



**Prosperous Communities  
Committee**

**24 October 2017**

**Subject: Market Rasen Car Park Review**

Report by:

Director of Commercial and Economic Growth

Contact Officer:

David Kirkup – Property and Assets

Purpose / Summary:

The purpose of this report is to report back on the review of the impact of car parking charges in Market Rasen, in terms of ease of car parking and town centre viability over the last 8 months and to respond to local concerns in this regard.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1: To recommend to Corporate Policy and Resources committee to amend the car parking charging regime as follows:**
  - **Cessation of the free after 3pm, in favour of**
  - **Introduction of free two hours, at any time**
  - **Maintain car parking charges between the hours of 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday, and**
  - **Continuation of the no charge policy for Blue badge holders.**
  
- 2: To recommend to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee that the loss of revenue arising from the above is regarded as “match funding” to support the evolving regeneration plans for the town over a 12 month period.**
  
- 3 To recommend to Corporate Policy and Resources committee that this amendment to the car parking charging regime is reviewed in 12 months and options to secure cost recovery are developed and consulted on in October 2018, for implementation in April 2019.**

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Legal:**

The implementation of the amended Car Parking regime will require a variation to the Parking Order. This requires consultation with statutory consultees. However as the proposed amendments are in response to public consultation undertaken by Market Rasen Town Council and traders (formerly part of the Market Rasen Development Trust) formal consultation with residents and local businesses is not required. Instead this report suggests a communication plan to engage the community.

**Financial: FIN/72/16**

The financial impact of the recommendation will result in a net loss of car parking revenue of £9,600 pa, plus additional costs associated with reconfiguring the meters and signage. In the short term this cost will be “borrowed” from the Gainsborough Car Parking Strategy benefits. However, as this benefit was to be utilised for funding future investment, based on evidenced need, this funding will need to be replaced.

Options to recoup this lost income have been modelled which include modest increases to the tariffs and cost of permits.

Whilst the regeneration case to support the introduction of the free two hours is compelling and the need to expedite quickly to benefit from the run up to Christmas is understood, the Council could not sustain this loss beyond a 12 month period. In addition to the loss the Council needs ensure that funds are accumulated to cover medium and long term maintenance.

**Staffing:**

Car Parking delivery is within the existing remit of the Property and Assets Team, with Revenues and Benefits responsible for collection of direct debit payments for permits. Notice processing is carried out by a partnering arrangement with another council. This will not change as a result of the strategy and will continue to be implemented in the same way.

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :**

The amendment to the car parking regime is as a response to local resident and business concerns. A bespoke approach to car parking in Market Rasen is warranted given the economic challenges facing the town and in the context of emerging regeneration plans for the town – referred to as the Three Year Vision, which is designed to improve the sustainability and attractiveness of the town for shoppers and visitors and capitalise on the housing led economic growth secured in the Local Plan.

**Risk Assessment:**

At the time of introducing car parking charges in the town the key risk was noted as the potential negative impact on footfall in the town centre and local businesses. The Free after 3pm policy was introduced to mitigate this risk by encouraging trade during quieter periods, while managing the supply of car parking during peak times. The feedback from local consultation advises that this policy has not been effective in maintaining town centre viability; and provides evidence that two hours free any time will provide the best balance between management of length of stay and turnover of spaces and town viability.

This amendment to the charging regime does result in a loss of income to the Council for one year but seeks to maintain the self-financing principles of the original policy in April 19.

The impact of **not** amending the charging regime presents significant risks:

- Potential/ perception of further harm to town centre viability
- Reputational damage to WLDC contrary to Corporate plan objectives of People First and Open for Business
- Distraction from addressing the regeneration needs of the town, and
- Failure to capitalise on the housing led economic growth, secured by the Local Plan.

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:**

This amendment to the car parking charging regime will assist in securing a new regeneration plan for the town to enhance its vibrancy and improve the environmental conditions of the high street encouraging access on foot, specifically from the new residential developments.

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

Challenge and Improvement Committee 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015 Paper E (Restricted Pink Paper CAI.21 15/16)

**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

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 The Council implemented car parking charges in January this year in line with the adopted Car Parking Strategy 2015-20. The Strategy aimed to set out a comprehensive approach to car parking, in order to improve transparency of decisions and to ensure that the provision in the district is operated equitably and to best effect.
- 1.2 The Strategy recommended that the Council adopt a more uniform approach across the district, ensuring consistency in the implementation of charges. This resulted in charging for all WLDC car parking provision, with the aim of supporting local retailers by freeing up space for shorter term parking to be used by shoppers and visitors to encourage footfall and spend in the local economy.
- 1.3 The Strategy established the following key principles:
- Full cost recovery for operating and maintaining West Lindsey District Council car parks
  - Equity in approach across all West Lindsey District Council car parks e.g. charging, season tickets
  - Support for local businesses with an element of free parking.
- 1.4 The introduction of car parking charging in Market Rasen was opposed by 120 local people and resulted in the submission of a petition against the implementation of the charges which was discussed by Council on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016. The main objections were:
- Will deter visitors and footfall in the town
  - Will reduce the competitiveness of the town centre against local supermarkets
  - Will reduce the number of people making short trips to the town to make a single purchase
  - Gainsborough has received significant financial support from WLDC, which Market Rasen has not
  - Some businesses in the town are already in decline, which may be exacerbated
  - Town centre businesses and shopkeepers will be penalised
  - Inconvenient for drivers to have to find change for the machines
- 1.5 With regards to times and prices there was a strong opinion that offering two hours free would support shoppers and business and deter commuter car parking.

