

Copied by Robert Styles ✓

15 MAR 2016

Dear Mrs Beilby,
Car Parking Charges in West Malling,.

12th March 2016

In 1973, Malling Rural District Council, Tonbridge Town, and Tonbridge Rural District Council were prepared for amalgamation into Tonbridge and Malling District (later renamed Borough) Council. A number of steering groups discussed various practical aspects of the merger, including the location of the offices and the time of day of meetings (MRDC met during the day.) One of the more difficult issues was how rates would be applied.

Tonbridge Town had decided not to establish a Town Council. Tonbridge residents would therefore pay only general Borough Rate. The remainder of the emerging Borough was entirely covered by Parish Councils who levied their own rate in addition. The amount collected by the Parish rates varied greatly from the lowest rate at that time by West Peckham Parish Council and the highest, possibly by Ditton. It was obvious that these Parish rates could not be equalised within the general Borough Rate.

Parishes collected rates in respect of the so called Concurrent Functions within their own parishes ie functions which both Parish and Borough Councils had the power to deliver. These included street lighting, churchyards cemeteries, and recreation facilities such as sports pitches and playing fields. However, in the absence of a Tonbridge rate, the costs for those services in Tonbridge town were to be paid for out of the general Borough rate which all Borough residents would pay. It was clear that this system would result in much lower levels of rate being paid by Tonbridge town householders than in the parishes, and that this would be unfair.

Under Malling Rural District Council, the centres of West Malling, Snodland, Larkfield, Borough Green and Aylesford were recognised as natural local service centres, providing shops and services such as medical surgeries, library and post office to many surrounding parishes. Therefore, car parks were provided free of charge to support this provision of services to the wider community by those local service parish centres. In Tonbridge however, parking had been charged as was normal in larger towns.

During the merger negotiations, it was recognised there would need to be a compromise to solve these issues. Part of the solution adopted was that car parking charges should remain free in the Rural District area, firstly in order not to threaten the viability of the local service centres, and secondly as part recompense for the lower rating of Tonbridge householders. In addition, the Borough Council would set up a system of Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils, paying a subsidy to partly meet the cost of delivery of concurrent functions.

Over the intervening years, there have been a number of occasions at which the possibility of extending charges to the rural car parks has been discussed as an additional source of revenue. However, before and during the leadership of Mark Worrall, the suggestion was never pursued not only because of its effects on the businesses of West Malling, but also because councillors and officers reminded the Council that it would go against the 'agreements' that free parking was a partial recompense for the much lower rates enjoyed by Tonbridge residents since 1974. Abandoning free car parking would therefore need to be accompanied by reconsideration of a special rate for Tonbridge.

We hope that the Borough Council will take this statement into account when making its decision on the current proposal to impose charges on West Malling, and the intention to review the car parking arrangements in Snodland, Aylesford and Martin Square, Larkfield.

J.E. Sweetman

John Sweetman
*Former Administration Director
and Acting Chief Executive.*

David Thornewell

David Thornewell
FORMER TMBR COUNCILLOR
AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL