

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

06 November 2023

Report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services, the Director of Finance and the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Infrastructure

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 REVIEW OF CAR PARKING FEES & CHARGES

Summary

This report brings forward proposals for existing on street and off street car parking fees and charges for implementation from 1st April 2024. The Committee is requested to consider the proposals and make recommendations to Cabinet.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 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 with the exception of Haysden Country Park, the last full review was last undertaken in November 2021.
- 1.1.2 In bringing forward the proposals in this report, consideration has been given to the set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges established by the Council. The guiding principles can be summarised as follows:-
- Fees and charges should have due regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and should reflect the Council's key priorities.
 - If there is to be a subsidy from the Council taxpayer to the service user this should be a conscious choice.
 - The Council should look to maximise income subject to market conditions, opportunities and comparable charges elsewhere, in the context of its key priorities and other corporate aims and priorities.
 - Fees and charges should be reviewed at least annually (unless fixed by statute or some other body).
 - Fees and charges should not be used to provide a subsidy from the Council taxpayer to commercial operators.
 - There should be consistency between charges for similar services.

In addition to the above, consideration also needs to be given to a number of specific principles relating to the provision of a successful car parking service. In summary the Council should:-

- Seek to optimise the availability of parking.
- Manage assets in a fair commercial and efficient manner.
- Implement an appropriate charging regime taking into account the cost of the parking service
- Balance the management of the car parks to meet the needs of all users
- Have in place suitable inspection and maintenance regimes to ensure it provides safe and well-maintained opportunities for the public to park their vehicles.

At the recent meeting of Cabinet it was agreed to consult on proposed evening, Sunday and Bank holiday charges and charges in previous free for use car parks and on street parking bays. These charges are subject to formal public consultation prior to further consideration by Cabinet.

1.1.3 The report considers current and future fees and charges for parking, and following careful consideration of the aforementioned principles, brings forward a number of proposals. In summary the proposals are as follows:

- Short stay parking charges in Tonbridge for parking longer than 1 hour to increase in a linear fashion in line with an hourly charge of £1.60. A penalty tariff is in place for parking longer than 4 hours. Long stay parking charges in Tonbridge to increase by 20p per tariff band.
- Residential preferential parking permits to increase from £52 to £57 per annum across the whole borough, with a rising scale of charges based on the number of cars per household increasing by proportionate amounts. New applicants to continue to receive 10 visitor permits free of charge.
- Visitor permits to be increased to £14 for 10 permits.
- Country parks – an increase from £2 to £2.20 for the first 4 hours. Season tickets for regular users to increase from £65 to £70.
- West Malling High Street car park – an increase in short stay parking charges in the High Street car park as shown in Table 5. Season tickets for the Ryarsh Lane car park to increase from £255 to £290 and the Saturday phone payment charges to reflect the same rate as the High Street car park.
- Borough Green – charges in the Western Road car park to increase by 10p per hour.
- Peak and Off-Peak Season tickets – increases to reflect market conditions/demand.

- Business permits/dispensations for on-street – increases applied with the exception of permits for carers.
- Carers permits to remain free of charge

1.1.4 It is relevant for Members to note that the last annual review of car parking charges was in 2021 with implementation of the new charges in April 2022. Since those charges were implemented inflation has been running at a high level which has impacted on the cost of providing the parking service.

1.2 Investment in the Parking Service

1.2.1 The review seeks to achieve a balance between proactively managing parking on behalf of residents and businesses and an appropriate charging regime taking into account the cost of the parking service. Many items contribute to this cost, such as maintenance of the car parks, enforcement, business rates, lighting, security measures, renewal of signs and lines and a considerable investment in the Parking Action Plan to improve the management and convenience of parking throughout the Borough. Members will also note that off-street car parking charges paid by users are subject to VAT. It is also true to say that many of the Council's car parks are potentially valuable land assets were they not to be given over for parking purposes, representing an 'opportunity cost' to the Council.

1.2.2 Over the period since the previous review report in November 2021, 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 Members as well as 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:-

- Improvement works to the value of £55,000 have been carried out in a number of car parks including Martin Square, Bradford Street, Teston Road, Sovereign Way Mid & North, Ryarsh Lane and Angel West
- In addition to these works approximately £335,000 has been spent in Angel East resurfacing large areas of the car park with replacement drainage channels added. As part of the contract agreement with Sainsburys, the value of these works are re-charged back to Sainsburys.
- The improvement work is underpinned by a continuing and consistent programme of maintenance work to keep the car parks safe, clean, well presented 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 £30,000 and it is

notable that there is a nationwide increase in materials costs for civil engineering works, that affects the Council's maintenance work.

