support team at Tonbridge Castle should also appear as part of this investment since they play a critical role in achieving the aim of promoting a well ordered parking environment in this Borough that is responsive to local needs and pressures. Its costs are only partially recouped from income deriving from the issue of penalty charge notices and parking permits. There is also a need to invest in IT systems to assist in the effectiveness and responsiveness of our parking management service.
- 5) In addition, there is also a staff cost associated with implementing Local Parking Plans and the phased programme. This is integrated with other transportation related work but the input in an average year comes to about £30,000.

1.2.3 Taking all these elements together, they amount to a significant investment by the Borough Council in seeking to provide a comprehensive and integrated parking service on behalf of residents and businesses. They represent a considerable and continuing commitment to the aim of achieving an efficient and effective parking environment in the Borough and they provide an important context for the consideration of parking charges that follows.

1.3 Scope and Context of the Review

1.3.1 An important context for any review of fees and charges is the wider economic climate. First and foremost is the effect of the recession on local businesses, traders and residents and their ability to sustain the economic position locally. The state of the national economy has also prompted the Comprehensive Spending Review resulting in substantial cuts in local government grant over the period from 2010 to 2014. Inevitably, this is leading all Councils to examine their income streams with even greater care and consideration than would be the case in more normal times. There is no escaping the fact that revenue derived from parking is an important element in the Council's budget but fees and charges must be carefully balanced by considerations of the potential impacts of new or

increased charges on a local economy that is currently in a delicate state. This is particularly true of car parking where town centre vitality and viability is an important consideration.

1.3.2 There are a few further factors that provide a direct context for the review.

- Apart from an increase in the cost of season tickets the year before last, fees and charges for parking have remained unaltered since the last major consideration of charges three years ago in the summer of 2008.
- The Council pays VAT on income from car parks. The rate increased from 17.5% and is now at 20%, effectively increasing costs by 2.5%.
- Car park usage in Tonbridge remains suppressed and it has not recovered from the levels reached in the depths of the recession in 2008 and 2009. Therefore there is currently unused capacity in the town centre car parks. This contrasts with the situation five or six years ago when the car parks were under considerable demand and spaces were at a premium. For many years, there was a holding list for a restricted number of season tickets but over the past couple of years the demand has been such that this approach has no longer been necessary.
- Driver compliance with parking restrictions has continued to increase. This is beneficial from a parking management perspective but it does have implications for service provision. Permits contribute only a small proportion of the cost of carrying out the enforcement service and it means that this part of the service is therefore subsidised.
- Comparison with the fees and charges of other Kent districts should not be a driver of what might be appropriate in this Borough, since local circumstances are critical in such considerations. However, they do act as a guide and can provide some persuasive support on what might be considered the 'going rate' for particular pricing policies. In addition, this Council does not currently charge at times that are now routinely charged for in many other districts such as charging on Sundays and public holidays and also in the evenings, early morning and overnight during weekdays.

1.3.3 The scope of the review exercise covers consideration of all existing services and charges and includes assessment of whether current circumstances justify them being reduced, maintained as they are or increased.

1.4 Off-Street Parking – Daily Short and Long Stay Charge

1.4.1 The One Hour Tariff - The foundation for charging policy in the car parks is defined by the first hour short stay tariff. Ticket sales for the one hour period have represented almost 60% of all tickets sold in recent years. The price was set at 80 pence in the 2008 review and this has remained unchanged over the past three years. Notably, the 2008 increase followed another long period of price

stability because the previous one hour parking ticket had remained at 60 pence for five years.

- 1.4.2 Going back to the point just made about comparisons with other neighbouring parking authorities, it is interesting to note that parking tariffs have been rising since 2008 and, although there needs to be a fair degree of interpretation of local circumstances such as proximity to the heart of the town, there does appear in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells to be a consistent established standard of £1 for the first hour of parking. The question to be answered therefore is whether the local circumstances in Tonbridge town centre justify a similar rate?
- 1.4.3 Most people also understand that providing the parking management service comes at a cost. Car parks require maintenance and the Council pays for management, rates, enforcement, cleansing, grounds maintenance and security using CCTV and behind all of this there is the opportunity cost of money tied up in the asset itself. The Council also has a broad policy approach, endorsed through consultation, that users of services should make a direct contribution to the cost of providing the service. As far as parking charges are concerned this is an established approach from previous reviews.
- 1.4.4 An important special local circumstance that should feature in this assessment is that a substantial proportion of all ticket sales in Tonbridge town centre are subject to the dual ticketing arrangement with J Sainsbury, Waitrose and Iceland and that this effectively makes the first hour of parking free for a great many people using the Botany and Angel car parks.
- 1.4.5 Another special factor comes from the fact that the ticket machines do not give change. There are good operational reasons for this. It avoids the additional cost of having to ensure that the machines are regularly topped up with sufficient coinage to provide the change. Providing change has implications in terms of wear and tear on the machine itself and can lead to security problems because additional coinage within the machine overnight risks theft and damage. The Council has some 40 or so ticket machines and modifying these to provide change would cost a significant amount of capital investment. The reason this is a special factor is that we know indirectly from ticket sales and income received that many people already pay a £1 tariff. Clearly, the dual ticketing arrangement mentioned in the previous paragraph has a strong bearing on whether at least some drivers choose not to retain a small amount of coinage in their car to ensure they have the correct change for the meter. It does suggest a degree of consumer acceptance of a price set at £1 as a result of the ticket refund in the stores.
- 1.4.6 There is a further special consideration that is highly relevant to a £1 tariff for the first hour. There is something psychological about this rounded sum that makes it to a great extent a 'plateau' price that is unlikely to alter for many years once it is set. This should be considered in conjunction with a related factor that has been raised frequently at the Board whenever parking charges have been assessed.

