

Confirmation of decision to introduce District parking charges

Date: 11 December 2024

Report of: Director Communities, Housing & Environment & Director City Development

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

The proposal to introduce car parking charges in a number of district car parks was included as part of 2024/25 budget setting process.

The proposal was progressed during 2024 with extensive consultation resulting in delegated decision D57783 being taken by the Chief Officer Highways and Transportation and Chief Officer Elections & Regulatory on 12 November 2024. The debated decision included recommendations to support the introduction of parking charges and prepare a Parking Places Order to implement these charges at the following car parks: Wilderness & Station Gardens (Wetherby) Barleyhill Road (Garforth); Fink Hill (Horsforth); Netherfield Road (Guiseley) & Marsh Street (Rothwell).

The decision was subject to a call-in and it was, therefore, considered by the Housing, Environment and Communities Scrutiny Board on 21 November 2024. At this meeting it was recommended that the decision was reconsidered by the decision makers.

Having considered the key concerns detailed in the Call-in Outcome Report, this report seeks Executive Board approval of the confirmation of the original key delegated decision.

Recommendations

- a) Note the contents of this report and the attached Appendices,
- b) Note that further consideration has been given by the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment and Director of City Development to the recommendations raised by the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board in its report dated 21 November 2024,
- c) To approve the confirmation of the original key delegated decision to:

- i) Note the findings of the report and support the principle of the introduction of car park charges at the following car parks: Wilderness & Station Gardens in Wetherby; Fink Hill in Horsforth; Barleyhill Road in Garforth; Marsh Street in Rothwell & Netherfield Road in Guiseley;
- ii) Note, subject to the Parking Places Order (PPO) being sealed and made, that the Chief Officer, Elections and Regulatory is delegated to operate the off-street car parking and associated decriminalisation and issuing of parking contravention notices;
- iii) Instruct the City Solicitor to advertise a draft Parking Places Order in respect of those off-street car parks detailed in Appendix 1, and if no valid objections are received, to make and seal the Order as advertised. If valid objections are received, these will be reported to the Chief Officer, Highways and Transportation for further consideration, and;
- iv) Note the timescales for implementation and that before and after surveys will be undertaken in the streets around the above car parks and that, should further restrictions be required, these will be: subject to further recommendations; fully funded by Communities Housing & Environment; and, reported to the Chief Officer, Highways & Transportation.

What is this report about?

1. The proposal to introduce car parking charges in a number of district car parks was included as part of 2024/25 budget setting process.
2. The Council is experiencing unprecedented financial challenges, with a current in-year potential overspend of £20.7m as at month 7 and as reported to Executive Board in December 2024. A separate report on the agenda today presents a proposed budget for 2025/26 and provisional budgets for 2026/27 and 2027/28. That report includes savings proposals amounting to £82.7m for 2025/26. If the proposals are not progressed, this would place a further pressure on next year's budget amounting to £414k.
3. Following public consultation, a delegated key decision to support the introduction of parking charges at six district car parks and to prepare a Parking Places Order to implement these charges was made on 12 November 2024. It was called-in with two requests received on 13 November 2024 and a call-in meeting of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board was therefore arranged for 21 November 2024. The reports pack for this meeting, including the original decision report and the call-in requests are shown at Appendix 1.
4. At this meeting, Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) agreed by majority vote to recommend to the decision-maker that the decision be reconsidered, details of this decision are included in the Scrutiny Board Call-in Outcome Report at Appendix 2. The following specific concerns were raised:
 - i) **Displacement Parking:** concern was expressed that the introduction of parking charges would lead to displacement parking on roads in surrounding areas. The Scrutiny Board has asked for clarity and reassurance regarding the pace at which additional Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) would be commenced should displacement parking create concerns for residents, and that consideration be given to the introduction of TROs ahead of the implementation of new charges in some circumstances.

- ii) **Impact on the economies of district centres and impact data:** concern was raised in relation to all district centres and ways in which a robust assessment could be made about the influence of new parking charges on footfall and that comparative data from other district centres outside of Leeds, where charges have already been introduced, had not been fully evaluated along with the impact of car parking charges on local social and economic factors, including reviewing data/other forecasting methodologies about the potential for charges to affect the length of time people stay in a district centre and how much money they therefore might spend in the local economy. The Scrutiny Board also asked for additional data to provide more assurance about the proportional impact of the introduction of charges on different stakeholder groups – for example, workers, shoppers and visitors.
- iii) **Consultation:** the Scrutiny Board expressed concern about the level of opposition to the proposed charges (reflected in the survey responses appended to the report to the decision maker) and ask that the Director again considers these factors.
- iv) **Equality of access:** concern about the breadth of payment methods, particularly addressing those citizens without access to a bank card or parking app.

These comments have been very carefully considered as follows:

5. **Displacement Parking:** When reviewing the implementation of Traffic Regulation orders to provide waiting restrictions on the highway, a set process is applied where a series of objective parking demand surveys are undertaken to determine if a problem exists, the scale of any problem and the type of restriction which may be appropriate to meet the needs of the local community (residents, customer, and business needs) whilst at the same time ensuring the Local Highway Authority discharges its duty to all users of the highway. These surveys are then compared against the parking patterns following the changes to the car parks, so that the scale and extent of any displacement can be fully and objectively assessed.

