

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

20 January 2014

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 CAR PARKING FEES, CHARGES AND OPERATIONS

Summary

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

This report considers all current and potential fees and charges and, through a careful balance of considerations of parking management objectives and support for the local economy, it recommends an appropriate way forward. In summary, the proposals are as follows:

- The continuation of the current policy of no charges in the early morning, late evening, overnight, on Sundays and Public Holidays
- No change to the cost of a resident preferential parking permit, visitor permit or business permit.
- No change to the on-street parking charges
- The half-hour stay parking band to be retained at 50p
- First hour of parking in Tonbridge town centre car parks to be increased to £1.10p
- Broadly, a 20p across the board increase on other tariff bands except the all day band which is proposed at an additional 30p a day
- Annual season tickets in Tonbridge car parks to be raised from £799 to £850
- No change to the tariffs in Borough Green car park
- Blue Bell Hill car park charges to be increased to £2 a day.

- Haysden and Leybourne Lakes – increase the charge for up to 4 hours from 70p to 80p and the over 4 hours charge from £2.80 to £3

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 The Council regularly reviews its fees and charges for services provided for the local community; the last review was undertaken in July 2011 and consequently there has been no increase in any parking charges in the Borough for two and a half years.

1.3 Continuing Investment in the Parking Service

1.3.1 As in previous years, the review seeks to achieve a careful balance between supporting the local economy, managing parking on behalf of residents and businesses and securing some financial return to support 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. It is also true to say that many of the Council's town centre car parks are potentially value land assets were they not to be given over for parking purposes.

1.3.2 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) Approximately £21,000 has been invested since 2011 in a range of on-street parking measures across the Borough.
- 2) Improvement works have been carried out at a number of car parks including resurfacing of the Upper Castle Fields and Sovereign Way East Car parks, reconstruction of a retaining wall in Kinnings Row Car Park, relining throughout many car parks, costing approximately £120,000 from the capital budgets for this work. Further works planned for the near future include a further extension to the Lower Castle Fields Car Park which should yield an additional 67 spaces for general use.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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 £96,000. Rates are around £208,000 each year and to round off this section on maintenance and safety, CCTV should be included and this amounts to some £265,000 each year to keep the car parks safe and secure for customers.

- 5) The enforcement service, the CEOs and the support team at Tonbridge Castle are critical to 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.
- 6) In addition, there is also a staff cost associated with implementing Local Parking Plans and the phased programme of more ad hoc parking interactions. This is integrated with other transportation related work but the input in an average year comes to about £30,000.

1.3.3 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.

1.4 Scope and Context of the Review

1.4.1 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. National economic issues have also prompted reductions in local government funding. Inevitably, this is leading many Councils to examine their income streams with great care and consideration. Clearly, the revenue derived from parking is an important element in the Council's budget, but fees and charges must be carefully balanced by consideration 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.

1.4.2 I am also minded that the car parking picture in central Tonbridge could change during the course of the next three to five year period should the proposals for redevelopment and regeneration take place. During that time there will inevitably be some change and temporary management arrangements put in place.

1.4.3 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.

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

1.5.1 **The 30 Minute Tariff** - The 30 minute tariff was introduced in Tonbridge in the last review in 2011. This has proved to be a very popular facility with almost 300,000 tickets sold each year. The price is currently set at 50p. Maidstone Borough Council currently charges the same price and Sevenoaks District Council 70p.

1.5.2 This 30 minute tariff has become an important dimension in the overall parking picture in Tonbridge meeting specific short stay trips and no change is recommended at this time.

1.5.3 **The One Hour Tariff** – This is the most popular ticket sold (> 500,000 each year) and the current price has not risen since the last review in 2011.

1.5.4 Most people understand that providing the parking management service comes at a cost and it seems right that if any increase in charges are to be contemplated, then it is the prime use period that should see the rise. However, an important consideration that features in this assessment is that a substantial proportion of all ticket sales in Tonbridge town centre are subject to the dual ticketing arrangement with Sainsbury's, 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, but at the same time brings in important additional income to the Council.

1.5.5 On balance, it is right to now increase the first hour charge by a nominal amount to £1.10, particularly bearing in mind that this pricing has been held static for over two years.

1.5.6 **Other Daily Tariffs** - The suggested change for longer term bands is an addition of 20p on all charges with the exception of the all-day charge which should be a 30p increase to help encourage the take-up of season tickets which will remain attractively priced relative to the day cost. The recommended adjustments to the pricing are shown in Table 1.

1.5.7 In considering the all-day charge, it is worth noting that the 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
30 minutes	0.50	0.50
1 hour	1.00	1.10
2 hour	1.70	1.90
3 hour	2.30	2.50
4 hour	2.80	3.00
Long Stay		
3 hour	2.30	2.50
6 hour	3.30	3.50
All day	4.90	5.20

1.6 Lower Castle Fields Car Park

1.6.1 I am not proposing any change to the pricing or management structure in this car park which Members will appreciate provides for a very wide range of parking visitors, using sports and leisure facilities as well as the town centre.