This is whether there should be an additional first half hour pricing band. It is difficult to assess how much take up there might be and this has implications for the financial analysis later in this paper. Nevertheless, it has been considered as a means of mitigating the impact of the first hour's cost for people who only need to park for a short time for their visit to the town centre.

- 1.4.7 **On balance, we feel that it is right to establish the £1 first hour charge as the basic unit of car park pricing, subject to it being accompanied by a new half hour rate to respond to these consistent calls from customers over the years for a half hour ticket option.**
- 1.4.8 **Other Daily Tariffs** - Similar considerations already discussed for the one hour tariff apply to the longer period tariffs, although the VAT increase will have correspondingly greater impact as the prices increase. To recoup the VAT increase while maintaining relativity to the one hour tariff and also keeping the cost on rounded units of ten pence for practical purposes, the adjustments to the pricing schedule shown in Table 1 are recommended.
- 1.4.9 **The suggested change is, in the interests of clarity and simplicity, an 'across the board' addition of 20 pence on all charges with the exception of the all day charge which should be a 40 pence increase to help encourage the take up of season tickets which will remain attractively priced relative to the day cost.**
- 1.4.10 In considering the all day charge, it is worth bearing in mind that the neighbouring railway station car park on Vale Road has a daily tariff covering the peak period of £6.

Table 1

Short Stay		
Period – Hours	Current Tariff	Proposed Tariff
0 – ½	-	0.60
½ - 1	0.80	1.00
1 - 2	1.50	1.70
2 – 3	2.10	2.30
3 – 4	2.60	2.80
Long Stay		
0 – 3	2.10	2.30
3 – 6	3.10	3.30
6 +	4.50	4.90

- 1.4.11 Shortly after the current tariffs were introduced, the operational hours and charging structures at a number of the long stay car parks were altered to accommodate short stay use on a Saturday. In other words, it allowed the long stay car parks to be used to cater for overspill from the busy short stay car parks

without customers having to pay for the minimum period of three hours. They could pay for one two or three hours as they so wished.

- 1.4.12 **We recommend that this be extended to all the long stay car parks throughout the week because there are times when the short stay car parks are at full demand and there is capacity in the long stay car parks to accommodate it.**
- 1.4.13 Over a number of years, the Council has sought to refine the tariffs to make them simple and easily understood by customers and consistent across the range of car parks. The major division is the distinction between purely short stay car parks and those dedicated to longer stay usage. As suggested in this paper, the long stay car parks will in effect become hybrid facilities where short stay use is possible. However, the distinction in favour of dedicated short stay car parks will continue to be protected and preserved as a maximum permitted stay of four hours.

1.5 Lower Castle Fields Car Park

- 1.5.1 The one car park where a degree of anomaly and inconsistency persists is Lower Castle Field. The weekday charging rates were finally brought into line with all the other town centre car parks in the 2008 review. However, Saturday mornings continued with a unique charge and Saturday afternoons remained free. This was further discussed at the Board in the 2009 Review when it was resolved that “consultations for the charging system for Lower Castle Field car park to be aligned with the one that currently exists in Upper Castle Field be carried out through the Tonbridge Sports Association”.
- 1.5.2 It was intended that the results of this consultation would be reported to the Board at the first opportunity to do so. There was no meeting of the Board last year because it was inappropriate to be coming forward with proposals to increase any car park charges at that delicate stage in the economic cycle. So effectively this meeting of the Board is the first opportunity to revisit this matter. It is worth repeating the text of the 2009 report to recall why this particular car park has continued with such an anomalous and differing pricing structure to all the other car parks in the town centre.
- 1.5.3 *At the last review, the weekday charging regime was aligned for the first time with all of the other town centre car parks but Saturday mornings were given a unique tariff and Saturday afternoons were left free of charge. All of this reflected a continuing feeling that Lower Castle Field car park occupied a special place among the town centre car parks. It supports a number of social, leisure and sporting uses including the swimming pool and the current operating regime assists sporting activities on Saturdays. However, it also takes its place among the other town centre car parks because it serves an important function for visitors and business customers in the town centre since it is conveniently close and accessible to the High Street.*

