

HALF HOUR FREE PARKING IN BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS

Head of Service/Contact:	Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	N/A
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	Annex 1 - Equality Impact Assessment
Other available papers (not attached):	

Report summary

This report seeks a decision from the Committee as to whether or not it wishes to support a motion that the first half an hour of parking in all Epsom & Ewell Borough car parks should be free. This would come at a cost of up to £240,000 per annum at a time when income from the Council's car parks is already falling short of the original target set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In considering the viability of this motion, the Committee would need to consider what service expenditure within this Committee's remit could be reduced to meet the above cost.

Recommendation (s)

That the Committee decides to either:-

- a) Support the motion that the Council should agree that the first half an hour of parking in all Epsom & Ewell Borough car parks should be free.**
- Or**
- b) Reject the motion that the Council should agree that the first half an hour of parking in all Epsom & Ewell Borough car parks should be free.**

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1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 In considering changes to parking fees and charges the Committee will need to consider and balance the effective management of parking spaces, the economic impact on the Borough and the potential loss of income to the Council and its services.

2 Background

- 2.1 At the Council meeting on 11 December 2018 a Motion was proposed recommending that "The Council should agree that the first half an hour of parking in all Epsom & Ewell Borough Car Parks should be free".
- 2.2 The Council referred the motion to the Environment and Safe Communities Committee for consideration.
- 2.3 In considering this motion and the potential impacts it has been assumed that the motion refers to half an hour of free parking being offered within the Council car parks with the car park user then leaving the car park within that half an hour. The alternative being that the first half an hour parking is free to all car park users regardless of their length of stay. This would be almost impossible to calculate with any accuracy but the financial impact would certainly be greater than those considered in this report. The costs to administer such a change would also be far greater.
- 2.4 Following the approval of the 2019/20 car park fees and charges by the Committee in October 2018 a shortfall of £104,000 has already been identified against the medium-term financial strategy target determined by the Strategy and Resources Committee.
- 2.5 In addition to the above the Council's car park income for 2018/19 is currently forecasted to fall short of its target by approximately £120,000.
- 2.6 If the motion was passed any such changes to the Off-Street Parking Places Traffic Order would be subject to a formal consultation with objections and representations to be brought back to a future meeting of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee.

3 Operational Considerations

- 3.1 There would be a number of operational challenges and risks associated with this motion being passed, as follows:
 - 3.1.1 If all pay and display car park machines were configured to offer free tickets for half an hour then this could lead to an increase in costs due to large numbers of paper tickets being required, an increase in litter of tickets and an increase in officer time spent re-filling the pay machines.

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- 3.1.2 Currently there are no measures in place that would prevent a car park user leaving a car park after half an hour and either re-parking or moving to another car park to gain a further 30 minutes of free parking. To introduce such measures in either the pay and display or barrier controlled car parks would increase costs.
- 3.1.3 It is not uncommon for a car park user in the barrier controlled car parks to query a tariff or ask for a reduction if they have stayed just over a time-band setting i.e. someone who has stayed for 1 hour and 5 minutes may request (often unsuccessfully) for the one hour tariff to be applied. If the motion was approved and a car park user stayed for just over the half an hour, the difference would not be between two tariffs but between paying a tariff and obtaining free parking. This could lead to an increase in requests such as these but also potentially to users not having the means to pay for their parking as they anticipated being within half an hour. The upshot is that there would be a risk of an increase in verbal abuse or threatening behaviour toward car park staff.
- 3.1.4 In the barrier controlled car parks a user may return to the pay station within half an hour and therefore be entitled to free parking, should the motion be approved. By the time they have driven to the exit they may have exceeded the half an hour and be required to pay a fee. This would then either require them to leave their vehicles to visit a pay station or manual intervention from a car park officer to allow them to leave.
- 3.1.5 In certain locations such as the rear Town Hall car park it was not previously uncommon to see a number of vehicles dropping passengers off to walk to locations such as the station. This has reduced since the introduction of the barrier controlled car park however free parking for half an hour would allow this practice to become common place once more. The impact of this could be that parking space for those who wish to pay to park becomes limited or an increase in cars stopping and starting outside of marked bays potentially putting more pedestrians and other car park users at risk.

