

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 4 May 2022

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Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Car Park Issues

Report summary:

To consider new arrangements for collection of cash from pay and display car parks and to consider recommendations from the East Devon Car Parks' TAFF in respect of a policy for campervans and motorhomes. To approve the recruitment of two additional Officers to deliver the new in-house cash collection service and to provide effective management and enforcement of the rules and restrictions around campervans and motorhomes.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☐ No ☒

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Cabinet approve the proposed arrangements for cash collection and an exemption to contract standing orders to enable Teignbridge District Council to provide the service and delegated authority to the Strategic Lead Finance to finalise the terms and enter into an appropriate agreement.

That Cabinet approve the policy for use of EDDC pay and display car parks by campervans and motorhomes

That Cabinet approve the recruitment of two additional officers within the car parks team to enable in-house cash collection and effective management and enforcement of the campervans and motorhomes policy and recommend to Council that an additional budget of up to £30,000 be agreed for the second post.

That Cabinet considers the situation at Exmouth Lorry Park and provides direction in terms of future use and urgency of delivery.

Reason for recommendation:

To approve an exemption to standing orders in respect of tendering a contract for cash collection services on the basis that our customers are now moving towards card and mobile-phone payment options. A policy to set out our rules for overnight parking of campervans and motorhomes in our public car parks will enable our officers to properly manage and enforce inconsiderate and inappropriate behaviour that impacts on the environment and on neighbours. An in house staffing solution to delivering both of these will give flexibility and offers value for money.

Officer: John Symes and Andrew Ennis

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- ☒ Economy and Assets
- ☒ Finance
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ Better homes and communities for all
- ☐ A greener East Devon
- ☒ A resilient economy

Report in full

Cash Collection

The Council's cash collection contractor (Contract Security Limited) ceased trading in September 2021 and interim emergency arrangements have been in place since that time. Immediately following receipt of the news of the demise of our contractor's business, colleagues at Teignbridge District Council offered interim assistance with counting and banking car parking cash at their in-house facility in Newton Abbot. We accepted this offer on a trial basis and that relationship has proven to be successful. Due to a general move away from cash transactions over the last two years in favour of card and mobile-phone payments, it seems inappropriate to try to re-tender our cash collection contract at this stage and instead we are now proposing a hybrid of in-house collection of coins from our car park pay machines with a formal collaboration with Teignbridge District Council to provide a counting and banking service. The combination of additional in house costs plus the contract with TDC will be within the existing cash collection budget of £40,000. An exemption to contract standing orders will be required to authorise us to work with TDC. We would request that the task of finalising the contract terms and costs be delegated to officers.

Motorhomes and campervans

The Council's car parking TAFF met in March 2021 and made recommendations in respect of a policy for campervans and motorhomes using EDDC car parks. This recommendation now needs formal consideration by Members to (a) bring an end to the ongoing trial in Exmouth and (b) adopt a policy that will enable the car parks' team to effectively manage the situation.

TAFF recommendations here.

<https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=245&MId=1641&Ver=4>

Exmouth Lorry Park

Exmouth's lorry park was closed two years ago to provide a dedicated construction site compound for the Exmouth Tidal Defence works programme. That work has now been completed and the future of this site now needs to be considered.

The March 2021 TAFF recommended that "...officers should explore the possibility of creating dedicated motorhome/campervan pitches to allow longer stays and for which a premium overnight rate comparable with commercial campsites could be charged. Officers should begin a formal consultation process with local members, the town council and Natural England to consider the impact of the first such development on the site of Exmouth's former lorry park, adjacent to the estuary. Further consideration would then be needed in terms of financial investment decisions and planning permission..."

More recently the unused lorry park has now become occupied by a variable number of people who are living in their vehicles and appear to be working locally. Further interaction with the individuals concerned has revealed a group of mainly younger working people who are choosing this way of life to avoid high residential rents locally and are attempting to save money towards a deposit to buy their first home. Ward Members Cllrs Joe Whibley and Olly Davey have requested that the Council look carefully for land upon which they (and similar) individuals might be able to park their vehicles to use as residential dwellings and in addition, to allow them to remain on the site of the former Estuary lorry park until the future use of that site has been determined and implemented.

Officers' recommendation is that the former lorry park be developed (subject to the necessary consultations) for use as a tourist motorhome / campervan site with associated facilities. These facilities would include refurbishment of the adjacent category C toilet block into a dedicated toilet and shower facility for the site and that a fair commercial charge is applied to the offer (taking into consideration the prime location of the site including its proximity to the town centre, the railway station and of course stunning views over the Exe estuary and direct access to the Exe Estuary trail. This charge is likely to be around £20 per night – way in excess of the charges that would be acceptable to the longer term residential van users.