- 1.5.4 *These competing needs have been monitored over time and have been carefully managed. In recent years, the pool use was dealt with through a dual ticketing arrangement which provides for a partial refund of the car park charge for pool users and this has been working effectively. There is also in operation a permit arrangement to assist those coaching the junior footballers, agreed in conjunction with the local sporting interests and it appears to be also working effectively. This illustrates that it is possible to achieve a good workable balance between parking management needs and local community support through sensitive and responsive arrangements.*
- 1.5.5 *With the pool use supported by a dual ticketing system and the junior football coaches assisted through permit arrangements, the continued price differential on Saturday morning and no charge at all on Saturday afternoon warrants careful assessment. Such charging policy may not in practice help the sports interests as much as perceived because the fact that the car park is free on Saturday afternoons leads to spaces being taken up by non-sports users. This is not helpful either from a financial point of view since a considerable quantity of free parking convenient for the High Street shops is being made available and it draws custom away from other paying car parks.*
- 1.5.6 *In the overall context of parking budgets the likely yield of bringing Saturday parking in line with other town centre car parks is almost notional and the main driver would be to simplify the charging system and doing away with anomalies. Nevertheless, there would be some additional income although in the current circumstances this is very difficult to estimate but could be in the region of £8 - 10,000 a year.*
- 1.5.7 *Before any firm way forward on this matter is adopted it is proposed that consultation be undertaken to assess in identifying what the implications would be were charges in Lower Castle Field car park to be made consistent with the other town centre car parks by removing the Saturday morning differential and extending charging to the afternoon. This would need to include consultation with the main sports users on Saturdays, co-ordinated through the Tonbridge Sports Association.*
- 1.5.8 These consultations with the TSA have been carried out and they reinforce the need to consider very carefully the continued use of this car park as a focus for sporting and leisure activity that the Council is keen to support. As indicated when we last reported to the Board, there is some use of the car park, such as for town centre shopping, that makes it no different from other town centre car parks. However, the management arrangements needed to differentiate between such uses and the sporting and leisure activities that we wish to encourage and support would be cumbersome and costly.
- 1.5.9 The rational conclusion is that the current arrangements should be maintained subject to some adjustment in prices as contained in the following table to reflect the general rise being proposed in the rest of the car parks. These proposals are focused on Saturday mornings as the ticket prices for Monday to Friday already match those in the other car parks in the town centre.

Table 2

Lower Castle Field – Saturday am		
Period – Hours	Current Tariff	Proposed Tariff
0 - 1	0.80	1.00
1 - 2	1.20	1.40
2 – 3	1.80	2.00
3 +	2.70	2.90

1.5.10 There is a parallel matter related to Lower Castle Field car park that, whilst not strictly speaking a car parking charges issue, is worth mentioning in a wider context. It has started to be the focus of intense usage at weekends largely prompted by the success of the Old Juddians rugby club, to the extent that it is having a detrimental effect on parking available for users of Tonbridge Swimming Pool. The prime time when this occurs is on Sunday mornings but there is some adverse effect on pool usage on Saturday afternoons. This is a critical management problem for the Pool that needs to be addressed irrespective of any decisions on parking charging. We are currently considering how best this can be achieved. It will include assessments of measures that might be practical throughout the week, not just on Sundays, to support the use of the pool through achievable adjustments to parking management in and around Lower Castle Fields.

1.5.11 For the moment, the main focus is on pricing policy in Lower Castle Field on Saturday mornings and afternoons. **After careful consideration and consultation, we are recommending that the unique pricing structure in this car park be retained as a means of supporting the sport and leisure activity on the sports-ground.**

1.6 Season Tickets in Tonbridge Car Parks

1.6.1 The annual season ticket price is £765. From a purely VAT point of view, this should increase by about £20 to keep pace with the change in VAT. The question is whether there is justification for raising it further? Looking at the current price for parking in the nearest non-Council car park, that is, Tonbridge Station car park, an annual season ticket costs £1128.50, almost 50% differential over the price of a season ticket for a Borough car park.

1.6.2 Looking slightly further afield, to Tunbridge Wells, an annual season ticket is either £950 or £810 depending on which car park is chosen. Prices in Sevenoaks range from £1020 to £799 depending on the location of the car park in relation to the town centre.

- 1.6.3 It was mentioned earlier in this paper that the demand for season tickets has fallen and we no longer have to operate a waiting list as we once did. **Our feeling taking these comparisons and circumstances into account is that only a modest increase over and above the purely VAT related cost is merited and that this should be based on an annual price of £799, in line with the lower pricing band for some of the car parks in Sevenoaks.**
- 1.6.4 Table 3 contains recommended prices for quarterly, six monthly and annual season tickets. We are recommending a new option of a monthly ticket as we feel this will be welcomed by some motorists as being more manageable in these recessionary times.

