

STRATEGIC PARKING OBJECTIVES

Executive Summary

The purpose of the report is to seek approval for strategic objectives to provide a framework for setting parking fees and charges for Woking car parks on daily tariffs and permit pricing. The primary aim is to rationalise the current myriad of daily tariff options into a simplified, user-friendly structure with a focus on encouraging longer stays for daily visitors and to rationalise the number of permit options, and reposition them, to better incorporate Woking's overall corporate policies. The report also sets out objectives to ensure car parks are self-financing and offer good value for money for the Boroughs visitors and residents.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) the proposed strategic objectives for setting parking fees and charges be agreed; and
- (ii) a report be brought to a subsequent meeting of the Executive to consider a revised fees and charges schedule for the Council's car parks, in line with the agreed strategic objectives.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To help rationalise, regulate and manage the use of off-street parking facilities in the Borough and ensure clear objectives are set to provide a framework for future reviews of parking fees and charges, to support a healthy local economy, meet Council policy on sustainability and, to support services and needs for all visitors to, and residents of, the Borough.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 5 June 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report considers key objectives in relation to the setting of parking fees and charges for Woking Borough Council operated car parks, by proposing a strategic, principled approach for the future.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council operates the majority of car parking facilities in the town centre and villages across the Borough. It is important to regulate these finite resources in order to balance the needs of parking users, including commuters, local businesses, residents, shoppers, and other visitors. It is also important to ensure all parking fees and charges are set consistently across the Borough.
- 2.2 Woking Town Centre has undergone a remarkable transformation during recent years with exciting projects that have transformed and modernised the town. To reflect the aspirations to make Woking a Place for All, the Council must ensure that the transport network and infrastructure is fit for purpose and is sustainable. Parking provision is integral to these plans but getting the balance right between the demands for parking and the needs of Woking's population continues to be a challenge and the development of this document reflects the Council's commitment to striking the right balance.
- 2.3 The last decade has seen changes in public attitudes and the introduction of legislation that moves the expectations and options available in delivering a parking service. There is a significant structural change in the way people buy things and potentially permanent changes to the way people work and carry out ordinary activities as a result of the response to coronavirus. The reason people come to town, and how they spend their time there has changed. Whilst Woking still offers a variety of excellent options to do so, the town centre is becoming less of a destination to buy goods, and more of a place to live, work, spend time, browse, socialise, be entertained, and partake in leisure activities. Woking sees a lot of its parking activity come from residents and employees of business based in Woking Town Centre who park on a consistent basis, but there remains a significant percentage of guests to the town who come as more traditional daily visitors. Whilst the overall content attracting people to town sits outside of the parking service's influence, a recent local government survey backed by the British Parking Association (BPA) indicated that around one in five visitors were curtailing their stay in towns and cities because of parking time limits. Indications found that visitors who are able to pay for their off-street parking on return, with a longer minimum payment rate, are staying longer, visiting more shops, and using more services. All town centre car parks have now been converted to pay on exit car parks, but hourly tariffs remain, and may impact stay length.
- 2.4 The use of parking facilities and the requirements of customers has evolved in recent years. The BPA indicates that the most important factors for customers are convenience and location, safety, for both pedestrians and for the vehicle, availability of spaces, wayfinding, and cost. Woking Borough Council has focussed its resources in optimising its facilities across all these factors, having recently achieved ParkMark and ParkAccess accreditation for its town centre car parks in 2023.
- 2.5 In the last decade there has also been a shift towards new technologies. These are being applied to enable a significant change in how the parking service is used and how it can be delivered. A particular example of how Woking has embraced this is with the WPS system replacing traditional tickets for ANPR technology, the JustPark App offering a cashless payment platform, and with ZatPermit as a paperless, virtual permit option. The subsequent result of this technology development has been the generation of insightful data which can be used to inform future intelligent decisions on car park management and tariff setting, based on real evidence of customer behaviour, visitor data and stay length.