- Business Rates are around £294,000 per annum and to round off this section on maintenance and safety, CCTV provision amounts to £188,500 each year to keep the car parks safe and secure.
- The enforcement service includes 10 full time CEO's. Staff are patrolling until 8pm at locations across the whole Borough, and the team are critical to promoting a well-ordered parking environment in the Borough that is responsive to local needs and pressures. It is also relevant to note that the expectations from the public in terms of levels of enforcement continue grow. In addition, an external contractor is employed to empty the ticket machines at an annual cost of £71,500.
- In addition, there is also a staff cost associated with implementing Local Parking Plans and the phased programme of more ad-hoc parking interactions. Whilst this is integrated with other parking related work, the average annual cost is iro. £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 and provide an important context for the review of parking fees and charges that follows. Further investment may also be required in the future to meet initiatives brought forward in the context of the Council's Digital and Climate Change Strategies.

1.3 Comparative Charges

1.3.1 Comparison with the parking fees and charges of other Kent districts and private sector operators should not be the main driver of what might be appropriate in this Borough, since local circumstances, such as the availability of short and long-stay parking, the convenience of the car park locations, and any "through the till" refunds offered by businesses in Tonbridge (Sainsburys, Waitrose, Iceland and TM Active) are critical in such considerations. Ticket refunds from the aforementioned businesses in Tonbridge amount to £451,000 per annum. Comparative charges do, however, act as a guide and can be viewed by the public as to what might be considered the 'going rate' for parking. For these and other local reasons comparisons of charges outside the Borough and even within must be carefully qualified.

1.3.2 The scope of the review exercise covers consideration of all existing services and charges and includes an assessment of whether current circumstances justify them being maintained as they are or increased. In overview, a comparison of parking charges levied by neighbouring authorities would indicate the proposals

are generally in line with others, and it is anticipated that most other Councils will be bringing forward their own increases in advance of the next financial year.

1.4 Current Income Levels

1.4.1 Income from the Council's car parks is monitored by the Council's Management Team on a monthly basis. This enables any variances against profile to be identified and if necessary action to be taken. Current levels of income reflect an ongoing but gradual recovery from Covid and have been carefully considered in bringing forward the proposals in this report.

1.4.2 After the first 6 months of the current financial year, income is close to profile.

1.4.3 Parking income for Haysden Country Park is monitored separately. Income after the first 6 months is above/below profile, with a year-end forecast of £89,000.

1.5 Off-Street Parking in Tonbridge – Daily Short and Long Stay Charges

1.5.1 Detailed in Table 1 below are the current and proposed charges for daily short and long stay car parking charges in Tonbridge. It is proposed, subject to public consultation, to extend the Tonbridge car park charging period from 8am-6pm to 8am-8pm, Monday to Saturday and to introduce charges on Sundays or Bank Holidays. The proposed charges shown in the table below will apply to these proposals.

TABLE 1		
Short Stay		
Period – Hours	Current Charge	Proposed Charge
30 minutes	£0.70	£0.80
1 hour	£1.40	£1.60
2 hours	£2.80	£3.20
3 hours	£4.20	£4.80
4 hours	£5.60	£6.40
Additional hours	£2.80	£3.20
Long Stay		
1 hour	£1.40	£1.60
2 hours	£2.60	£3.00
3 hours	£3.50	£4.10
6 hours	£5.40	£6.20
All day (23 hours)	£6.80	£7.00

- 1.5.2 The proposed all-day tariff of £7.00 does not exceed the current all-day rate of £7.90 in the privately operated Tonbridge railway station car park. It operates for 23 hours to prevent the long-term storage of vehicles.
- 1.5.3 Upper Castle Field and Castle Grounds car parks were changed from long stay to short stay as part of the car parking charges last review. This has proved successful, and it is proposed this be retained.

