

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 30 November 2022

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Review of free car parks and charging hours

Report summary:

Details of a proposal to take on management of a new car park as part of the Lower Otter Restoration project, as well as a review of the 6 free car parks that are currently managed by EDDC, options for extended evening charging in the coastal locations and free Sunday charging in the inland towns and villages.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendations:

- (1) That cabinet consider the available options for the portfolio of free car parks. In all cases, option A represents the officer recommendation for each site.
- (2) That cabinet approve the proposed management arrangement for the new car park on South Farm Road, Budleigh Salterton. Terms to be agreed with Clinton Devon Estates through delegated authority by the Strategic Lead for Governance and Licensing in conjunction with the Strategic Lead for Finance.
- (3) That cabinet consider the option of extending the charging hours in our short stay car parks, and seek to maintain the current charging structure.
- (4) That cabinet consider the options for free Sunday car parking charges across the District and seeks to continue with the current arrangements.
- (5) That Cabinet support the current process for assessing and determining concessionary parking requests

Reason for recommendations:

- (1) These car parks are important assets in their respective areas, but other options for their maintenance and long term use should be assessed to ensure they continue to be the best use of land in consideration of other Council priorities
- (2) The management of this new car park is mutually beneficial in as much as it offers effective management of the site by EDDC who share the landowner's aspirations for the site to be a popular visitor destination. Alternative management by a third party would not achieve this, and EDDC would not benefit from any additional income from this site.
- (3) Extended charging is an option of managing evening parking demand, however this will have an impact on the evening economy as well as being ineffective due to alternative free parking options at this site.
- (4) There are other options that can be considered in relation to free Sunday parking however the current arrangements are well established and consistent with the current approach to parking charges across the District. Changes made in isolation run the risk of artificially increasing demand on some days and unintended consequences in regards to traffic management and demand on services.

(5) It is important that we operate a fair and transparent process for considering concessionary parking requests and that this process is consistent in all circumstances.

Officer: Richard Easthope, Car Parking Services Manager – reasthope@eastdevon.gov.uk

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;

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

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

1. Free Car Parks

As well as 47 chargeable car parks, EDDC currently operates 6 Car Parks that are completely free to use at all times;

The Green – Broadclyst
Littleham Cross – Littleham
Brook Road – Budleigh Salterton – (2 hour maximum stay)
School Lane – Newton Poppleford
Manor Farm Estate – Sidbury
Temple Street – Sidmouth

Parking time restrictions do apply to these areas to ensure a turnover of vehicles and prevent vehicles being left indefinitely.

From a purely commercial perspective, the year round management of our free car parks is effectively subsidised by the wider portfolio of chargeable spaces. Although the cost of this management is routinely limited to occasional patrols and enquiries, the value of the free car parks are brought into question when considerable works are required maintain the condition of the surface or boundaries.

It is from a convenience and traffic management perspective that our free car parks do demonstrate their value by offering residents and visitors safe parking place whilst reducing demand and congestion on residential streets.

It is prudent to regularly review the status of free EDDC car parks, so to consider alternative uses, better management through car parking charges and to ensure a continued relevance to their location.

The Green – Broadclyst (41 Spaces)

The Green is a very popular car park, used by commuters into Exeter, visitors and residents of the National Trust, patrons of the community hall, Doctor’s surgery as well as overnight parking by other local residents. The car park surface is in urgent need of replacement and the perimeter walls also require underpinning. There is currently £24k allocated as part of the capital programme to undertake these works. There has been previous discussions with the Parish Council about transferring ownership of this car park, however, these have reached an impasse due to the required expenditure to ensure the safety of the site and to relay the surface.

The car park was sold by the National Trust to EDDC on 28th April 1980 for £10,000 and is subject to several restrictive covenants; 2(i) relates to the car park being for the benefit of the inhabitants of the village and 3(i) stipulates that it is EDDC’s responsibility as the Owner to maintain the walls in good repair.

General usage of the car park has been provided below by Broadclyst Parish Council.