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- 2.6 The approach taken by the Council over the last five years to meet the needs of all users of its parking facilities is set out above, however a strategic approach to tariff setting has not been established. A draft independent Parking Study commissioned for WBC commented that the parking provision offered by Woking is strong, but the tariff review section of the Study identified that a coherent, principled framework for the management of parking tariffs was urgently required. Crucially, daily tariffs and permit prices have not previously been coupled, which has led to disproportionately discounted parking permit prices and lost opportunities on the daily tariff to achieve wider Council objectives.
- 2.7 Setting appropriate parking tariffs, both for daily parking, and for regular users in the form of permits, requires consideration of a number of factors. Parking charges should be reasonable, balanced and competitive with comparable Boroughs, while being supportive of the objectives of the wider regeneration, parking and transport strategies, plans and policies. The charging framework for off-street parking should generate sufficient income to enable continued re-investment in the upgrade and modernisation of parking facilities.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 The setting of parking fees and charges should meet the following strategic objectives:
- 3.2 **Ensure that parking income from fees and charges covers the costs of providing the service to residents and local businesses, and is in line with the budget requirements.** It is important to recognise that, in order to continue to provide a good standard of service to all car park users, fees and charges should reflect and recover the full costs associated with that service. Car parks must remain safe, be well lit, have regular patrols, be cleaned to a satisfactory standard, have potholes resurfaced, have damages repaired, be landscaped and weed managed. In addition, any significant structural renewal works must be completed when required. Account also needs to be taken to all associated costs, including energy and business rates. As will be noted from the finance report, elsewhere on this agenda, there is currently a significant shortfall against the agreed budget, which could have a negative impact on the ability to continue to deliver the level of service to residents and local business if not addressed. It is important to note here that, alongside this review of strategic objectives, options in relation to efficiencies and meeting budget requirements are also being considered, including temporarily closing some floors where there is currently excess capacity, but the information to date indicates that there are no significant savings there, other than reduced cleaning costs which have already been agreed.
- 3.3 **Ensure parking prices support the changing pattern of use of the town centre, both for residents and local businesses, and to ensure that other, more sustainable methods of transport, remain attractive to users.** The recent years have seen quite a significant change in the way the town centre is used, with residents not just coming in to shop, but also to socialise, eat out, and enjoy the leisure and entertainment facilities that Woking has to offer. Fees and charges should be able to reflect that change and support longer dwell times in the Town Centre. Such an approach would also support local business and organisations. An increased period of time in the town can reduce the number of journeys vehicles are making on the road, which subsequently reduces the carbon footprint of each visitor.
- 3.4 **Ensure parking prices are standardised, and simplified, providing a fair and equitable level of fees to all car park users.** The current fee structure is complex in terms of the number of charging bands, with no direct link to permit pricing. A key objective therefore would be to rationalise daily tariffs, simplifying them so that they are much easier for daily visitors to follow. Similarly, permit prices should be rationalised so that they are much more straightforward for residents and businesses to understand and budget for, but continue to incentive lower emission vehicles. Intelligent led, rationalisation of the tariff bands offers best fit for visitors to the town, as opposed to standard percentage hikes across all tariff bands which are more commonly applied when setting tariffs. Parking permit prices should be set to offer a set discount against the all day, daily tariff price, and that set percentage discount should continue

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to be applied consistently, if and when the cost of all day parking changes. The all day, daily tariff price should be the pivot point for future decision making, determining the appropriate discount measurement for future permit price setting.

- 3.5 **Ensure parking prices offer good value for money to the public.** Any rationalisation or simplification of current tariff structure should seek to ensure that, in meeting the above objectives, any new fees offer good value to all customers, both for daytime users and for the evening, where tariffs should be competitive to encourage further use of the nighttime economy in Woking. Benchmarking against neighbouring Boroughs is important to show that tariffs are competitive against key comparators.
- 3.6 Finally, any review of fees and charges should be considered in the context of the Woking Commercial Protocol, consistent to the approach now taken to all commercial decisions.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 The proposed strategic objectives are in line with the aims of the Woking for all Strategy to provide for prospering and greener communities.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 5.1 All options that contain financial implications have been detailed within this report.
- 5.2 Analysis indicates potential for increased revenue through longer stays and higher occupancy rates.
- 5.3 Risk of public resistance to changes may need to be mitigated through effective communication, demonstration of the benefits of the scheme and by promoting how better value for money is provided with daily tariffs.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.4 The setting of strategic objectives would not have direct impacts.
- 5.5 Monitoring and evaluation would be needed from parking team to ensure future tariff structure proposals meet their objectives.

Legal

- 5.6 All parking fees and charges are subject to statutory notice of variation in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Parking Places (Variation of Charges) Act 2017 and may require a public consultation.

Environmental

- 5.7 Reduction in short-term parking turnover can lead to decreased congestion and lower emissions.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 A draft independent Parking Study has been carried out on behalf of Woking Borough Council that focusses on parking assets, and crucially for this report, on Woking's tariff structure.

REPORT ENDS