Table 3

	Current Charge (£)	Proposed Charge (£)
Annual	765	799
Half-yearly	420	450
Quarterly	230	250
Monthly	-	90

1.7 Ryarsh Lane Car Park

- 1.7.1 Ryarsh Lane car park operates a 'permit users only' car park and these permits are available to people working for businesses in West Malling at a price of £50 for a year's parking. There is no constraint in issuing these permits and this accords with what the local Chamber wished when the car park pricing regime was established many years ago.
- 1.7.2 In practice, this pricing and management regime generates unbalanced usage patterns and pressures. There are currently 275 permits in issue for a car park with 120 spaces that are at capacity most mornings yet with space available in the afternoons. For some time, there has been non-permit access from 4pm each weekday, reflecting the capacity available from that time. At the request of the Chamber of Commerce, we examined the scope for reducing this further and, last summer, the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board endorsed an alteration to 3pm.
- 1.7.3 Although a review of the current permit cost is desirable now, it is inappropriate to make changes in isolation and without due regard to a coordinated approach to parking management and pricing in the town. It has been the intention that such work be carried out in conjunction with an overall review of the Local Parking Plans implemented a few years ago. This will be undertaken as soon as other

commitments have been completed. The current position is that the major project to introduce the East Malling Local Parking Plan has just been recently completed and, once the Phase 6 of the general programme has been implemented and a parking assessment for Aylesford has been carried out, there will be an opportunity to revisit the West Malling Local Parking Plan, possibly within this calendar year, all things being equal.

- 1.7.4 In the circumstances, therefore, it is best if considerations of pricing and car park usage in Ryarsh Lane car park remain in abeyance until we have the benefit of this reassessment work and a better take on the interplay between this car park and the short stay car park in the High Street.

1.8 Borough Green Car Park

- 1.8.1 We implemented the Borough Green Local Parking Plan during 2008 and it settled down fairly quickly, although we received a few comments and observations in the early days that we have logged and will revisit shortly as part of the refinement stage that we carry out on all the parking plans. Nevertheless, overall it has successfully achieved what we set out to achieve in terms of parking management in the town. As far as the car park is concerned, the basic aim was to achieve a better balance between long and short stay parking on behalf local residents and businesses and, critically, to ensure that this did not continue to be effectively an additional car park for Borough Green Station. All our observations demonstrate that this has been achieved.
- 1.8.2 It is worth commenting on two elements of the plan as far as it concerns the car park. The numbers of season ticket issued for this car park had crept up gradually over the years to occupy a substantial proportion of the space available, some 75 bays. This was distorting the usage patterns in the car park and the decision endorsed by the local Steering Group was that season ticket issuing should be suspended in the period after the introduction of the Parking Plan so that new parking patterns could be established without this distorting effect and, critically, allow some of the private non-residential parking in the town centre to come back into use. Sufficient time has elapsed to allow the situation to be reassessed and our judgement is that it would be appropriate to permit the reintroduction of season tickets up to the limit of 50% of the available spaces, as endorsed by the Steering Group.
- 1.8.3 The second element of the Plan relevant to the car park relates to the pricing band for nine hours and over. The endorsed policy is that this will be set at level equivalent to the daily rate in the station car park plus £1. It is intended to be a tariff that is sufficiently high to discourage commuter use of the car park. In the occasional circumstance that this might impinge on local business or resident use that we would not wish to frustrate, we deal with this flexibly and informally.

- 1.8.4 An inevitable first point of focus is the 0 – 2 hour band. This is currently free although a ticket must be displayed. From an operational point of view, this is extremely unsatisfactory.
- 1.8.5 There is anecdotal evidence of misuse and abuse of the free two hour ticket that is difficult to deal with because of the disproportionate frequency of the visits it would necessitate. There is also the issue of littering from unnecessary button pushing, encouraged by the zero cost of a 1 - 2hour ticket. From a practical and operational stand-point, there are compelling reasons why there should be a general policy of charging in the car parks for all time bands even if the first one or two hours are set at a relatively modest level.
- 1.8.6 The Council is extremely sensitive about the levels of car park charges and how these impact on the health and success of the local economy. This helps explain why the existing charges in Borough Green car park across the range of bands are set at a supportive level. **In all the circumstances and considering the wider imperatives for us to achieve effective operational management of parking and to contribute to the wider budgetary challenges confronting the Borough in the longer term, we believe there is no justification for persisting with the zero charge band and that the other bands warrant modest increases. The proposed tariffs are shown in Table 4.**

Table 4

Band (Hours)	Current Tariff (£)	Proposed Tariff (£)
0 - 1	Free (0-2hrs)	0.30
1 - 2	Free (0-2hrs)	0.50
2 - 4	0.50	0.80
4 - 6	1.00	1.30
6 – 9	1.50	1.90
9 +	BG Stn + £1	BG Stn + £1

- 1.8.7 The current daily station peak price is £4 so the proposed 9+ hour tariff will be £5 in accordance with the adopted pricing policy for Borough Green car park. The band up to nine hours, is potentially very attractive for anyone that can regularly go from Borough Green and back in less than this time. However, our monitoring does not suggest that this is currently a problem and full time employment in London will generally require more than this when the travel time is factored in.