Stakeholder	Typical length of stay	Regularity
Doctors Surgery and Pharmacy dispensary	Short stay (30-60 minutes)	Throughout the weekday
Victory Hall:	Medium stay (1-3 hours)	From early morning to late in the evening, 7 days a week
Clyst Caring Day Centre	Short stay around dropping off / collecting clients from the Day Centre	Weekdays 9.15-10am and again 2-3pm
Tenants of National Trust properties	Residential parking	24/7 days a week.
School run parents/carers	Short stay at peak AM & PM times	Weekdays; term time
National Trust visitors & tourists	Medium stay (2-4hrs, to all day)	Seasonal; mainly weekends
Commuter parking	Long stay (7.30/8am to 5.30/6pm)	Mainly weekdays
Churchgoers	Medium stay (1-3hrs);	Sundays and other significant Christian celebrations
Weddings and public event parking	Medium to long stay (2-6hrs); occasional, but high-volume usage.	Usually weekends / bank holidays.

Options;

- A. Seek agreement from local beneficiaries of the car park, including the National Trust and Parish Council to share the cost of the required works to make the car park safe and improve the surface

- B. Carry out the scheduled works and introduce charging in the car park to reclaim the cost of resurfacing. Commit to reviewing the option of transferring ownership and the charging scheme once the resurfacing and wall repairs have been paid for.
- C. Carry out the planned works and retain as a free car park
- D. Do not carry out the works and seek agreement to transfer ownership
- E. Do not carry out the works and continue managing the site in its current condition.

Temple Street – Sidmouth (31 Spaces)

This small car park on the outskirts of Sidmouth is mainly occupied by 20 reserved bays, with the cost currently £400 a year for a dedicated space. The residue 11 spaces are free to be used by those visiting local shops and there is no commercial viability here to introduce a charging scheme. There is currently a waiting list for the reserved bays within this car park, however a balance has been found between reserved spaces and free spaces for local shoppers. All Car parks where there is demand for overnight residential parking should be reviewed separately as part of a future EV (Electric Vehicle) strategy for the District, as early indications suggest that overnight charging residential charging in Devon is likely to be where there is the greatest unmet demand;

Options;

- A. Make no changes.
- B. Review the reserved permit arrangements.

Brook Road – Budleigh Salterton (15 Spaces)

A small central car park set a road back from the high street. This car park benefits from a toilet block, although due to its size and the cost of installing a P&D machine, offers very little commercial opportunity in its own right. A 2 hour maximum stay is currently enforced in this area, targeting its use at those visiting local shops as oppose to longer term parking. The central location lends itself to other uses, and may be a viable option for an overnight residents charging hub, due to the high number of properties without dedicated parking in the area, such as flats and properties above shops. The land could also be considered for other non-parking uses with alternative short-stay chargeable parking at Rolle Mews only a short walk away.

Options;

- A. Make no changes
- B. Explore potential for alternative non-parking uses for the site

Littleham Cross – Jarvis Close, Exmouth (14 spaces)

A small car park containing a toilet block that has been deemed surplus to requirements. The car park is mainly used by residents and those visiting the local parade of shops and small supermarket nearby. There is plenty of free kerbside parking in this area, and the car park and toilet block have been identified by the Housing Services Lead as an area with potential for development. An attractive scenario for this site is that it can be used to help meet local housing need, whilst also maintaining an element of free parking for visitors of the nearby businesses. Due to its size, it is not commercially viable in its own right, but could help meet future EV charging needs.

Options;

- A. Explore housing potential for this site, whilst seeking to maintain some free parking
- B. Retain the site as a free car park

School Lane - Newton Poppleford (35 spaces)

This car park is set back from the high street, close to the medical centre but predominantly used for residential parking despite mainly free on-street parking in the surrounding area. It benefits from a toilet block and is very convenient and popular at school drop off and collection times. Management during school collection and drop off times would be beneficial for the car park, although this would likely increase traffic on the residential streets nearby. The car park has low viability as a pay and display car park due to sufficient on-street provision, but may be a good location for residential EV charging in the future;

- A. Make no changes at this time
- B. Explore other non-parking opportunities

Manor Farm Estate - Sidbury (19 spaces)

This car park offers safe and convenient parking in close proximity to the village hall, there is availability of free parking on-street nearby however some of this is grass verged as opposed to kerbside, leading to the risk of inconsiderate parking that may cause impede traffic flow. There is free parking on the neighbouring street with the closest properties also benefitting from their own driveways. There is not a requirement to better manage this car park through a charging scheme, as there is free parking nearby and the car park is relatively small and predominantly used by visitors to the village hall. Transferring ownership of this site for community benefit, would reduce the risk of future maintenance costs, and see it continue to be used as a parking place. It could also be explored for non-parking use, or to meet future residential EV charging needs.