1.6 Season Tickets, Tonbridge

- 1.6.1 The Council currently offers Season Tickets focussed primarily on commuters and workers in the town to park all-day in the Sovereign complex (Sovereign Way East, Sovereign Way North and Vale Road) and Lower Castle Fields car parks. Season tickets are available on a monthly and yearly basis. In addition, as part of the last review of car parking charges, the Council introduced a Town Centre Residents Season Ticket covering a designated area within the town centre. It is suggested that the designated area be extended further to include areas north of the river. A plan of the proposal is shown at **Annex 1** to include residential properties in the area shown in orange to the north of the Medway, west of Cannon Lane, south of Bordyke and east of The Slade.
- 1.6.2 The annual take-up of Season Tickets is currently 57 at the annual rate and 317 at the monthly rate. 38 of the new Residents Season tickets have been sold. Uptake of the season tickets has increased in the recovery period from Covid.
- 1.6.3 The proposed Season Ticket charges at Table 2 takes into consideration the charges applied at the Railway Station car park which has the advantage for commuters of being located immediately next to the Station. The current price of a Tonbridge Station season ticket is £1,415.50.

TABLE 2

Season Tickets, Tonbridge		
	Current Charge	Proposed Charge
Monthly	£120	£132
Annual	£1050	£1150

- 1.6.4 The existing charge for the Town Centre Residents season ticket is £87.50 for 3 months or £350 for a year. Taking into account the aim to increase take up and extend availability it is suggested a modest increase to £90 and £360 respectively is applied.

1.7 Off-Peak Season Ticket, Tonbridge

- 1.7.1 The Council offers an “Off-Peak Season Ticket” in Tonbridge that allows anyone to park between 4pm and 9am the next day (and all-day Saturdays) for £320 per year in any of the Council’s car parks in central Tonbridge. There are currently 7 off peak annual season tickets as demand has reduced since the introduction of the Residents Season tickets. Members will note from Table 3 below that it is the intention to increase the charge to £360 per year.

TABLE 3

Off Peak Season Ticket, Tonbridge		
	Current Annual Charge	Proposed Annual Charge
Off-peak season ticket (4pm-9am & Saturdays)	£320	£360

1.8 Off Street Parking in West Malling – Season Tickets and Short Stay Charges

- 1.8.1 The current Season Ticket for the Ryarsh Lane car park is set at £255 per year or £26 per month. The car park is primarily used by businesses and retailers in the week for their staff. The car park is also free of charge after 3pm on weekdays to enable parents to collect their children from the local primary school. At the last review of charges, charges were introduced for Saturday at the same level as the High Street short stay car park subject to a public consultation exercise, it is suggested these charges will be extended to also apply on Sundays and bank holidays in the future.
- 1.8.2 Privately managed, alternate long-stay parking is available at West Malling railway station. Although it is recognised that this is less convenient for the town, the comparative cost of the parking is shown below in Table 4.

TABLE 4

West Malling Long Stay Parking				
Parking provider	Daily Charge	Off peak Charge	Saturday Charges	Annual Charge
South-eastern (West Malling Station)	£5.60	£5.10	£3.80	£976.00
Ryarsh Lane car park	Not available	Not available	Short stay charges apply as shown below at Table 5	£255 (annually) £26 per month

- 1.8.3 Despite successive increases demand for season tickets in Ryarsh Lane continues to exceed supply and there still remains a tendency for season ticket holders to retain their tickets even when not always required. The car park has 114 spaces and the allocation of tickets is currently limited to 127. At the last review of charges a monthly Season Ticket at £26 per month was introduced. This has proved to be quite popular with 106 monthly tickets sold last year.
- 1.8.4 It is proposed to increase the annual season ticket to £290. The Saturday charges will increase in line with the short stay charges shown below in Table 5.
- 1.8.5 Detailed in Table 5 below are the current and proposed charges for daily short stay car parking charges in West Malling High Street car park.

TABLE 5

West Malling Short Stay		
Period	Current Charge	Proposed Charge
30 minutes	£0.50	£0.60
1 hour	£1.10	£1.20
2 hours	£1.80	£2.00
3 hours	£2.60	£2.90
4 hours	£3.40	£3.80

1.8.6 Resident Season tickets are also available for the car park but these are restricted to local residents. There are currently 13 annual resident season tickets issued.