- 1.8.8 When pricing at Borough Green was last considered in 2008, the Board also considered season tickets even though the intention at that time was for further issuing to be held in abeyance to allow the Local Parking Plan to settle down. We recommend above that we start issuing season tickets once again but, given the passage of these three years, it is appropriate to assess whether the prices adopted at that time remain valid. The Board agreed a price of £230 for an annual season ticket in the knowledge that this represented a considerable discount over the annualised cost of a daily 6 - 9 hour ticket. On the working assumption that the Board would wish to continue with a similar level of discounted season ticket, we recommend that this be priced at an annual price of £290. By way of comparison, the station car park currently charges £682.50 for an annual season ticket so vigilance will be required to ensure that the season tickets are only supplied to people who work or live in the village. We recommend that the following intermediate prices be adopted as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Season Ticket	Current Tariff (£)	Proposed Tariff (£)
Annual	230	290
Half-yearly	130	160
Quarterly	70	90

1.9 Blue Bell Hill Car Park

- 1.9.1 Blue Bell Hill car park was constructed in 2004 using a substantial 'wind-fall' contribution from the Highways Agency to develop a small existing car park (43 spaces) into something more substantial (276 spaces) to cater for London bound coach commuting. It exploited land that was essentially 'sanitised' in the centre of the substantial intersection at junction 3 of the M2 motorway and the A229 and it allowed us to deal constructively with what had been till then a chronic problem of on-street commuter parking throughout the residential parts of Blue Bell Hill.
- 1.9.2 The Highways Agency suggested building a car park far smaller than the site would allow based on its best estimate of future demand. In contrast, we took the view that it was best to build the site out to its maximum extent in one hit to avoid abortive work in the future when it would inevitably have to be extended to cater for growing demand.
- 1.9.3 At each review of car parking charges, the advice has been that the capacity, as foreseen in the early years, exceeded current demand and that this fact alone militated against increasing the initially introduced tariff of one pound a day. We expected that it would take many years for this car park to reach peak usage but there has been a surge recently in the number of commuters using it resulting in it

being regularly filled to a high proportion of the available number of spaces. This might be a reflection of the increase in rail fares and a switch in mode of travel.

- 1.9.4 We have consistently advised that the price be retained at the £1 a day mark in previous reports to the Board and the difficulty in departing from this round sum serves to illustrate the point made earlier in relation to the potential longevity of the proposed short stay price in the Tonbridge car parks. Nevertheless, there is now a justification for reconsidering the price we are charging in Blue Bell Hill car park not the least because of the VAT increase.
- 1.9.5 The issue to be considered is whether an increase in price will encourage commuters to revert to their old ways and migrate onto the street again. In our view this is not a serious issue because there has been a substantial amount of parking management introduced throughout Blue Bell Hill to curb this driver behaviour. Consequently the risk is less than it was previously. In addition, we have live CCTV monitoring of this car park, providing a substantial security and personal safety benefit for motorists and their vehicles.
- 1.9.6 **In the circumstances, we recommend that the daily rate for parking in this car park should be raised to £1.50.**
- 1.9.7 The travel patterns of commuters using this car park are different from other long stay car parks in the Borough. It appears to be based on a short term perspective and does not automatically produce a consistent five day working week. A consequence of this is that season ticket patronage is minimal, even for the attractively discounted weekly ticket. Nevertheless, there is some limited demand so the following scale of charges in Table 6 is recommended.

Table 6

Band	Existing Tariff (£)	Proposed Tariff (£)
Annual	150	190
Half- yearly	80	110
Quarterly	-	60
Monthly	-	22
Weekly	4	6
Day	1	1.50

1.10 Resident Preferential Parking Permits

- 1.10.1 The current price of a resident preferential parking (RPP) permit is £30 across the Borough. It confers subtly different benefits from zone to zone depending on how the local parking zone is configured. Nevertheless, the price is now uniform everywhere. The cost of a permit was last reviewed in 2008 with an operational implementation date in April 2009 and has remained this way for the past two years.
- 1.10.2 The major problem resulting from leaving prices constant for too long is that change, when it comes, can be seen as disproportionate. When prices are associated with ticket machines and, therefore, coinage considerations, there is no avoiding this difficulty, if proposed changes are to be kept as rounded figures. RPP permits do not require such rounding and more regular incremental change in line with RPI is warranted.
- 1.10.3 **Purely in these terms, and considering the three years since the prices were last reviewed, we would recommend that an RPP permit is increased to £35.**
- 1.10.4 At this level it is still highly competitive with neighbouring districts, though comparison is problematic because in many places there is a stepped scale of charges for first and subsequent vehicles and, in some places such as Tunbridge Wells, a limit in the numbers of permits per household (in some zones of Tunbridge Wells it is two permits). It is worth reminding the Board that RPP permit holders receive a card of ten visitor permits with a new or renewed application. Not everyone makes use of these, of course, but for those who do it represents a £10 discount on the cost of an RPP permit and we make no suggestion that this concession be altered.

1.11 Business Permits

- 1.11.1 The same comments about regularly testing the prices apply to business permits too. These are currently £120 and have been so for three years. **We recommend a rounded increase to £130 for an annual permit.**

1.12 Visitor Permits

- 1.12.1 The one price where there is remarkable consistency across Kent is the £1 charge for a visitor permit. There is some minor variation but most districts have retained this as a 'going rate'. It is a further demonstration of the power of a £1 charge to persist for many years before the pressure for change overcomes it.
- 1.12.2 **Despite comments in the preceding paragraphs about not letting a charge become too settled and embedded, we feel this is one that merits retaining as it is and leaving it for a future review to consider.**

1.13 Commercial Road Car Park

- 1.13.1 The car park at Commercial Road is a small historic remnant left over from development of the neighbouring site many years ago. There are six spaces not available for general access but dedicated for the use of six season tickets held by residents immediately adjacent to the car park. The future usage of this car park needs to be considered more broadly and, in conjunction with the Central Services Director, we intend to assess potential options and to report on these to Members in due course.