- A. Consider alternative options for this site
- B. Make no changes

2. Lower Otter Restoration Project – New Car park management

As part of the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) in Budleigh Salterton, Clinton Devon Estates will be creating a new 46 space car park on South Farm Road which is due to be completed in May 2023. The new car park is being created for visitors to the area, particularly walkers looking to explore the AONB. EDDC have been approached to manage the car parking area on behalf of Clinton Devon Estates in a similar arrangement to the ones currently operational in Lyme Street, Axminster and Sideshore, Exmouth.

There are two distinct management models that could be explored, one is a set annual fee that guarantees a fixed income regardless of the success of the new site, the other is a profit share arrangement that would see EDDC take a fixed percentage of the net profits, after taxes and other operational costs. In exchange EDDC will carry out daily enforcement patrols in the car park, the administration of PCN issuance, management of the car parking machine/s and collection of the cash, card and Ringo payments on behalf of Clinton Devon Estates. There are alternative providers of such services in the market, however these are normally camera-led operations with a greater focus on generating income through enforcement activity.

With the landscape of the LORP area due to change quite significantly it is difficult to anticipate the success of the new car park, Lime Kiln is likely to maintain its popularity due to its proximity to the coast, and the South Farm Road site is set further inland, appealing to a different type of visitor. The preferred option from Clinton Devon Estates is a profit share arrangement of 80/20 in their favour on an initial 12 month term. As a minimum, this will cover the cost of management incurred by EDDC, whilst also generating additional income dependent upon the success of the site. Initial set up costs such as the installation of signage and the Pay & Display machine will be covered by Clinton Devon Estates.

As it is not possible to predict the parking income for the site, especially in year 1, a fixed management fee model poses a much greater risk to Clinton Devon Estates as it is possible that the site would not generate enough income to cover EDDC costs. A profit share arrangement eradicates this risk, whilst ensuring that both parties receive income from the site in the first year. Had a similar model been sought in Sideshore, Exmouth, EDDC would have achieved a significant income in year 1.

Once the car parking site is established, annual review of these arrangements may be beneficial to both parties.

The management of this site can be carried out with existing staff resources, and we already have legal templates to form the contractual agreements for this type of arrangement.

3. Evening charging hours and times – Short stay car parks

As with the regular review of the free car parks, it is also good practice to review the current suitability of charging hours in car parks, to ensure they reflect demand and usage in their respective locations. EDDC short stay car parks currently charge for parking between the hours of 8am and 6pm all year round, with the only exception being Manor Pavilion in Sidmouth that charges until 8pm. In the summer months there is still demand for tourist and visitor parking past 6pm, particularly in coastal locations, and those close to amenities such as Beach Gardens in Exmouth. With this demand comes the opportunity to extend the charging hours of our short stay car parks to reflect usage after 6pm. It should be noted that EDDC long stay car parks such as Manor Road in Sidmouth and Estuary in Exmouth, already currently charge around the clock, 24hrs a day.

Free evening parking favours the night-time economy, allowing pub and restaurant customers' safe and convenient parking whilst visiting local businesses. Charging tariffs are an effective way of maintaining turnover and managing demand in our car parks, however this is not a necessity where local evening parking is currently free and plentiful. Devon County on-street parking tariffs in East Devon operate similarly to the EDDC charging structure, with most locations charging until either 6pm, or continuously 24hrs a day. Most DCC enforced single yellow line restrictions also run between 8am – 6pm, allowing plenty of choice for free parking after 6pm.