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3.1.6 In recent years approximately 66% of income generated by car parks has been reinvested into the car parks. Free parking for half an hour would result in at least the same wear and tear issues being caused but without the recompense of as much income to re-invest in the necessary repairs and maintenance. For example, a vehicle visiting a barrier controlled car park for less than half an hour still requires a chip coin to enter and leave the car park, the barriers to rise and close on entry and exit and could still bring in oil or water causing damage to the car park surfaces without making a payment. The loss of income due to offering free parking would also mean less money to reinvest in the car parks themselves and could therefore lead to safety risks or poor conditions for parking.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 When considering the financial impact that could be caused by offering a free half hour in our car parks it is important to note the following:
- 4.1.1 In the Council's pay and display car parks in Depot Road, Upper High Street, West Hill and Atkins the minimum tariff is at least 1 hour so it is not possible to calculate the exact length of stay for those purchasing a ticket for the minimum fee.
 - 4.1.2 Likewise it is not possible to determine the length of stay for a car park user purchasing a pay and display ticket for the evening in either Dorset House, Ewell High Street or Bourne Hall.
 - 4.1.3 In the Council's barrier controlled car parks it is possible to calculate the number of visitors who currently remain for up to half an hour as the chip coin system allows for the time of entry, payment and exit to be tracked. However the Committee would also have to consider that a greater number may reduce the time they typically stay in the car park to take advantage of free parking.
- 4.2 In total the direct financial impact caused by loss of revenue from introducing a free half hour tariff in each of the Borough Council car parks is estimated at between £139,000 and £240,000 per year. This estimate is based on the car park usage figures for 2017/18, and considers purely those visitors who stayed in the car park for up to half an hour.
- 4.3 If users who currently stay for longer than 30 minutes cut short their stay in order to leave within half an hour, then the financial impact would be far more significant.
- 4.4 There would be a cost to re-programme all car park ticket machines as pay and display ticket machines would need to issue a free ticket for a stay of up to half an hour. The barrier control machines would need a grace time extension applied after entry to allow the free parking to occur. The cost of this is likely to be in the region of £6,000.

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- 4.5 Appropriate signage and changes to tariff boards would need to be made. As these changes would affect all car parks the changes are likely to cost a minimum of £12,000.
- 4.6 There would be publicity costs to advertise such a proposal and to confirm whether the change was going ahead. This could cost in the region of £500.
- 4.7 The advertisement would prompt a consultation period which could incur further costs depending on the size of the response.
- 4.8 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** The net income produced by the Council's car parks supports the provision of services across the Borough. Any reduction in this income will result in the need to identify an alternative funding source or find compensating savings from other services.
- 4.9 Based on visitor numbers who currently stay up to half an hour, the proposal is estimated to result in a reduction in income of between £139,000 - £240,000 per annum. However, if a significant number of visitors, who currently stay for longer than 30 minutes, were to cut short their stay in order to leave within half an hour, then the adverse financial impact would be even more significant.

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed (see **Annex 1**) which highlights that blue badge holders and older or less able car park users could feel discriminated against as they are less likely to be able to visit their required destination and return within half an hour. (This does apply with any car park tariff structure but would be highlighted more so if a free period of parking was introduced. Currently Epsom & Ewell Borough Council offer an additional hour of free parking to blue badge holders subject to payment of the minimum tariff).
- 5.2 Off street parking is regulated by Orders made under Part IV of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. There is a statutory process to be followed if an order is to be made or amended.
- 5.3 In summary the process is as follows:
 - 5.3.1 Prior to making an order there is a requirement to consult with certain organisations, to publish a notice of proposals in a local newspaper, and to display/deliver notices in places affected by the proposals.

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5.3.2 If any objections are made to the proposals, the Council must consider these and may make modifications to the proposals. If the modifications are significant and may affect certain persons, they should be given further opportunity to make representations about the modifications.

5.3.3 The Council may then make the order.

5.4 The Council must then publish and where relevant give notice that it has made the order, setting out details such as a brief statement of the general nature of the order and description of the key provisions.

5.5 After this has all been done the order can come into effect.

5.6 Where an order makes provision as to the charges to be paid in connection with the use of an off-street parking place, and there is a proposal only to vary the charges to be paid, it is not necessary to make a full new order; a shorter process is available under section 35C of the 1984 Act.

5.7 A notice of variation of parking charges must be published in a local newspaper at least 21 days before the new charges are to come into force. Notice must also be displayed in the parking place. There is no provision for representations to be made or considered.

5.8 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report.

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

6.1 Income generated by the Borough Council car parks is used to fund other Council services. A reduction of income could impact these services, particularly if the required funds cannot be identified from elsewhere.

7 Partnerships

7.1 Any changes in the structure of car park charges should be informed by close engagement with partners to ensure a full understanding of potential impacts.

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 It is likely that passing this motion could have a heavy financial impact to the Borough Council's car parking income as well as an increase in costs in its implementation. The Committee has already recommended freezing the car park tariffs for 2019/20 which has caused a shortfall of £104,000 in the budget for next year.

8.2 The motion is likely to cause at least as much wear and tear to the Council's equipment and machinery without providing the financial means to make repairs.

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- 8.3 There is the risk of an increase in dis-satisfied car park users who have stayed just over the half an hour time leading to potential conflict with those working in the car park.
- 8.4 There is a risk that half an hour of free parking may incentivise consumers to limit their visit to half an hour, thereby depriving shops of passing trade. This could affect the Epsom Town Centre retail offering, and consequently have a further negative impact on the Council's car park income.
- 8.5 A loss of income could result in a loss of other Council services or for funding to be required from elsewhere to support these. This could result in residents subsidising costs for non-residents to visit the town and park.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 That the Committee considers the information provided within this report and decides whether or not to support the motion to offer half an hour free parking in Epsom & Ewell Borough Car Parks.

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);