

Appendix D

Business Survey

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 In June EBD Officers of the Council approached a number of businesses to ask their views on the increase in car parking charges. Given the level of complaints/concerns received from Denbigh as a result of the increase, a larger number of business in Denbigh were approached compared to other towns.

In total 26 business were approached, broken down as follows;

Denbigh	8
Ruthin	2
Rhyl	5
Prestatyn	3
Llangollen	3
Corwen	2
St Asaph	1
Rhuddlan	2

- 1.2 Contact was made either over the telephone or face to face. They were asked whether they were aware of the increase in car parking charges and whether the impact had any impact on their business. Officers also viewed some of the complaints/comments received and reviewed some of the relevant content on social media.

2. Summary of Responses Received:

Responses received varied across the Council, as expected given the diversity of our towns.

2.1 Denbigh:

Feedback has been received from the businesses contacted, the business group, Town Council and social media.

Almost all of the businesses contacted strongly felt there had been a drop in footfall in the town over the three months and in the usage of the car parks, all but one of the 8 businesses reported that their trade had been negatively impacted by this.

From those businesses approached, estimates of the decline in takings varied between 5% and 30% for the period April-June this year compared to last year. We were provided with takings information from one business on the High Street which showed a decline of 22.5% in June 2016 from June 2015 as well

as a decline in daily transactions. The information on daily transactions actually showed a steady decline from 2000, suggesting that parking charges are not the main impact on reduction in takings.

There were concerns on the wider impact of the car park pricing, with anecdotal evidence of regular customers no longer visiting the town as well as those visiting the town for other purposes e.g. baby groups and library users not paying to park for longer and thus not spending time on the High Street, resulting in loss of passing trade.

Reference was made to four shops which are “on the brink of closure”.

There was mention that the parking price increases may have disproportionately impacted upon those with disabilities and reduced mobility.

The increases have also reportedly had an impact upon business owners and staff parking, with the result being many of them appear to now park on side streets, in residential areas or use the free parking at Lidl.

2.2 Ruthin:

Whilst the feeling was that footfall was declining, and businesses were struggling it was not being so strongly linked solely to the parking charges.

It was noted that there had been a steady decline in passing footfall over a number of years, but the recent increases in charges had perhaps had more impact on “customer morale” and on the image of our town centres, resulting in a potential loss of passing trade.

There were some concerns that customers are receiving parking tickets as they have not noticed that the charges have increased.

2.3 Rhyl:

No negative comments from most of the businesses regarding the impact of the increased charges. The main shoppers car park in Rhyl is likely to be the White Rose Centre, which is why changes in DCC pricing may have been less of an issue for businesses.

There was negative comments on the condition of car parks, signage, availability of on street parking and drop off/pick up locations. Car parks were described as unattractive places to park that did not instil confidence in shoppers.

There was a feeling that free car parking could draw in more shoppers.

2.4 Prestatyn:

No negative comments made regarding the impact of the increased charges.

Comments arose on issues with congestion on weekends and lack of spaces on the shopping park, as well as problems with finding long-stay parking for staff.

There is currently a large amount of free parking in Parc Prestatyn and Ty Nant.

2.5 Llangollen:

A mixed response and although there weren't any concerns noted regarding a fall in car park usage, it was felt that the increased charges could put tourists off from visiting again, an impact which perhaps won't be felt until later in the year.

Has impacted upon staff parking and displaced these cars to neighbouring streets.

2.6 Rhuddlan:

Not aware of the changes, no impacts noted.

2.7 St Asaph:

Not aware of the changes, no impacts noted.

2.8 Corwen:

No impacts noted.

3 General:

Car parking charges are only one of a complex array of factors that impact on the vitality of our town centres. Generally our town centres, like many across the Country, are facing challenging times with both wider evidence and commentary pointing to an ongoing, long term decline in retail on the high street. Our high street businesses face pressures from:

- Time available for shopping
- Worries about the economic outlook
- Retail savvy consumers who use the internet to secure value for money purchases
- Out of town locations with free parking, easy access, greater choice and more space from which to deliver the shopping experience
- Increased proportions of spending on household bills, leisure and eating out rather than goods
- Increased competition

As such, all aspects of the customer *experience* take on an enhanced importance e.g. street cleanliness, ease of movement, ambience, time taken, opening hours, mobile connectivity, car parking, quality of service, price etc. Small changes in these 'experience' factors are likely to impact on visitor

numbers, but attributing a decline to any one specific factor is probably not possible.

Indeed a report was prepared for WG in March 2015 entitled, "Assessing the Impact of Car Parking Charges on Town Centre Footfall". That report is very helpful in understanding the issue, and it states;

"Car park charging is often perceived, particularly amongst businesses as being a key determinant for changes in footfall levels in town and city centres.....However, the available evidence is almost entirely anecdotal."

"Beyond anecdote, there is very little published evidence which links changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall."

3.1 Public Transport visits to our Town Centres;

Passenger transport usage figures for free travellers is down 6.2% in the South of the County and 3% in the North of the County for June this year compared to June last year, indicating that fewer people are arriving into the towns on the bus services.