1.7 Season Tickets in Tonbridge Car Parks

1.7.1 Annual season tickets for the car parks are currently set at £799 and I am recommending that this be increased to £850. An annual season ticket in the station car park currently costs £1,128.50 and so for local workers this remains a competitive charge.

1.7.2 Table 2 contains recommended prices of the various season tickets.

Table 2

	Current Charge (£)	Proposed Charge (£)
Monthly	90	95
Quarterly	250	265
Half-yearly	450	480
Annual	799	850

1.8 Ryarsh Lane Car Park, West Malling

- 1.8.1 Ryarsh Lane car park operates a 'permit users only' car park between 8am and 3pm, Monday to Friday. These permits are available to people working for businesses in West Malling at a price of £50 for a year's parking.
- 1.8.2 The West Malling Local Parking Plan Steering Group is currently considering various options for the ongoing use of this key facility and its relationship with the West Malling High Street short stay car park. Therefore I am not recommending any changes for this car park at this time.

1.9 Borough Green Car Park

- 1.9.1 This car park is operating well and is vital to the business community and shopping facilities in the town. There is currently a two hour free parking policy with charging beyond, mainly to guard against use by commuters or others not using town centre shops and services. I am wary about altering the levels of car park charges and how these might impact on the health and success of the local economy and am not recommending any changes for this car park at this time.

1.10 Blue Bell Hill Car Park

- 1.10.1 This 220 space commuter car park has become increasingly popular in the last few years and, although the number of parked cars varies from day to day, on some days the car park is almost full.
- 1.10.2 The car park is well located for those wishing to car share or travel by commuter bus into London. However the operating costs are not insignificant and it is important that the Council get a reasonable income from this asset.
- 1.10.3 In the circumstances, I recommend that the daily rate for parking in this car park should be raised from £1.50 to £2, which would still represent excellent value.
- 1.10.4 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 sales are minimal, even for the attractively discounted weekly ticket. Nevertheless, there is some limited demand so the following scale of charges in Table 3 is recommended.

Table 3

Band	Existing Tariff (£)	Proposed Tariff (£)
Day	1.50	2
Weekly	6	7
Monthly	22	26
Quarterly	60	70
Half- yearly	110	125
Annual	190	220

1.11 Resident Preferential Parking Permits

1.11.1 The Borough has a wide and comprehensive coverage of residential preferential parking (RPP) schemes. The current price of a resident preferential parking permit is £35 and was raised from £30 in 2001. This charge is effectively a contribution towards the administration costs of running this service. This is undoubtedly a valuable service to local residents, especially where parking is limited and/or under pressure from other potential users. However, mindful of the current prevailing economic conditions I am not recommending that we make a change as part of this review.

1.12 Business Permits

1.12.1 The comments above about regularly testing the prices apply to business permits too. These are currently £130 and have been so since 2011. I am not recommending that we increase this as part of this review.

1.13 Visitor Permits

1.13.1 The £1 charge for a visitor permit is still fairly comparable across Kent, although some districts are starting to increase their price now. However, I feel this is one that merits retaining as it is and leaving it for a future review to consider.

1.14 Country Park 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. The last increase was applied in 2012 with charges rising from 60p to 70p for up to four hours and from £2.40 to £2.80 for over four hours.

1.14.2 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.

1.14.3 The existing charges, together with the proposed charges, are detailed below and represent a 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 4

Haysden/Leybourne Lakes Country Parks

Period - Hours	Current Tariff	Proposed Tariff
0-4	70p	80p
4+	2.80	3.00
Annual Season	25.00	25.00

1.14.4 The total annual net income from the Country Park car parks in 2012/13 was £41,190. Based on current levels of demand it is anticipated that the proposed charges will generate additional annual net income to the Council of £4,500.

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

- £1.50 to £2.00 (park dependent) flat rate Monday to Friday
- £2.00 to £2.50 (park dependent) flat rate weekend and Bank Holidays
- £40 season ticket (covers eight 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 excellent value for money.

1.15 On-street Parking Charges

1.15.1 There is only one small area subject to on-street parking charges across the Borough. 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 2011 and this generally reflected the rates for short stay spaces in the town centre car parks.

1.15.3 These limited short-stay spaces provide useful opportunities for those who may not wish to use the town centre car parks and I am not recommending a change to the tariff at this time. This would also reflect the thrust of current Government

policy which is directed at reducing the burden on primarily on-street parking costs.

1.16 Potential Additional Charging

1.16.1 Previous reviews of parking fees have considered a number of additional items that could be considered for 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. This Council's view has been that local circumstances in the Borough have not justified introducing such charging policies. Similar considerations apply to the other items where charging merits consideration; namely, the car parks in Snodland, West Malling and Aylesford car parks and introducing additional areas of on-street charging. Each of these is discussed in turn.

1.17 Charging Period in the Car Parks

1.17.1 The chargeable period in the car parks is 8am until 6pm, 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 some shopping activity in the evening. This has led many councils to extend the hours of operation of their car parks to reflect this. Tonbridge has a significant level of leisure, sport and social activity, reliant on the town centre parking capacity and the Council has consistently supported these activities by not extending charging periods.

