

<b>Report to</b>	Communities Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Lead Member for Environment and Transport / Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services
<b>Report author</b>	Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager
<b>Title</b>	Review of car park charges and operational hours

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. To explain proposed tariff increases for Council car parks; changes to car park charging periods, and the potential introduction of charges in some car parks that are currently free.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To provide Communities Scrutiny Committee with a detailed understanding of the changes proposed, and the rationale for these changes.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. That Communities Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report, and provides observations on the proposed increase to parking tariffs, and the other changes proposed.

## **4. Report details**

### Background

- 4.1. The Council operates 47 public car parks, 40 of these are pay and display car parks.
- 4.2. Our parking charges were last increased in April 2016. According to Bank of England *Consumer Price Index* (CPI) figures; in that period, the cost of goods

and services in the UK has increased by 31% due to inflation. By April 2024, this is predicted to have increased to nearly 35% above April 2016 levels.

- 4.3. Having withstood these rising costs for some time, it is now necessary to increase our car park tariffs. Whilst the Bank of England forecasts inflation to reduce to 5% by 2024, we will need to introduce an element of “future-proofing” into our proposed car park tariffs to allow for future inflationary rises. This is because we typically only increase tariffs every few years, owing to the costs associated with re-programming our pay and display machines, changing car park signs and legal costs. Together, these costs total approximately £15k. The proposed new car park tariffs are listed in Appendix A.
- 4.4. The amount we charge in our car parks depends upon the type of car park. Our car parks are designated as “Short Stay”, “Long Stay”, or “Beach” car parks. The different charges for each car park type are the same irrespective of which town a car park is located in. We considered whether tariffs should vary between towns but dismissed this on the basis that a similar proposal wasn’t supported by elected members when it was discussed at Communities Scrutiny Committee in the lead-up to the April 2016 car park tariff increases.
- 4.5. In considering the tariff increase, we’ve considered the tariffs charged by other North Wales County Councils, and the amount of inflation from 2016 to 2023, including an allowance for “future-proofing” ahead of continuing high levels of inflation. Information detailing parking tariffs charged by other North Wales County Councils is in Appendix B. Although not reflected in the figures for the other North Wales authorities, it is likely that some of them will themselves be considering further increases for implementation in April 2024.
- 4.6. Our Car Park tariffs were last increased in April 2016, and in April 2009 prior to that. The April 2016 increase included a commitment to increase investment in our car parks, after years of insufficient investment. Investment was managed through the introduction of a Car Park Investment Plan, with significant spend on our car park infrastructure taking place since 2016. We propose to develop a similar Investment Plan for the 5-year period from April 2024 onwards.
- 4.7. Our car park charges currently apply from 8am until 5pm. It is proposed that we extend this period, so that charges apply from 8am until 11pm. This change

reflects that our car parks are assets that aren't just used for 9 hours a day, and need to be maintained. Paying for parking in the evening is not unusual in other counties in North Wales and further afield, please see Appendix B. Conwy County Borough Council's car park charges apply 24 hours a day, but with cheaper rates applying overnight (between 6pm and 8am). In Anglesey, charges apply in full from 8am until 8pm. In Gwynedd, 24-hour charging applies in 37 out of their 59 pay and display car parks, whilst in the remaining 22 car parks, charges apply from 10am to 4.30pm. In Flintshire, charges apply from 9am until 5pm. In Wrexham, they run an initiative which provides free parking after 11am (i.e. charging only applies between 8am and 11am).

- 4.8. Evening charging may generate opposition from some local residents who currently use the car parks to park overnight. However, residents can choose to purchase a Long Stay parking permit, which presently costs £120 a year, although this cost is itself proposed to increase as detailed in paragraph 4.10. People aged 60 or over will continue to be able to purchase a concessionary permit which is just over half the cost of a standard Long Stay permit.
- 4.9. We have a small number of public car parks that are free to use. We are currently reviewing whether there is a case to introduce charging at some, or all, of these free car parks. A list of our free car parks is provided in Appendix C.
- 4.10. It is proposed to increase parking permits costs as detailed in Appendix D. Appendix D also demonstrates that our permit costs are very cheap compared with our neighbouring authorities. Our permit costs remained static from 2009 until the start of the current financial year, which is reflected by how inexpensive they are when compared with other North Wales authorities.
- 4.11. We propose to continue to offer our various free parking initiatives. These include free parking after 3pm in all our town centre pay and display car parks from late November until the 31<sup>st</sup> December every year. The small areas of free, short stay parking that are present in some of our pay and display car parks will also remain. Finally, we will also continue to provide 5 free parking days each year for every City, Town and Village where we operate pay and display car parks. The respective City, Town and Community Councils choose when to use their 5 free days.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1. The proposals generally don't contribute towards the Corporate Plan delivery, apart from some benefits from reduced energy consumption in car parks.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. The cost of increasing car park tariffs is will approximately be £15k, owing to the re-programming of car park payment machines, changing signs and legal costs.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. A comprehensive Well-being Impact Assessment will be undertaken prior to a decision being taken by the Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services and in order to help inform that decision.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. The statutory requirement for changing car park tariffs, and extending charging periods, is that a public notice is placed in each car park and in a local newspaper which displays both the existing and proposed car park tariffs.

8.2. A Traffic Order known as an Off-Street Parking Order (OSPO) is required to introduce charges in car parks that were previously free.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. The fees and charges policy states that they should be reviewed annually where practical to keep up with the inflationary pressures that the Council faces. It is recognised that this is not always possible and that periodic reviews are sometimes required. It is welcome that this has been carried out at a time when the Council faces severe budget pressures and funding constraints. The proposals within this report are fully supported.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. The biggest risk will be opposition from residents and town centre retailers. This will require clear communication as to why the changes are being made.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Paragraph 8.50 of Appendix 3 to Section 13 of the Council's Constitution.

11.2. Section 35C of Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Regulation 25 of Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.