Planning permission would be required to change the use of the lorry park to a tourist motorhome/campervan site and gaining consent would not be straightforward. The site is immediately adjacent to the Exe Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The site supports internationally important wildlife notably including over 20,000 overwintering wildfowl and waders. These are detrimentally impacted by recreational impacts of water sports, dog walking and other activities such that all developments providing residential accommodation and overnight tourist accommodation have to be assessed under the Habitat Regulations and at the very least provide a financial contribution to the mitigation strategy overseen by the South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee of which EDDC is a member. In this case the development is directly adjacent to the protected site and so poses an even greater risk in terms of its potential impacts from light pollution and other activities in addition to recreational activities caused by users of the site having virtually direct access to the estuary. It may be that these issues can be adequately mitigated but there would be costs associated with this. In any event these issues would have to be very carefully considered and Natural England consulted in the event that Members wished to pursue this option.

Staffing

The proposals above to bring cash collections in house and to potentially adopt a policy for campervans (and the possibility of introducing new evening charges and Sunday charges) will both increase revenue but also mean that to manage these changes properly we will need two new FTE civil enforcement officers. This will be cost neutral. The costs of one officer can be met from the existing cash collection budget, the cost of the second officer will need to be considered alongside the potential to generate additional revenue from a properly managed and enforced offer for overnight stays (for campervans and motorhomes) in some of our public car parks. That revenue will depend (at least in part) on the overnight charge agreed by Cabinet Members if they are minded to approve the draft policy and the extent to which Ward Members feel comfortable with permitting overnight stays in their local car parks. I would suggest that our experience from Exmouth alone very roughly indicates a potential income based on 30 overnight stays each day from 1 June to 30 September of 30 van x 120 nights x (say) £20 per night gets us to something around £70,000 of extra income, more than enough to cover the employment costs of an additional officer.

Other matters for consideration

There are a number of other matters arising from the work of the Car Parks TAFF leading to the development of an East Devon car parking strategy and it is proposed that a further report will be presented to Members in the autumn. The outstanding matters will include:

1. evening charging in short stay car parks,
2. Sunday charging in our public car parks in Axminster, Honiton and Ottery St Mary (where we don't currently charge at all on Sundays).
3. addressing our Climate Change action plan **including a policy on EV charging**. The Council has participated in two funded schemes to deliver EV infrastructure so far- the DELETTI programme led by DCC and the rapid charging project funded by innovate UK. Further opportunities will quickly present themselves as social, marketing and fuel price driven pressures all increase the increase of electric vehicles into society. We will also need to take advantage of other benefits offered by the car parks portfolio including the provision of cycle parking, cargo bike storage, hosting zero-emission car clubs and developing genuine transport interchanges.
4. It is the case that most of the Council's car parking revenue is earned by around twenty of our fifty seven car parks. Around nine of our car parks currently require maintenance and improvement and overall have significant running costs including business rates but we make no charge for their use. Not only are these a drain on our resources, they also represent missed opportunities to generate additional revenue, in some cases to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds.
5. The Council has recently entered into agreements to manage car parks for Sideshore in Exmouth and Hallmark Estates in Axminster. We have also recently been asked to consider managing a new public car park for Clinton Devon Estates for which we will need Member approval in due course. Beyond this our reputation for fair and transparent enforcement make us an attractive option compared to some private sector operators and I would see this as a potentially important and financially viable "trading" model to consider if we look at asset transfer options for those car parks that we may want to transfer to other ownerships / communities.
6. Finally Members have indicated a desire to review both parking permits (including charges and eligibility) and reserved parking arrangements – both of which I would agree are in need of an update this year. Specifically we will be presenting options that will try to offer affordable rates to local residents but will take a different approach to other customers including a specific policy on second home owners!

Financial implications:

The need to formalise the cash collection arrangements is essential, the final cost is to be agreed with TDC and there is a requirement of 1 FTE civil enforcement officer - there is currently an existing budget provision for the cash collection contract of £40k and it is estimated that this will not be exceeded. The request for an additional FTE to help support the implementation of the Campervan Policy, although covered by income, is a new budget and will require Council approval.

Legal implications:

These car parking matters (save for the budget request) are appropriately matters for Cabinet, following the Car Parking Strategy being removed from the Policy Framework. The awarding of the cash collection contract to Teignbridge District Council is permissible and the granting of an exemption in this case, given the sum involved, can be reasonably justified. It is for Cabinet to determine whether it wishes to agree the proposed approach to motorhomes and campervans.