1.17.3 There is little to be gained in parking management terms by changing the current arrangements. It would require extended enforcement and the yield financially is relatively marginal and the risk to services supported by this ready access to free parking in the early morning and mid to late evening seems significant. For these reasons I recommend that the operational hours of the car parks be kept as they are currently.

1.18 Sundays and Public Holidays

1.18.1 Sundays and public holidays are becoming increasingly busy and this explains why a growing number of parking authorities across the county have introduced parking charges. We have considered the potential introduction of, say, a flat rate charge of £1 for these days, which could, for example, raise an additional £50,000 p.a. However, there are other resourcing implications regarding the need to review and strengthen the on-street waiting restrictions and provide additional enforcement around the town centre for seven day working or we are likely to simply move people out of the car parks and onto potentially unsuitable on-street locations.

1.18.2 Members have routinely considered Sunday charging at each review and consistently decided against introducing it, primarily in support of the local businesses and the community use of car parks. I do not perceive any significant difference in circumstances since this was last considered and I am minded to recommend that things be left as they are currently.

1.19 Charges in the Northern Car Parks

1.19.1 The car parks in Snodland, West Malling, Martin Square and Aylesford are, for ease of reference, known 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. I would like to 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.

1.20 Snodland Car Park – Snodland car park 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 these special local factors will, for the foreseeable future, tend to support it being free in order to support local economic vitality.

1.21 West Malling – The Borough Council provides some 260 spaces in the 2 public car parks in West Malling and these, together with a considerable number of on-street spaces; help support a thriving local economy. The Local Parking Plan, implemented in 2004, manages the competing demands for parking and we extended Ryarsh Lane car park a few years later to create some more off-street spaces.

1.21.1 The West Malling Local Parking Plan Steering Group is currently considering various options for the ongoing use and management of the Shoppers' High Street car park and requested that the current restrictions (four hour maximum) be reduced to a maximum of three hours and be extended to include Saturdays. The Group's current position, as reported previously to the Board, is that this car park should remain free of charge. In the meantime, we are deploying some new registration plate referenced machines to assist with enforcement. No charges are currently proposed but this will need to be kept under review.

1.22 Martin Square – The car park at Martin Square 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 supermarkets and DIY stores nearby. Members have previously agreed that we should not introduce a charge here unless there was some compelling, over-arching parking management reason to do so. I am unaware of such a reason and believe that even into the long term this car park will remain

one where special local factors again support it being free in order to support local economic vitality.

1.22.1 **Aylesford** – Again Aylesford has benefited from its own review through a Local Steering Group and it is still judged to be inappropriate to charge in these two community car parks which are integral to the vitality of the Village community.

1.23 Overnight Resident Season Ticket – Tonbridge

1.23.1 This overnight ticket has been well received and assists those residents who want access to a private car and wish to return home to park before the end of the charging period (6pm). Ready access to on-street parking opportunities are generally rare in the heart of the town and there is a small, but growing stream of requests for overnight parking in the car parks.

1.23.2 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. This is effectively a short-stay season ticket for a three hour period each day and is priced at £240 a year. I am not recommending a change for this ticket at this time.

1.24 Legal Implications

1.24.1 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.

1.24.2 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.

1.25 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.25.1 This review has examined the complete range of current parking fees and considered potential additional items in the context of considerable and continuing investment in the parking management service. This results in a series of reasonable and relatively modest increases. It is worth noting that around 900,000 tickets each year are, or have the potential to be, refunded in the short-stay car parks in Tonbridge.

1.25.2 Table 5 is a summary of the financial impact of the recommendations contained in the paper. It is based on the assumption that current usage remains constant and that ticket sales remain uninfluenced by price increases and that there is a similar distribution of tickets in each pricing band.

Table 5

Paragraph	Income Source	Estimated Additional income 2013/14¹
1.5	Short and long stay parking in Tonbridge	£113k
1.7	Season tickets in Tonbridge car parks	£6.25k
1.10	Blue Bell Hill car park	£14k
1.14	Haysden and Leybourne Lakes car parks	£4.5k
	Additional income for 2013/14 ¹	£137.75k

Note 1: Assumes new charges can be introduced from 1 April 2014. This may not be achievable and the actual date of commencement for the new charges might slip into May.

1.26 Risk Assessment

1.26.1 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.

1.27 Equality Impact Assessment

1.27.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.28 Policy Considerations

1.28.1 Asset Management

1.29 Recommendations

1.29.1 That Cabinet be recommended **TO APPROVE** the following proposals with effect from April 2014;

- 1) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for short and long stay parking in Tonbridge shown in Table 1.
- 2) Adopt the schedule of season ticket prices shown in Table 2.

- 3) Introduce the schedule of tariffs for Blue Bell Hill car park shown in Table 3.
- 4) Introduce the schedule of prices for Haysden and Leybourne Lakes country parks shown in Table 4.
- 5) Reduce the maximum stay in the West Malling High Street car park for 4 hours to 3 hours.
- 6) Any objections received by written representations to the administrative process of making the Off-Street Order may be considered by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation.

Background papers:

contact: Mike O'Brien

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

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.