The extension of charging hours in short stay car parks would likely only be viable in certain locations, but there would be little demand or revenue where there remains a free parking option on-street. Also, where free evening parking is commonplace throughout Devon, introducing such charges, even experimentally, may deter some visitors and see them choosing other locations for their evening pursuits. Unitary authorities such as Torbay are able to easily align their charging hours and pricing strategy as they have full control of most on-street and off-street locations, however should members be minded to explore the extension of charges in East Devon, it is highly unlikely that Devon County would do the same, due to the extent and the area over which the changes would be required.

Introducing new charges will always be unpopular, especially if they stand out for being at odds with the settled local charging structure. The exception to this will be if the changes are made to increase the effectiveness of the management of our assets, such as to solve a specific issue in a particular location. The requirement for individual car park review may appear from time to time, for example if a car park's primary usage was to change, or if a new amenity nearby meant that it was being used differently to how it had been in the past.

If members were minded to explore the extension of the charging hours in any particular location, full public consultation in collaboration with Devon County would certainly be best practice.

4. Sunday charging – Honiton, Axminster and Ottery St Mary

Sunday parking in EDDC inland towns and villages is currently free all day throughout the year. Analysis of coastal towns, shows that Sunday is the 2nd most popular day for parking in Exmouth, Seaton and Budleigh Salterton despite all of these locations charging for Sunday parking. Sidmouth is a slight exception to this coastal rule, and Sunday is the 2nd least popular day, preferred only to Monday.

	Comparison of paid parking hours by location on each day of the week (01/11/21 - 31/10/22)						
	Card & Cash Payments only - Not RINGO						
	Exmouth	Sidmouth	Budleigh	Seaton	Axminster	Honiton	Ottery St Mary
Monday	154,887	112,993	34,824	31,499	33,608	54,017	9,041
Tuesday	157,655	122,161	35,113	37,678	47,914	68,390	10,536
Wednesday	168,941	126,161	36,491	34,758	49,292	63,187	11,439
Thursday	183,875	128,452	41,087	36,843	75,883	65,227	10,626
Friday	203,788	139,498	48,015	31,929	48,648	67,328	14,074
Saturday	299,739	178,974	61,747	49,952	50,297	109,827	26,817
Sunday	238,684	114,067	57,496	39,343	FREE	FREE	FREE
TOTAL HOURS	1,407,569	922,306	314,773	262,002	305,642	427,976	82,533
Difference between highest & lowest day (hours)	144,852	65,981	26,923	18,453	42,275	55,810	17,776
As a percentage	93.52%	58.39%	77.31%	58.58%	125.79%	103.32%	196.62%
Percentage of total weekly hours parked on Sunday	16.96%	12.37%	18.27%	15.02%	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Market day in Axminster is clearly popular, with Thursday 50% busier than Saturday, despite Saturday's being the busiest day in all other locations.

Seasonal demand is also a factor when looking at parking patterns and behaviour, and expectedly the below demonstrates that the coastal towns experience this to a greater extent than the inland towns. August is by far the busiest month in the coastal locations, whereas in Honiton it is April and Ottery St Mary it is October.

	Comparison of parking hours by month of the year (01/11/21 - 31/10/22)						
	Card & Cash Payments only - Not RINGO						
	Exmouth	Sidmouth	Budleigh	Seaton	Axminster	Honiton	Ottery St Mary
November	97,979	65,852	17,882	9,572	6,947	28,523	5,698
December	88,470	59,260	11,203	16,700	5,717	24,384	4,682
January	97,856	55,093	18,429	6,785	13,517	19,910	3,690
February	93,549	55,049	15,365	13,243	17,487	21,183	4,419
March	127,616	84,411	28,412	20,120	24,127	34,692	5,149
April	118,987	84,287	23,013	20,773	32,904	55,331	9,450
May	100,229	66,055	23,190	23,695	35,409	40,174	7100
June	124,256	85,459	28,759	29,707	35,040	42,292	7849
July	171,174	113,060	50,895	33,992	36,756	43,391	8109
August	222,294	133,147	59,995	49,982	38,613	47,837	8074
September	91,189	71,602	24,352	24,176	34,100	45,551	9933
October	73,966	48,989	13,274	13,283	31,780	43,674	11380
TOTAL HOURS	1,407,565	922,264	314,769	262,028	207,904	309,880	85,533
Difference between highest & lowest month (hours parked)	148,328	84,158	48,792	43,197	31,666	35,421	7,690
As a percentage	200.54%	171.79%	435.53%	636.65%	553.89%	177.91%	208.40%
Percentage of total monthly hours parked highest month	15.79%	14.44%	19.06%	19.08%	18.57%	17.86%	13.30%