This objective process aims to prevent significant amounts of abortive work that would be required if the council is asked to predict (without any supporting evidence) where parking may displace to and to propose restrictions in advance which may have unintended implications for the local community. This potential abortive work would be magnified when considering that the current changes to district car parks are proposed across a number of wards. It is also important to note that if restrictions are proposed to be implemented where a problem does not exist and without the supporting evidenced based approach, it would be extremely difficult to recommend that any legitimate objections be overruled via the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) procedure.

It is for this reason that we adopt the objective evidence-based approach described above when considering waiting restrictions, and that the limits and extents of any proposed restrictions are where the evidence shows it is necessary. This approach ensures a defensible, objective and pragmatic approach is adopted which provides a balanced parking offer for businesses, residents and visitors.

Parking restrictions are reviewed periodically in the district centres – for example in Horsforth and Wetherby there have been reviews of traffic regulation orders in 2022 and 2024 respectively. The Horsforth ward TRO included 18 locations where parking restrictions were deemed necessary, and the ongoing Wetherby ward TRO is currently reviewing the town centre. The restrictions proposed or introduced within each ward order sought to resolve safety concerns, remove obstructive parking, protect junction visibility splays, protect large vehicle swept path requirements and provide additional disabled parking provision.

As with any major scheme, we have committed to carry out before and after on street parking surveys for these car parking changes to enable an objective review to be undertaken. Unless a specific and identifiable road safety issue was identified and confirmed, the latter would be no later than 6 months after implementation. Further progression would be very much dependent on objections/ representations received.

6. **Impact on the economies of district centres and impact data:** It is not possible to carry out a detailed economic impact assessment for a number of reasons. There is very little base data to support such an assessment. The network of traffic cameras outside the City Centre is not sufficient to allow a comprehensive analysis of traffic movements. As the car parks are currently free there is no detailed data on usage. At a Council level we do not have access to information on things like VAT returns, income tax records, benefit claims etc. that could potentially provide data on the local economy. We have also spoken to other authorities and this is not something that they have done when introducing similar measures in their area. Parking charges in previously free district car parks have been introduced in Calderdale, Bradford and Kirklees. These authorities report that implementation has been successful with no adverse impact on local economies and car park usage and revenue in line with expectations. District charges have been in place in Otley for many years. We have carried out surveys of car park use and there are detailed statistics on car park use in Appendix 3 to the original decision report, with information from over 4000 respondents. As with all car parking charges, we do keep them under regular review to make sure they meet their objectives and where there is demonstrable evidence that car parking prices or arrangements are not working as intended changes are made.
7. **Consultation:** We consider the consultations identified in the report have been properly and lawfully undertaken. We have carefully considered those responses from local residents and businesses, pricing amendments have been made, specifically with one free hour of parking being available at each site. There is also alternative free parking available at each of the district centres concerned. Our initial survey work has also highlighted that, along with the free hour and nearby free alternative parking, the charging proposals will be effective in ensuring availability of parking at each location. As with any policy change, the council will continue to monitor the medium and long-term impacts of the decision and respond accordingly. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposals are unpopular, due regard has been given to the feedback received as detailed above.
8. **Equality of access:** The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) have estimated that 2.1% of the adult population do not have access to a bank account, and would therefore be unable to pay by card or parking app. This does not however equate solely to 2.1% of drivers who do not have a bank card. There is also data to support the trend that people with the lowest incomes do not drive and an estimated 22% of the population have no access to a car. The FCA state that there is a link between low incomes and having no access to a bank account, therefore the number of car drivers without a bank card will be much smaller than 2.1%. For example, it is not possible to insure a car without a bank account, therefore those without a bank card will not be significantly affected as they do not generally own a car. We cannot protect cash parking machines particularly in non-residential areas and have been subjected to over 100 thefts of machines in recent years. Where we have removed cash payment machines in other areas there have been no adverse impacts in relation to complaints about not being able to use cash. Following the Scrutiny meeting we have agreed to look at using the Paypoint network to offer cash payment, this is an option available through our cashless parking provider. There will also be an option to buy season tickets on a weekly, monthly and annual basis. Other equality issues are addressed in the Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) screening attached to the original decision report at Appendix 1.

What impact will this proposal have?

9. Please see appended report.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

10. Please see appended report.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

11. Please see appended report.

What are the resource implications?

12. Financial projections for introducing charges are as below:

Car Park	Annual revenue
Barleyhill Road	£25,500
Netherfield Road	£49,000
Fink Hill	£20,500
Marsh Street	£56,500
Wilderness	£147,000
Station Gardens	£37,000
Total	£335,500

13. This was the expected net income for 2024/25 when the proposal was originally made. The full year effect of the proposal is net income amounting to £414,000 and this figure is currently included in our budget projections for 2025/26.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

14. Please see appended report.

What are the legal implications?

15. The Local Government Act 2000 requires that Overview and Scrutiny Committees be given the power to recommend that a decision made but not implemented, be reconsidered.

16. The Act gives local authorities considerable discretion over the detailed operation of the required call-in mechanism. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, in the case of this decision the call-in procedure will be regarded as exhausted when the decision has been confirmed or amended following reconsideration by the Executive.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

17. The alternative option would be to cancel the proposal and not proceed with the implementation of parking charges at these locations. This has not been done for the reasons stated above.

How will success be measured?

18. Please see appended report.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

19. Please see appended report.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) reports pack 21.11.24
- Appendix 2 Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) call in outcome report

Background papers

- None