1.14 Haysden and Leybourne Lakes Car Parks

- 1.14.1 Members will be aware that charging is in place for car parking at both of the Council's Country Parks. Charging at Leybourne Lakes Country Park has been applied since the Park opened in 2004 and since this date has been subject to a single increase rising from 50p to 60p for up to four hours, and from £2.00 to £2.40 for over four hours in April 2008. With regard to Haysden Country Park, charging has been applied at the Park since 2008 at an equivalent rate to that charged at Leybourne Lakes and to date has not been subject to any increase.
- 1.14.1 In addition to the charges above, an annual season ticket can also be purchased which provides parking at both Country Parks. The season ticket was introduced in 2008 at an annual charge of £25 and has not been subject to any increase.
- 1.14.2 Charges within the Country Park car parks were last considered at the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board on the 13 December 2010. Members of the Board recommended to Cabinet (Decision Notice **D110013CAB**) that the charges be reviewed at a future meeting of the Car Parking Charges Advisory Board. It should again be noted that car parking charges are subject to VAT, which increased to 20% in January 2011.
- 1.14.3 The existing charges, together with the proposed charges, are detailed below and represent a very modest increase. It is proposed that the season ticket price remains unaltered to encourage further uptake and to support regular users of the country parks.

Table 7

Haysden/Leybourne Lakes		
Period – Hours	Current Tariff	Proposed Tariff
0 - 4	0.60	0.70
4+	2.40	2.80
Annual Season	25.00	25.00

1.14.4 The total annual net income from the Country Park car parks in 2010/11 was £41,270. Based on current levels of demand, and taking into account the increase in VAT, it is anticipated that the proposed charges will generate additional annual net income to the Council of £4,000, and this has helped underpin additional investment in these car parks since the introduction of the parking regime.

1.14.5 For information, the current charging structure in relation to Kent County Council's Country Parks is:

- £1.20 to £2.00 (park dependent) flat rate Monday to Friday
- £1.70 to £2.50 (park dependent) flat rate Weekend and Bank Holidays
- £35 season ticket (covers 8 sites across Kent)

1.14.6 It can, therefore, be seen that in comparison to the charges applied by KCC, this Council's proposed charges continue to offer value for money, with the season ticket benefitting regular users of the Park.

1.15 On-street Parking Charges

1.15.1 In this Borough there is only one small area subject to on-street parking charges. This is located at Avebury Avenue in Tonbridge and some of the neighbouring streets and it was installed with the main aim of providing some rapid turnover short stay spaces close to the town centre as well as some additional capacity for resident permit holders in the area.

1.15.2 The price of a ticket was last changed in 2008 and this reflected the general rates for short stay spaces in the town centre car parks, subject to the unique point that these on-street bays carried a 0 to 30 minutes band priced at 30 pence.

1.15.3 We consider that the aim of keeping these spaces attractive for very short stay should be retained and, in contrast, that there should be less encouragement for the longer end of the short stay period. Although we recommend that the prices be increased, we consider that the first half hour band should be less than half the proposed hourly rate in the main car parks. If it is set at 40 pence, this will be 20 pence cheaper than the new half hour rate in the main car parks (60 pence).

1.15.4 The one hour price should match the car parks but bands above this should be correspondingly dearer to discourage such usage which can be accommodated readily within the town centre car parks. **With these changes in mind, we recommend the proposals in Table 8.**

Table 8

Band	Current Tariff (£)	Proposed Tariff (£)
0 – 30 mins	0.30	0.40
30 mins – 1 hour	0.80	1.00
1 – 2 hours	1.50	1.80
2 – 3 hours	2.10	2.50

1.16 Potential Additional Charging

- 1.16.1 Previous reviews of parking fees have considered a number of additional items that could merit a charge. Some, such as payment for overnight, Sunday and public holiday parking in car parks are routinely levied by a number of neighbouring authorities. However, this Council's view has been till now that local circumstances in this Borough did not justify introducing such charging policies. Similar considerations apply to the other regular items suggested as meriting assessment; namely, charging in Snodland, West Malling and Aylesford car park and introducing additional areas of on-street charging. We will discuss each of these in turn.

1.17 Charging Period in the Car Parks

- 1.17.1 The chargeable period in the car parks is 8 am till 6 pm Monday to Saturday except for Lower Castle Field (free Saturday afternoon) and Borough Green car park (free Saturdays). Observations and ticket machine issuing data demonstrate that there is significant activity in many of the car parks before 8 am and in the evenings after 6 pm.
- 1.17.2 Business hours have increasingly extended beyond the historical nine-to-five period and there is also considerable shopping activity in the evening. This has led many Councils to extend the hours of operation of their car parks to reflect this. Thus far, this Council has not done so because there is a significant level of leisure, sport and social activity reliant on the town centre parking capacity and the view of the Board has consistently been that this activity should be supported to the extent possible and not compromised by an extended charging period.
- 1.17.3 The question to be considered is whether circumstances have altered in a way that might justify changing the stance adopted when this was last considered in 2008? The answer is no and the factors that influenced the position back then have, if anything, moved in a direction that reinforces the need to retain the car park hours as they now are. The morning and evening sport and leisure activity focused on the Angel Centre relies on the car parking and extended pricing could

have an adverse impact on this and it could prejudice broader policies of the Council related to 'healthy living'.