## 2 Review

2.1 The review of the car parking charging regime has consisted of the following:

- A formal review by car parking consultants Parking matters, which included financial analysis from the car parking meters and monitoring of vacant shop units and latterly the introduction of footfall counters in shops
- Discussion with the Town Council
- Discussion with ward members
- Discussion with 3 prominent local businessman/objectors to the original introduction of car parking charges
- A consultation event and analysis held by the Town Council, and
- A survey undertaken, by a local businessman.

2.2 Parking Matters report that “The role of car parking in supporting town and city economies is not simple, and is only one aspect of a complex interplay of factors influencing willingness to travel to town centres. Car park charging is often perceived, particularly amongst businesses, as being a key determinant for changes in footfall levels in town and city centres. Beyond the anecdotal though, there is very little published evidence which links changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall. However, most research generally concludes that the general availability of spaces is felt by visitors to be more important than cost in their overall decision about visiting.”

2.3 In July footfall sensors were installed by the Local Data Company, at 2 locations in Market Rasen town centre (Advocate Arms – 2 Queen Street and Garnets Sweet shop – 45 Queen Street). The sensors capture footfall 24/7 by detecting Wi-Fi signals from mobile phones within a 20 metre range of the device location. The data collected is building a better picture of pedestrian movement and footfall in the town and also identifies peaks in visitor numbers by recording hourly counts. Whilst there has been issues with the sensor at 2 Queen Street (Advocate) with high count numbers being recorded, since the re-calibration in September average daily counts equate to approximately 3,800 pedestrian movements across the two sensor locations.

2.4 The council have monitored retail vacancy rates in Market Rasen for a number of years (back to 2009-10). In 2016-17 vacancy rates peaked with 13.1% (October 2016) of units being vacant around the town centre area. A further planned count has been undertaken this month and reveals a reduction in vacancy rates at 10.2% with several new businesses occupying formerly vacant premises. However 2010-11 vacancy rates were only 3.8%.

- 2.5 In conclusion it is clear that vacancy rates have gradually increased over the past 6 years, with little or no correlation to car parking charges.
- 2.6 The review of the use of car parks since the introduction of charging (gathered from the meter data and warden surveys) concludes that the existing charging regime has been successful in deterring long stay users taking up valuable spaces for shoppers. It demonstrates that there is adequate parking provision to cater for demand in the short to medium term.
- 2.7 Parking Matters recommend:
- That the existing charging regime be maintained, and
  - Should evidence arise that demonstrates that the charges are deterring short stay visitors to the extent that the economic health of the town is being adversely affected then consideration could be given to introducing 1 or 2 hours free parking on the car parks
  - No increase to existing tariff levels should be made to compensate for this loss of income until the impact on the economic wellbeing of the town is available
  - Tariff increases should then be more focussed on medium to longer stays where existing charges are cheaper than comparable locations
  - That permit prices are increased to be consistent with the policy in Gainsborough, where the discount on the daily parking rate will be restricted to 45%.
- 2.8 In summary the formal review of the impact of car parking charges on the viability of Market Rasen is inconclusive. This is exacerbated or distorted by the relatively short period the charges have been in place; and by the level of opposition against the introduction of charging specifically the principle of “Equity in approach across all West Lindsey District Council car parks e.g. charging, season tickets”.
- 2.9 However there is strong perception locally that the introduction of car parking charges in the town has damaged town centre viability.
- 2.10 The results of the Town Council’s consultation, a drop-in event (which has been recorded and viewed by officers) used a questionnaire and concluded that:
- Charges have had a negative effect on the town;
  - ‘Equality’ with Gainsborough strongly challenged;
  - Recognised that car parking in the town as a whole needs managing.
- 2.11 In addition the results of a survey undertaken by Adrian Campbell, a local businessman (a previous objector to the original introduction of car parking charges) with a post graduate qualification in Marketing

and specific training and experience in Market Research, is edited and summarised below:

- 76% of 76 respondents said car park charges had "damaged Market Rasen town centre retailers"
- 13% said car park charges had "have had no net effect" on Market Rasen town centre retailers"
- 3% (2 respondents) said car park charges "have supported Market Rasen town centre retailers". (One of these 2 respondents made it clear to the surveyor that their view was based on the fact that they could now easily park outside their office).
- 59% of 56 respondents said "takings have gone down" since Jan 30 (when car park charging began)
- 38% said "takings are unchanged" since Jan 30
- 4% (2 respondents) said "takings have gone up"

It should be noted that the survey questionnaire included additional questions about the setting up of a town partnership and past projects in Market Rasen; in addition the surveyor made an analysis of the loss of trade income he considered could be attributable to car parking charges of £265,000.

