

Proposed Car Parks TAFF Discussion Paper – Thursday 19 November 2020

1. Introduction

This Council currently owns and manages 57* public car park sites across the district.

**There are a number of other areas that are used for parking in connection with other sites and buildings that the Council owns and manages (these include car parking for certain parks and playing fields, local nature reserves, housing estates, Council depots and industrial estates). These are not currently managed by the car parks team and have not been included within the scope of this discussion paper.*

We operate 45 of these public car park sites on a pay and display tariff. One of these (Mill Street in Sidmouth also offers some reserved parking spaces on short term leases).

Of the remaining 12 sites:

1. Holmdale (in Sidmouth town centre) and Helena Place (in Exmouth) are currently available exclusively for reserved parking on short term leases,
2. Exmouth lorry park is currently in use free of charge as the main compound for the Exmouth tidal defence contract works (part of this council's contribution to the scheme),
3. Upper Station car park is currently being leased to Budleigh Salterton Town Council for £500 per annum and is then made available for unrestricted parking free of charge at the point of use,
4. Blackmore Gardens in Sidmouth is currently leased to NHS Property Services for £126 per annum and is then made available for unrestricted parking free of charge at the point of use,
5. Seaton Jurassic Coach Park is currently available for coach and bus parking free of charge to help promote Seaton as a Coach friendly town,
6. Temple Street in Sidmouth offers a combination of short term free of charge parking and reserved parking spaces on short term leases and
7. the remaining 5 sites (The Green in Broadclyst, Brook Road in Budleigh Salterton, Jarvis Close in Littleham, School Land in Newton Poppleford and Manor Farm Estate in Sidbury) continue to offer public car parking free of charge and therefore the council incurs a net cost including maintenance and business rates in operating them.

2. Task and Finish Forum Discussion Topics:

2.1 Climate Emergency

As I see it, one of the major challenges facing this Council is that for many, the provision of plentiful affordable car parking is still important for supporting our town centre economies and local communities. However the present climate emergency has to recognise the significant contribution that the exhaust emissions from petrol, diesel and LPG fuelled private motor cars add to our carbon footprint.

I am suggesting that one of the major challenges facing this Council (and therefore this TAFF) is to consider whether certain interventions, incentives and initiatives might now influence matters in favour of our becoming a greener East Devon through (for example) encouraging greener travel choices and perhaps introducing sanctions via a differential charging tariff to discourage the parking of some or all private fossil fuel driven motor cars within our town centre car parks at some stage. An interim measure could include investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure to (a) welcome visiting motorists who have already made their commitment to driving an all-electric or

plug in hybrid vehicle, (b) service our own growing fleet of electric vans as well as (c) giving confidence to the general public that it is now viable to consider an ultra low emission car as their main or sole option when they next change their vehicle.

2.2 Asset Management and Revenue Generation

It remains a reality that our car parks property portfolio currently turns over around £4m annually contributing a net surplus of £2.4m to the Council's general fund. This is clearly a significant amount of money and we have previously calculated that in order to replace it with for example council tax revenue would amount to around a 40% increase for an average band D resident in East Devon. An expectation has been outlined in our Budget Strategy for the coming year that car parking revenue could deliver a further £425,000 revenue in 2021/22 with some adjustments to our current charging tariffs. This expectation has been based in part on the expectations raised by my 2019 Cabinet Report that was called in to Scrutiny and led to the formation of the original TAFF in the autumn of 2019. That report is available [here at agenda item 17](#) for ease of reference and I am certain that the likely impact of these proposals could now be usefully considered in more detail by the TAFF including consideration of whether charging tariffs should be introduced or reviewed and whether certain assets might instead be considered as appropriate for asset transfers (subject of course to our usual policies and procedures in this respect).

2.3 Visitor economy, wellbeing and poverty considerations

I recognise that the prospect of an increase in car parking tariffs during and immediately following the pandemic will be seen by many as either high risk or even wholly inappropriate. However, with the prospect of increasing visitor numbers choosing UK and southwest holiday destinations, there may well be scope for maximising the income potential of our well located car parking assets and at the same time looking carefully at a range of concessions and affordable parking permit options for local residents, businesses and workers to retain a balanced economy.

2.4 Campervans and Motorhomes

We continue to see increasing numbers of campervans and motorhomes on our highways and in our public car parks. Our policy is, in my view in need of a revision to recognise both the demand for short term overnight pitches for campervans and motorhomes – and to acknowledge that measures to carefully and sensitively fulfil this demand (rather than continuing to treat overnight parking as a “parking contravention” or some form of “anti-social behaviour”) may well have benefits for both our town economies and for our own revenue. It is also the case that our own residents are choosing small and medium sized camper vans as either their main or second vehicle and in some cases our own policy currently prevents them from parking overnight in public car parks close to their own homes.

Some years ago we used to have simple rule in our Parking Places Order that specified “no overnight sleeping”, and that has widely been acknowledged in the industry as being almost impossible to enforce. In more recent years we have seen a new problem emerge – with our inexpensive permit tariffs (just £100 per year) we were inadvertently encouraging local motorhome and campervan owners to use some of our car parks as a cheap storage facility for their vehicles – with consequent lack of parking availability for visitors and town centre shoppers. Accordingly Cabinet considered papers that I had prepared and made decisions that this Council:

- (a) wished to encourage day visitors in motorhomes and campervans – so these vehicles are currently allowed to use any car park on any day but only between 08:00h and 22:00h daily)
- (b) was interested in a pilot scheme whereby we would consider the impact of allowing overnight “camping” for up to 3 consecutive nights in specified car parks in Exmouth (this pilot is about to enter its third season at the request of Exmouth Town Council) and
- (c) that overnight parking of any campervan or motorhome would not be allowed in any other car park (to prevent both storage and overnight camping).

The Exmouth pilot has been interesting and I would be happy to work with Members on a further review of this policy.

2.5 Other matters for consideration

It has been noted that in common with many pay and display car parks, from time to time customers leaving our car parks will offer another driver free use of unexpired time that they have purchased by handing over their pay and display ticket. Whilst this may well result in EDDC losing some revenue that would otherwise have been earned from that “lucky” motorist, there is perhaps also a “feel good” factor in that unlike some other Councils, EDDC recognises that the parking space has technically been paid for anyway – so a common argument would be why would the Council require another motorist to pay for it again?

Officers’ views are that there is clearly a simple option that you may wish to debate – ie. to make our tickets non-transferable by requiring the motorist to input their vehicle registration number into the pay machine at the time of purchase – that number then being printed on the ticket itself. This is now reasonably common in some pay and display car parks and would effectively prevent this practice. We would however need to consider a significant short term investment in modifying our ticket machines with a key pad and reprogramming them to achieve this. And the introduction of this change could of course be viewed cynically in some quarters.