- 1.17.4 There is little to be gained in parking management terms by changing the current arrangements, the yield financially is at best marginal and the risk to services supported by this ready access to free parking in the early morning and mid to late evening is significant. **For these reasons we recommend that the operational hours of the car parks be kept as they currently are.**

1.18 Sundays and Public Holidays

- 1.18.1 Despite the effects of the recession, Sundays and public holidays are becoming increasingly busy and this explains why, for a growing number of parking authorities across the county it has become 'just another day' as far as parking charges are concerned. Looking at this purely as a revenue stream, there is certainly potential to realise more income in the parking account, although there are countervailing operational considerations that have to be factored into this. It is not just a simple matter of changing the ticket machines and signs. There are resourcing implications for the parking team and there would need to be a general firming up of all the signs and lines around the town centre for seven day working because, if this were not to be properly addressed, Sunday charging is highly likely just to force people out of the car parks and onto potentially unsuitable on-street locations.
- 1.18.2 The Board has routinely considered Sunday charging each time it has met and consistently decided against introducing it. This was partly for the pragmatic operational reasons just described but also for the more fundamental reason that it believed the local community remained unsupportive of such a proposal and wished to retain a degree of specialness about the day, notwithstanding the growth in commercial activity in the town centre. We do not perceive any significant difference in circumstances since this was last considered by the Board and, **unless the Board is minded to instruct further work in identifying the full implications of this proposal, we are minded to recommend that things be left as they currently are.**

1.19 Charges in the Northern Car Parks

- 1.19.1 The car parks in Snodland, West Malling, Martin Square and Aylesford have been referred in a shorthand way as the 'northern car parks' although there are a number of other smaller ones dotted around the villages that also help support a range of local parking needs. We focus for the moment on these four larger car parks as they are important for both local residents and businesses and are all very well used. Each car park has its own usage patterns and characteristics and consideration of whether charging could or should be introduced really depends on individual assessment of the particular local circumstances in each car park and the role it plays in the wider parking management picture in each location.

- 1.19.2 **Martin Square** - Considering first Martin Square, this car park operates in close association with the immediately adjacent shops and it is a vitally important local facility in this area. The businesses there have to trade in an environment of stiff competition from the large Tescos on Leybourne Way and from the concentration of shops at Quarry Wood. The sentiment of the Board has consistently been that this is not natural territory where it would wish to introduce a charge unless there was some compelling, over-arching parking management reason to do so. We discern no such reason and we believe that even into the long term this car park will remain one where special local factors support it being free in order to support local economic vitality at a micro level.
- 1.19.3 **Snodland Car Park** – The position for Snodland car park is broadly to Martin Square. It is an important facility for local residents who would not otherwise have any ready access to parking and it represents a critical support for local retail activity exposed to considerable competitive pressures. It is likely that special local factors will, for the foreseeable future, tend to support it being free in order to support local economic vitality at a micro level.
- 1.19.4 **West Malling and Aylesford** – The Borough Council provides some 260 spaces in the two public car parks in the West Malling and these, together with a considerable number of on-street spaces, help support a thriving local economy relative to what it was some 20 years ago. We implemented a Local Parking Plan in 2004 to manage the competing demands for parking and we extended Ryarsh Lane car park a few years later to create some more off-street spaces.
- 1.19.5 As mentioned earlier in this paper in relation to Ryarsh Lane car park, it is a firm commitment that we revisit all our Local Parking Plans when they have been implemented and have settled down to deal with comments and observations from the local community and also to refine the details of the scheme in the light of changes to local parking patterns that result from the Plan. The sheer scale of parking work across the Borough on 'first time' responses to local requests has made it impossible till now to revisit areas needing a 'second pass' such as West Malling. However, the aim is to reassess the West Malling Local Parking Plan just as soon as a few commitments have been completed within the current year.
- 1.19.6 We have a similar commitment to deal with parking issues in Aylesford, including the management of the two public car parks in the village.
- 1.19.7 Given the planned work of assessment and review of local parking needs in West Malling and Aylesford, it is premature to judge whether any further parking management, including charging, is appropriate. Any potential proposals should emerge naturally from the reviews and the associated local consultations.

1.20 **Overnight Resident Season Ticket – Tonbridge**

- 1.20.1 While fairly marginal in financial terms, we are recommending the introduction of a new type of season ticket. As time has progressed, the number of people living right in the centre of Tonbridge has continued to grow. This is welcome for the

vitality and vibrancy of the town in the evenings but it does have some disadvantage for those residents who want access to a private car. Ready access to on-street parking opportunities are generally rare in the heart of the town and there is small, but growing stream of requests for overnight parking in the car parks.