There are a number of options that can be considered when reviewing the current Sunday charging arrangements, which were originally designed to encourage shopping in the inland towns, these are;

- 1) – Maintain the current arrangements
- 2) – Introduce Sunday charging in every chargeable car park throughout the district
- 3) – Make all Sunday car parking free in every car park
- 4) - Offer a mixture of free and charged Sunday parking based on parking behaviour, location and time of year

Maintaining the current arrangements

The current arrangements are well established and offer free parking to shoppers and visitors to our inland towns & villages. There is a clear disparity between inland and coastal locations in terms of Sunday parking, however there are also clear patterns of seasonality that benefit the coastal settlements to a greater extent than the inland locations. The current arrangements likely help maintain visitor numbers in the inland towns on a more consistent basis throughout the year. The only barrier to adopting a purely scientific approach to understanding the impact of the free Sunday parking offer is the lack of parking data available for this day, as there is no requirement to purchase a ticket, there is not an easy way of analysing visitor numbers or parking hours. Maintaining the current Sunday charging structure is consistent with the general approach to car parking fees, where charges are higher for parking in the areas of greatest demand.

Introducing Sunday charging in every car park throughout the district.

This is one equitable way of ensuring a consistent approach to parking charges across all EDDC owned car parks. This would generate an approximate increase in revenue of £90,000 based on a 15% increase in each car park in Honiton, Axminster and Ottery St Mary. This option would also increase the popularity and effective value of the £2 winter offer on Sundays. Anyone who currently benefits from the free Sunday parking offer would be unsupportive of this approach, as it may also deter visitors and shoppers. This would likely require additional enforcement capacity, or there would be a reduction in the amount of time spent patrolling the busier coastal locations in summer months.

Introduce free Sunday Car Parking in every car park throughout the district

This is the other equitable way of ensuring a consistent approach to car parking across the district. Free car parking on Sunday's would have a considerable impact on car park revenue, amounting to as much as 17% in Exmouth and 18% in Budleigh. This could easily equate to £300,000 across all car parks. The other issue would be that we would create additional demand in our already busiest locations where parking availability is already limited. We may also see a decrease in income on other days of the week which would undermine our current charging structure, with Sunday undoubtedly becoming the most popular day for visiting. Shoppers, shop owners and visitors would likely support this change, however residents most certainly would not. Road traffic congestion and pollution would certainly be attributable to this change, as this is effectively incentivising considerable road travel to locations that do not have the infrastructure to support it.

Offer a mixture of free and charged Sunday parking based on parking behaviour and location

This is the most scientific approach to managing car parking demand across the district, and would ensure that every area benefitted from an amount of free parking at the traditionally quietest times to encourage visitors and maintain a more consistent level of visitor and economic activity throughout the year. This could be achieved on a near cost neutral basis, for example by reinstating Sunday charges in August in Axminster, in exchange for Budleigh in December. However, this approach may impact car parking income on other days if it fails to attract new visitors to the area. This approach would ensure that every area was able to benefit from an amount of free parking at times when it may be needed most and also provide additional management information to assess the effectiveness of any new arrangements and guide future free parking decisions. This would likely be well received, except from in areas that already benefit from completely free Sunday parking all year round. The tables above offer a good indication as to when such an approach would be most effective, for example free parking in Seaton on Fridays in January, may bring more visitors to the town.

5. Concessionary requests for parking

Throughout the year the car parking service receive various concessionary requests to provide discounted or free parking, as well as for use of space within our car parks for events or charitable causes.

