



PR.23 14/15
Policy & Resources Committee
6 November 2014

**Subject: REVIEW OF FREE PARKING IN GAINSBOROUGH MAY 2014**

Report by:

Director of Operations, Mark Sturgess

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To review the effectiveness of free car parking offered in Gainsborough Town Centre in May 2014 through "Love your local market" campaign

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**In the absence of definitive data, and until definitive data is collected,**

- 1. To recommend Option 1 – to assess each application for free car parking on its own merits**
- 2. To recommend that the assessment of applications for free car parking be delegated to the Head of Service / Strategic Head for Localism or Property & Assets in consultation with the Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee and the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee**
- 3. That further research in relation to free car parking, including its impact elsewhere be incorporated into the full consultation report**

**IMPLICATIONS**

**Legal: None**

**Financial : FIN/CMT/53/15 Loss of income for each day of approximately £680**

**Staffing : None**

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : N/A**

**Risk Assessment: : Loss of income to WLDC. Need to ensure that the economic and social benefit to Gainsborough Town Centre outweighs the loss of income for WLDC**

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : N/A**

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None**

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)      **Yes**       **No**

**Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications      **Yes**       **No**

## **Executive Summary**

The Purpose of this report is to review the effectiveness of free parking made available in Gainsborough during the national “Love your local market” campaign in May 2014. Consideration needs to be given as to whether it is effective and a good use of resources to continue to provide free car parking in Gainsborough on occasions. As WLDC needs to make savings over the coming years, any loss of income must be considered and assessed in light of the current economic climate. Any decision must also be in alignment with the developing Car Park Strategy

It was agreed through Policy & Resources Committee that free parking would be offered on market days during the “Love Your Local Market” promotion, which took place from 17<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Free Parking was provided, to encourage people to shop in Gainsborough, all day for both Saturdays and from 10am on Tuesdays to ensure that it was primarily shoppers and visitors that benefited from the free parking. The aim was to help promote both the market and the Town centre and encourage visitors to come to Gainsborough.

Decisions are required on the following:

- Whether Free Car Parking should be offered in the future,
- What process should be followed to ensure any offer is effective
- How any decision to offer Free Car Parking could be made

## 1. Background

**1.1** Footfall counts were taken on all days that free car parking was offered and the table is shown below using alternative footfall counts as comparison. Unfortunately for one Saturday and one Tuesday, the weather was so inclement that the markets were forced to be cancelled and these are noted below. Please note that if 25% or less of stall holders turn up to trade, the market is considered as “cancelled” and this is what happened on two of the four days that free parking was offered. It is estimated that the income for the Love Your Local Market period (allowing for potential extra footfall due to the market promotion) would be around £680 per day which makes the predicted total loss of revenue for the four days at £2,720.

**1.2** Requests for free parking are submitted by both officers of WLDC and from external organisations and there is a need to agree some type of procedure to consider applications if the desire to offer free car parking on occasions is to continue.

## 2. Footfall count comparison

Footfall counts are taken to monitor the amount of visitors to Gainsborough. This is carried out every two to three months and takes place at four separate locations within the town, namely Market Place, Silver Street, Pingle Hill and Marshalls Yard at 10am, 1pm and 3pm. The footfall counts are undertaken on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays. The number of people passing is counted for a 10 minute period each time and the total number for each time and location is recorded. This allows comparisons to be made for locations and for dates and days. A note of the weather conditions or other information to be taken into account is made against each entry.

From the footfall count alone shown below, it appears that the free parking had more take up on a Tuesday than a Saturday when comparing to previous years. However this may not be an accurate reflection given that two of the four days had torrential rain and this would deter visitors to the market and town centre.

Date	Footfall number	Comments
Saturday 17 May 2014	Not taken - cancelled market	Love your local market – cancelled market
Tuesday 20 May 2014	1352	Love your local market
Saturday 24 May 2014	1147	Love your local market - Cancelled Market
Tuesday 27 May 2014	Not taken - cancelled market	Love your local market
<b>Comparison</b>		
Tuesday 15 May 2013	994	No free parking
Saturday 8 June	2607	Riverside Festival took place on this

2013		day, and free parking was provided
Tuesday 15 May 2012	981	No free parking
Saturday 19 May 2012	1161	No free parking

### 3. Consultation May - September 2014

#### 3.1 Purpose of consultation

The purpose of the consultation is to gather opinions, views and feedback from shoppers and visitors, market traders and local businesses, including their view on the impact of free car parking to them

#### 3.2 Background of consultation

Currently a wide consultation in relation to Gainsborough Market is being undertaken with shoppers and visitors, market traders and local businesses in the vicinity of the market square. The consultation with shoppers and market traders is now complete and most results are analysed here. There are some additional results that will be incorporated into a full report that will be prepared by the end of October 2014. The consultation with Town Centre businesses has taken place and the results will be incorporated into the report to be completed at the end of October. One of the questions being asked relates to free parking and the results collected so far are shown below. From the results so far, it appears that 68% of market traders feel free parking is minimally beneficial to their trade, and that shoppers and visitors from out of town are more likely to visit the market and Gainsborough Town if free parking is offered.