This survey was independent of the Council, this report is taking the findings at face value and using this as additional source of evidence to inform the recommendations in this report.

### **3 Current Context**

- 3.1 Market Rasen is the fastest-growing ward, and likely the fastest-growing parish in the Wolds area of the district. The parish population stood at 3,904 in 2011 (more recent figures are not available) while the ward population stood at 8,833. The ward is growing faster than the district as a whole. The area which formed the ward had 8.5% of the district's population in 2001, has 9.5% now, and could have a tenth of it by 2021.
- 3.2 The adopted local plan has allocated 6 sites for residential development, all of which have planning consent totalling the construction of 640 dwellings. The Transport Assessment for the Caistor Road site dated September 2016 states that 'Walking and the use of public transport will be realistic options for many trips to be made by future residents, with opportunities also for road based cycling. With the improved pedestrian facilities to be provided on Caistor Road as part of the development, the wide range of community facilities in and around Market Rasen town centre will be conveniently accessible on foot.'

- 3.3 It is not envisaged that the proposed residential developments will have a material impact on the availability of parking spaces within the town centre, particularly now that capacity is less of an issue since the introduction of charges. Rather this housing led economic growth will drive the regeneration of the town and improve the viability of the town centre.
- 3.4 In addition the feasibility of the provision a new dry side leisure centre in the town is being considered by the Council. The new centre will be located centrally and be easily accessible on foot and by cycle and include a minimum number of parking spaces. Again this will support the regeneration of the town.
- 3.5 Officers and the Chair of Prosperous Communities have had a series of meeting with the Town Council to engage and discuss their plans to revitalise Market Rasen. This is known as the Three Year Vision, and is intended to capitalise on the housing growth in the town and harness this to secure improvements to physical, economic and social infra-structure of the town. In this context the WLDC is considering providing governance and HR support, a substantial capital grant linked to project delivery and the transfer of the Market Rasen local officer to the Town Council to match fund their plans to invest in the Festival Hall.
- 3.6 Further discussions have commenced with the former members of the Market Rasen Development Trust to ascertain how the legacy monies from the former Mr Big project and their involvement can be assimilated into the Three Year Vision. All agree that there is a renewed optimism and “can do” attitude on behalf of WLDC which has been welcomed locally.

#### **4 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Despite the strong objections to the introduction of car parking charges in Market Rasen, evidence shows and most agree that it has resolved the issue of clogging up car parks by commuters, other long stay parking and abandoned vehicles. In addition most people accept the need for WLDC to secure cost recovery from car parking.
- 4.2 However the strong perception that the car parking regime has damaged the town’s viability persists and is detrimental to moving forward with the positive regeneration plans for the town. Specifically the criteria of attempting to get parity with Gainsborough’s car parking charges has proved to be divisive. The Gainsborough car parking review has considered the impact of the regeneration plans, and has concluded that additional car parking supply will be required as the town centre offer grows. As such a new charging regime is required to fund this. Options to amend the charging in Gainsborough are out for public consultation, the results will be analysed and amendments made in time for the new financial year. This effectively breaks away from the parity of car parking charges between Market Rasen and Gainsborough.

- 4.3 The review shows that there is a strong local consensus that offering “free for two hours anytime” to assist in revitalising the town. Implementing this policy on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December will maximise the impact of this policy change and build business confidence in the town. In this context the proposed amendment to the car parking regime in Market Rasen is aligned to the objectives of the emerging Three Year Vision. The loss of revenue to WLDC for the proposed 12 month period should be considered as an “enabler”.
- 4.4 Given the level of engagement on these issues over the last few months and strong and consistent evidence base for Free Two hours any time, statutory consultation on a range of options is not regarded as necessary or desirable. Instead a process of continued engagement and communication strategy is recommended. This is directed to enable the amendment to the car parking charges to be in place by the 1<sup>st</sup> of December.
- 4.5 The need to resume to cost recovery after this initial 12 month period will be secured by further monitoring and review and statutory consultation in October 2018. This will include 3 options aimed at recovering the lost revenue on annual basis on the principles recommended by Parking Matters i.e. a combination of increasing long stay daily tariffs and parking permit charges. In addition discussions with the Town Council to secure the implementation of the Three Year Vision may result in different ownership and control options.