- 1.20.2 Between 6pm and 8am the next day from Monday to Saturday there is no issue for the Council as the car parks are free and use is unrestricted. However for some people, this is operationally constraining and they wish to be in the car park a little longer in the morning or a little earlier in the afternoon. Consequently, what is being sought is a season ticket that will allow use between the charge periods of 8 to 9am and from 4 to 6 pm. These are times when there is ample capacity in the car parks and it provides a good opportunity to meet the needs of some local residents, while generating a modest income. The duration of this short stay season ticket would effectively be for a three hour period each day so it seems reasonable to set the annual price as three tenths of the full season ticket price; that is, £240 a year.

1.21 Legal Implications

- 1.21.1 The powers allowing the Borough Council to carry out parking management activity are contained in Sections 32 and 35 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, supplemented by formal agreement with Kent County Council. As the Local Highway Authority in respect of its powers under the Traffic Management Act 2004.
- 1.21.2 Changes to parking tariffs should be made using the variation notice procedures set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

1.22 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.22.1 This review has examined the complete range of current parking fees and considered potential additional items. This assessment is firmly set in a context of considerable and continuing investment in the parking management service. The recommendations have paid considerable attention to local economic and social circumstances and they seek to achieve a best balance between parking management objectives and a proper and fair rate of return for the service.
- 1.22.2 This results in a series of reasonable and modest increases, moderated greatly in their impact by the fact that not far short of a million tickets each year are or have the potential to be refunded in the short stay car parks in Tonbridge. There is certainly not the breadth of charging that takes place in many other districts in Kent where, for example, Sunday and public holiday charging is the norm rather than the exception and this Council continues to resile from extending the coverage of the charging regime to include such items.

- 1.22.3 Table 9 is a summary of the financial impact of the recommendations contained in the paper. It is based on the assumption that ticket sales remain uninfluenced by price increases and that there is a similar distribution of tickets in each pricing band.
- 1.22.4 It does not make any allowance for the proposed half-hour band because it is impossible to predict what the uptake might be and whether this uptake will be generated by new customers or customers 'down-banding' from a one hour ticket. The first of these would be positive for income while the latter would be negative. The best assessment at this stage is that it is likely to be broadly neutral.

Table 9

Paragraph	Income Source	Est Additional income 2011/12 ¹ £000s	Est Additional income 2012/13 £000's
1.4.7 1.4.8	Short and long stay parking in Tonbridge	87	174
1.6.3	Season tickets in Tonbridge car parks	2.5	5
1.8.6	Borough Green car park	1.5	3
1.8.8	Borough Green car park season tickets	1	2
1.9.6	Blue Bell Hill car park	7	14
1.10.3	Resident preferential parking permits.	-	10
1.11.1	Business permits	-	2
1.15.4	On-street charges	1	2
	Less estimated current level of enhanced income.	(50)	(100)
	Additional Income	50	112

Note 1: Assumes new charges can be introduced from 1 October 2011. This does not include RPP permit or Business permit charges as these need to be tied to the start of the next financial year for operational and practical purposes.

1.23 Risk Assessment

- 1.23.1 The estimated additional income is modelled on future parking patterns and demand matching what currently takes place. That is, it does not reflect any potential adverse customer reaction towards less use of the car parks or to shorter stays. Nor does it take into account the possibility of increased take up of the dual ticketing arrangement in Angel and Botany car parks.

1.24 Policy Considerations

- 1.24.1 Asset Management

1.25 Recommendations

- 1.25.1 That Cabinet be recommended **TO APPROVE** the following proposals;
- 1) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for short and long stay parking in Tonbridge shown in Table 1 and 2.
 - 2) Include a new half hour charging band as shown in Table 1.
 - 3) Offer the option of short stay parking in the long stay car parks by extending the current weekend pricing arrangement to weekdays.
 - 4) Retain the current special pricing structure for Saturdays in Lower Castle Field car park, subject to the proposed charges set out in Table 2.
 - 5) Adopt the schedule of season ticket prices shown in Table 3.
 - 6) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for Borough Green car park shown in Table 4.
 - 7) Adopt the season ticket prices for Borough Green car park shown in Table 5.
 - 8) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for Blue Bell Hill car park shown in Table 6.
 - 9) Set the cost of an annual resident preferential parking (RPP) permit at £35 from April 2012.
 - 10) Retain the cost of a visitor permit at £1 and continue to provide ten free visitor permits when an RPP permit is issued or renewed.
 - 11) Increase the price of an annual business permit to £130.

- 12) Introduce the schedule of prices for Haysden and Leybourne Lakes country parks shown in Table 7.
- 13) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for on-street parking in Tonbridge shown in Table 8.
- 14) Introduce a special season ticket for resident use at each end of the charging period at an annual cost of £240.

Background papers:

contact: Michael McCulloch

Nil

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Sharon Shelton
Director of Finance

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The recommended changes are neutral in their effect on people within the protected characteristics groupings.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The recommendations preserve the special arrangements that exist in the Borough car parks to assist disabled people who have Blue Badges.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		N/A

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.