TABLE 6

Borough Green Western Road Car Park		
	Current Charge	Proposed charge
Up to 30 minutes	£0.20	£0.30
30 minutes to 1 hour	£0.50	£0.60
1 to 2 hours	£0.80	£1.00
2 to 4 hours	£1.50	£1.80
4 to 6 hours	£2.20	£2.60
6 to 9 hours	£3.10	£3.50
All day	£5.30	£5.50
Residents Season Ticket	£350	£385

1.9 Residents Permit Parking Scheme

1.9.1 Residents permits across the Borough are shown below in Table 7 and are based on a rising scale of charges with those who park more cars on the road, paying more for their permits. The rising scale is designed to help manage road space demand where parking is at a premium. In essence, it seeks to discourage people from parking more cars in the road, unless absolutely necessary. 3147 residents permits are currently issued. 3056 relate to a 1st or 2nd car, 76 for a third car and 15 for a 4th.

TABLE 7	Current Annual Charge	Proposed Annual Charge
1 st car	£52	£58
2 nd car	£52	£58
3 rd car	£104	£115
4 th car	£156	£175

1.9.2 Foreign registered vehicles are required to be exported or re-registered in the UK via DVLA after 6 months. With this in mind, we offer 6 month permits to non-UK registered vehicles belonging to residents, at the pro-rata rate for comparable resident parking permits. The proposed change to the cost of resident permits will require a change from £26 to £28.50 for 6 months,

- 1.9.3 The Council offers Business and Carers Permits and Dispensations shown below in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Business/Carers Permits		
Permit type	Current charge per annum	Proposed charge per annum
Business permit (for businesses located within a permit scheme)	£200	£250
Carers permit	£0	£0
Dispensations		
Property Maintenance	£200	£250
On-street dispensation (for building works etc.)	£15 per day £60 per week	£18 per day £75 per week

- 1.9.4 Members will note that it is the intention to increase the cost of the permits/dispensations with the exception of the Carers Permit which it is felt should remain free of charges.

1.10 Visitor Permits

- 1.10.1 The Council has a system of issuing Visitor Permits to holders of Residents Permits to enable their visitors to park within the restricted area. The Visitor Permits effectively operate as a one-day parking permit.

- 1.10.2 Visitor Permits currently cost £12 per sheet of 10 permits, and every permit holder is given a free sheet of 10 permits when they first take out their permit. Currently iro. 2,500 permit sheets are sold each year. The charge per sheet of £12 has not been increased for 4 year and it is therefore proposed that it be increased to £14.

1.11 Haysden Country Park

- 1.11.1 The last increase in charges for parking at the country park was applied in July 2023 with charges rising to £2.00 for up to four hours and 4.50 for over four hours.

- 1.11.2 To reflect the popularity of the Park and the cost of providing the facility it is proposed that the current “up to 4 hour” rate of £2.00 be revised to £2.20. It is not proposed to amend the “over 4 hour” rate to £5.00.

1.11.3 Annual season tickets can also be purchased for regular users of the Park and is. The season ticket was introduced in 2008 and is currently £65 for the whole year. It is suggested that the charge be increased to £70 per annum. There are currently 268 season tickets.

1.11.4 Members may be interested to note that the current charging structure in relation to Kent County Council's Manor Country Parks in West Malling is:

- £2.00 Monday to Friday
- £3.00 Weekend and Bank Holidays
- £62 season ticket (valid at all 9 KCC Country Parks)

1.11.5 The existing charges, together with the proposed charges, are detailed below in Table 9. The proposals take into account the charges at the KCC Country Parks, the value of the season ticket for regular users and current demand.

TABLE 9

Haysden Country Park		
Period	Current Tariff	Proposed Tariff
0-4 Hours	£2.00	£2.20
4+ Hours	£4.50	£5.00
Annual Season Ticket	£65.00	£70.00

1.11.6 With regard to Leybourne Lakes Country Park the management of the site has now transferred to the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust.

1.12 Tonbridge On-Street Pay and Display

1.12.1 The Council currently operates some limited on-street pay and display parking in Tonbridge, the majority operating for up to a maximum stay of either 2 or 3 hours. The purpose of on-street pay and display is to provide short stay parking that is convenient to customers of local businesses, with a regular turn-over of spaces. In addition, the Council offers long stay on street parking in Morley Road, Tonbridge.

1.12.2 The proposed on-street pay and display parking charges are shown in Table 10 below, and are identical to the proposed short stay parking charges in Tonbridge reported earlier in these papers.