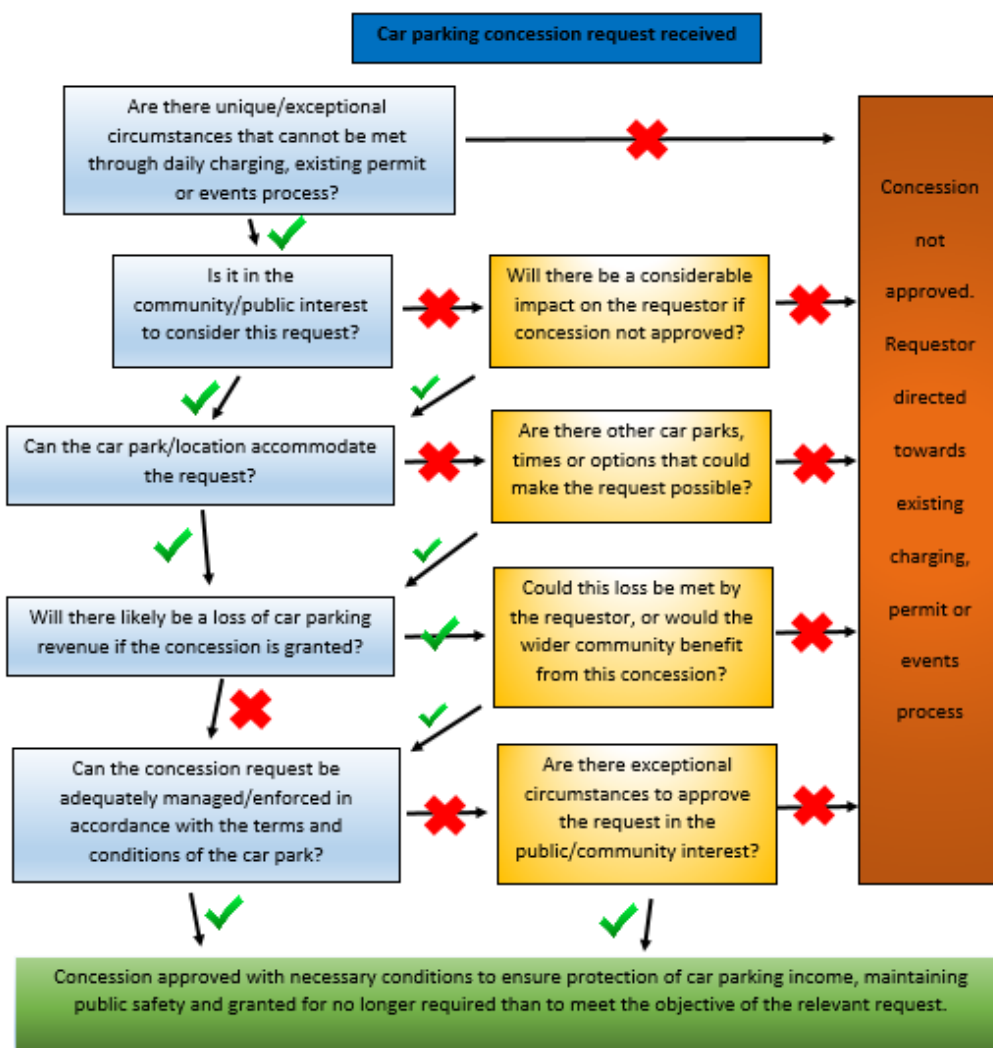
Each of these requests are considered upon their own merit and a joint decision made between the Portfolio Holder for Car Parking and the Parking Service Manager, and in consideration of the relevant charges, time of year and scale of the request.

The main consideration is whether the requestor may be able to benefit from utilising an existing concession, such as a monthly residents parking permit to meet their needs, if this is the case then they will be directed towards this option.

It is primarily important that a fair and transparent methodology is applied to concessionary requests to ensure consistency and equality, and to avoid unnecessary distress or inconvenience to those who could benefit from additional parking flexibility for a short period of time.

A good example of a granted concession in recent months has been for the “Hospice at Home” community nurses in Sidmouth who have temporarily lost parking spaces at their office due to building works. Parking by the nurses would be limited to a few hours per day on a staggered basis which the car park could easily accommodate during the winter period.

The decision tree below is applied to every request to determine whether a concession should be approved.



Financial implications:

Financial implications are detailed within the report.

Legal implications:

There is no direct comment to be made in relation to this report at this time, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises and to ensure that the Council's Parking Places Order is amended appropriate.