#### 3.3 Results of consultation (up to end August 2014)

Group	Question	Results – so far
Market Traders	Does free car parking on market days boost your trade?	YES – 13 NO - 6
Shoppers	Are you more likely to visit the Market if there is free car parking?	YES – 50 NO – 23 ( <i>many of these were local people who either walk or use public transport</i> )

### 3.4 Market Traders

From the 19 returned the surveys so far, 13 stated that they felt free parking boosted their trade, although many of these stated that it had only a small positive impact, and 6 stated that it did not, therefore 68% of traders feel that free parking does have a positive impact on their business



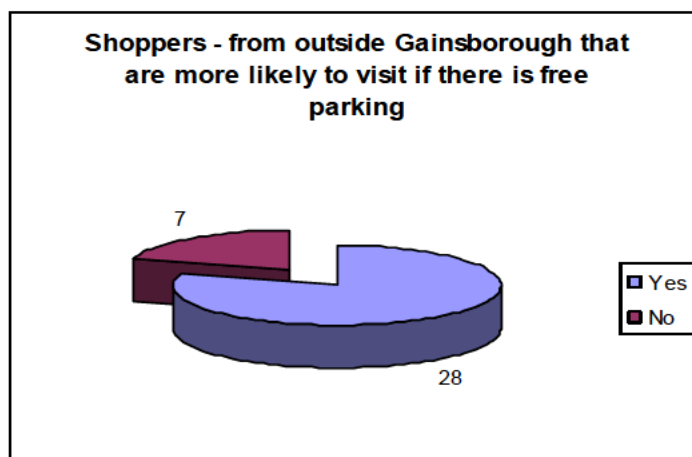
### 3.5 Shoppers and visitors

Out of the 74 completed surveys collated so far, a total of 50 felt that free car parking encouraged them to visit Gainsborough Market while 23 felt it did not; therefore 68% of visitors feel free parking is of benefit



### 3.6 Local visitors and those from out of town

The results shown in 3.5 above were divided into those visiting from outside of Gainsborough, and local Gainsborough visitors. This was carried out as many of the local visitors stated that they walked or used public transport to come to the Market. However, surprisingly, many local people still felt that free parking encouraged them to visit. 80% of shoppers from outside of Gainsborough and 56% of local shoppers felt free parking encouraged them to visit Gainsborough Market and the Town Centre



### 3.7 Local Businesses

Local businesses are currently being consulted on whether they feel free parking is beneficial for their business and this information will be available in the full consultation report which will be produced by the end of October 2014. A number of businesses have been asked if they feel that free parking is of benefit to their business and results so far indicate that while some feel that the impact on their income is minimal, the food and drink outlets do report an increase in trade on these days

## **4. Options for consideration**

### **4.1 Consider each request on its own merit (preferred option)**

As each application can vary in the effectiveness of the event at pulling people into Gainsborough, it is suggested that this is the preferred option to allow for an assessment of each application on its own merit. It is suggested that applications are assessed by the Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee, with officer support from a Head of Service / Strategic Head of Localism or Property Assets or a delegated officer. It will be the responsibility of the Officer to collect as much information as is needed to be able to make an informed decision

#### **Advantages**

- Provides a contribution from WLDC to town events and activities
- Attract visitors to Gainsborough
- Encourages longer stays for visitors
- Could provide a boost to the local economy
- Supports partnership co-operation

#### **Disadvantages**

- Loss of income to WLDC – estimated average of £680 per day
- Additional resources required to cover up machines
- Potential confusion for car park users if offered from 10am on a week day
- Publicity costs required to advertise free parking
- Potential conflict created if free parking granted for some events and not others
- Additional work for officers and Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee

### **4.2 Option 2 – Do not offer free parking for any occasion**

#### **Advantages**

- No loss of income for WLDC
- No additional resources required to cover machines
- No advertising costs required

#### **Disadvantages**

- Lack of partnership support for events
- Does not provide an incentive to visitors or local businesses, including market traders



### **4.3 Option 3 – Approve all applications for free car parking**

#### **Advantages**

- No perception of discrimination in relation to events
- No additional resources required by officers / Councillors
- No additional paperwork

#### **Disadvantages**

- No method or system for approval
- Potentially a significant loss of income to WLDC
- Potential indiscriminate applications
- No need to justify, monitor or measure effectiveness

## **5. Recommendations**

Although the above information does appear to indicate that it is beneficial for market traders and visitors to have the offer of free parking to Gainsborough, further research should be carried out to work out if this is the most effective use of resources and whether it may be a more effective use of resources to invest in events or activities to attract visitors to the Town centre and the market. This will be considered and included in the full consultation report. More detailed comparisons for car parking income on Saturdays is another area that can be further explored, comparing income raised on a normal Saturday to days when a special event is held in the market and / or town centre. This would provide information on whether or not the lack of free parking is a deterrent to people. Benchmarking with other towns in relation to car parking charges and policies around free parking can also be included in this later work. Observations appear to indicate that people attend events in the absence of free parking and that they stay in the town centre for longer, therefore increasing the economic benefit to town centre businesses and market traders. However, it is recognised that there is a lack of economic data to support any recommendation and one area that has already been explored is around the increase in income for market traders and businesses. Neither businesses nor market traders asked were willing to provide WLDC with information in relation to their income to allow a comparison to be made on the wider economic benefits to the Town.

## **6. Conclusion**

That although free parking appears to be attractive for shoppers, any offer needs to be looked at in more detail with sound economic and social benefits fully explored and demonstrated in any future request. Any decisions must also be consistent with the principles within the developing Car Park Strategy