TABLE 10

On-Street Pay & Display		
	Current Charge	Proposed charge
Up to 30 minutes	£0.70	£0.80
Up to 1 hour	£1.40	£1.60
Up to 2 hours	£2.80	£3.20
Up to 3 hours (where allowed)	£4.20	£4.80
All day (Morley Road only)	£1.80	£2.00

1.13 Timescale

1.13.1 Changes to the On and Off-street charges will be progressed and reported as required to the appropriate Member meetings. The Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England & Wales) Regulations 1996 requires a statutory consultation of at least 21 days for the invitation of objections, which will then be considered by Cabinet for off street charges and the Joint Transportation Board for on street charges. This will result in any Member endorsed proposals being introduced later next year.

1.14 Legal Implications

1.14.1 The powers allowing the Borough Council to carry out parking management activity are contained in 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. In particular, section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation 1984 Act imposes a general duty on local authorities exercising functions under the Act to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians) and the provision of safe and adequate parking facilities on and off the highway.

1.14.2 Changes to parking charges should be made via an Amendment Order to the Council's on and off-street parking Traffic Regulation Orders, using the procedures set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

1.14.3 Part 2 of The Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions (England) General (Amendment) Regulations 2015 introduced a statutory requirement for a 10 minute “grace” period to time limited parking, whether on-street or off-street, including Pay and Display, regardless of the intended duration of stay, effectively adding the facility to park for an additional 10 minutes to all parking periods.

1.15 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.15.1 This review has examined parking fees and charges within the context of a set of guiding principles, the cost of parking service to the Council and ongoing investment in the parking management service. It is anticipated that the proposals outlined in this report will generate estimated additional income of £364,011. This estimate is based on the assumption that current usage and refund levels remains constant, that ticket sales remain uninfluenced by price increases and that there is a similar distribution of tickets in each pricing bracket.

1.17 Asset Management

1.17.1 It is worthy of note that many of the Council’s car parks represent a significant asset in terms of resale and for development. It is essential given the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy that the Council seeks to ensure that the assets are managed in the most economically advantageous way and may in some cases include disposal of the asset.

1.18 Risk Assessment

1.18.1 The estimated additional income is modelled on predicted future parking patterns and demand matching what currently takes place. It does not reflect any potential adverse customer reaction or the possibility of increased take up. The proposed charges will be subject to formal public consultation early in the New Year, with the outcome reported to Cabinet.

1.19 Equality Impact Assessment

1.19.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.19.2 Blue Badge holders can park free of charge in the Council’s car parks for up to 23 hours. For Blue Badge holders living in a parking permit area, a Resident Parking Permit is not required as long as the valid Blue Badge and clock is correctly displayed. The Blue Badge scheme has recently been extended by Central Government to include people with “hidden disabilities”. This includes people with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health conditions.

1.20 Policy Considerations

1.20.1 Asset Management

1.20.2 Community

1.20.3 Customer Contact

1.20.4 Climate Change

1.21 Recommendations

1.21.1 It is RECOMMENDED that the Committee considers the following car parking proposals for formal public consultation early in the New Year, implementation from 1st April 2024 ,and makes recommendations to Cabinet-

- 1) Introduce the schedule of charges for short and long stay parking in Tonbridge shown in Table 1;
- 2) Adopt the schedules of Peak and Off-Peak Season ticket charges in Tonbridge shown in Tables 2 and 3;
- 3) Increase the Tonbridge Town Centre annual Residents Season ticket from £350 to £360;
- 4) Extend the designated Tonbridge Town Centre Residents Season ticket to the area shown in orange in **Annex 1** to the report.
- 5) Introduce the schedules of charges for long stay and short stay parking in West Malling as shown in Tables 4 & 5;
- 6) Introduce the schedule of charges for parking in Borough Green Western Road car park shown in Table 6;
- 7) Increase Residents Permits as shown in Table 7;
- 8) Introduce the schedule of charges for Business Carers Permits and Dispensations shown in Table 8;
- 9) Visitor permits be increased to at £14 for a book of 10 permits, with the current offer of 10 free permits to new applicants retained;
- 10) Introduce the schedule of charges for Haysden Country Park shown in Table 9; and
- 11) Introduce the schedule of charges for on-street pay & display parking in Tonbridge shown in Table 10.

Background papers:

Annex 1 – Tonbridge Town Centre Residents Season
Ticket area

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