

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2015

**REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

Report prepared by Marcus Lawler

1. CAR PARK CHARGES IN MOTE PARK

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider whether the Council should introduce charges for car parking in the car parks in Mote Park; and to consider the options for charging.

1.2 Recommendation

1.2.1 That the Committee considers whether car park charges should be introduced in Mote Park and makes a recommendation on the charging options, accordingly.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 On the 25th November 2014 the Committee considered an exempt report titled 'A review of business cases'. One of the business cases in that report was 'A Sustainable Future for Mote Park'.

1.3.2 After considering the business case the Committee raised SCRAIP ECD.141125.81.4

"The committee supports the further development of the options for charging for parking in Mote Park".

1.3.3 This report sets out proposals relating to charging for parking in Mote Park.

1.3.4 Revenue generated will contribute to park budgets and for the improvements to the park that the market research demonstrates that the park users and borough residents want.

1.3.5 Revenue generated will contribute to the savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.4 Background

1.4.1 Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) maintains 6 major parks with a further 28 open spaces under management. The 'jewel in the crown' is undoubtedly Mote Park, a 460 acre park with easy access to Maidstone town centre. The park enjoys Green Flag status and was recently voted Britain's second favourite park in a national poll.

1.4.2 Mote Park has long been a major visitor attraction. Sensory Trust surveyed users' numbers and demographics in 2008 as part of preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a restoration project. Estimates for that year were 660,000 user visits and 180,000 car visits.

1.4.3 The bid was successful and Mote Park received £2.5m to fund a joint MBC and Heritage Lottery fund project completed in 2011 which significantly improved the leisure offering. It has been so successful the park has experienced an increase in visits from circa 660,000 in 2009 to over 1,000,000 in 2013/14. Cars visiting Mote Park have increased from an estimated 180,000 in 2010/11 to 385,000 in 2013/14. Numbers for both types of visits for this year are currently up 10% on previous years.

1.4.4 During this period, the budget for day-to-day maintenance and Health and Safety remedial work (for example removing branches which are at risk of falling) has remained constant at approximately £1.8m per annum, across all of the parks and open spaces. This is a significant investment by MBC and represents over 10% of the Council's operating budget, in a non-statutory service. The increase in visits to the parks, and in particular Mote Park, is putting pressure on the Parks and Leisure team to maintain standards with a static budget. Through good management they have been able to secure Green Flag status for Mote Park, Cobtree Manor Park, Whatman Park and Clare Park and by stretching budgets to accommodate this increase. This stretching of resources has been achieved through careful management including the establishment of volunteer labour, the value of which currently stands at around £40,000 per annum (according to Heritage Lottery Fund values). If numbers continue to rise in this way, and all the indications are that they will, then the current budget will not be sufficient. There is also a real risk that Mote Park will start to absorb a disproportionate amount of the Parks and Leisure budget as the exponential rise in visits to this park continues, to the detriment of the Borough's other open spaces. To put this in the context of the amount of money the Parks and Leisure Manager has available to deal

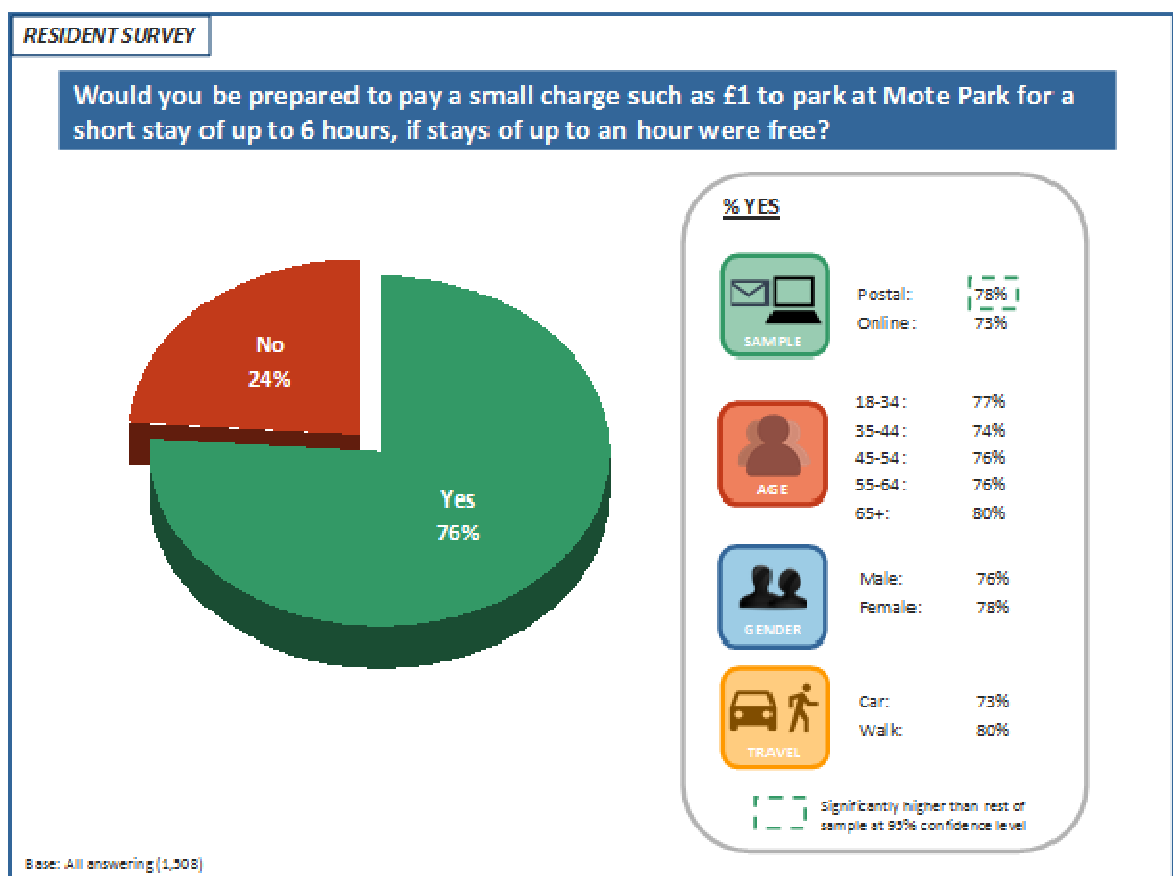
with each visit to the park: before the renovation project it was £2.77p and after £1.64p, a fall of 40%.

- 1.4.5 The £1.8m budget referred to is for day-to-day maintenance of the parks and open spaces and does not include capital investment to deal with wear-and-tear. Major works in the parks have always been dealt with through a bid to the Council's capital programme. The current funding position, caused by the reduction, and presumed abolition of the Revenue Support Grant is putting pressure of the Council's finances to the extent that priority for this type of investment will become lower over time, as the Council focuses on delivering statutory services with less money.
- 1.4.6 A large number of the people using Mote Park are travelling from outside of the Borough. Research shows 42% of people who use the park are visitors from outside the Borough; this equates to over 460,000 people and over 180,000 cars.
- 1.4.7 The current funding arrangements for parks and open spaces, given the huge rise in popularity of Mote Park, are no longer sustainable and current standards cannot be maintained within existing budgets. MBC's financial position is unlikely to allow increases in budgets and capital bids for non-statutory services may have to be given lower priority. Alternative sources of revenue therefore need to be identified if existing standards are to be maintained. The proposal to introduce parking charges is one of a range of measures being taken.

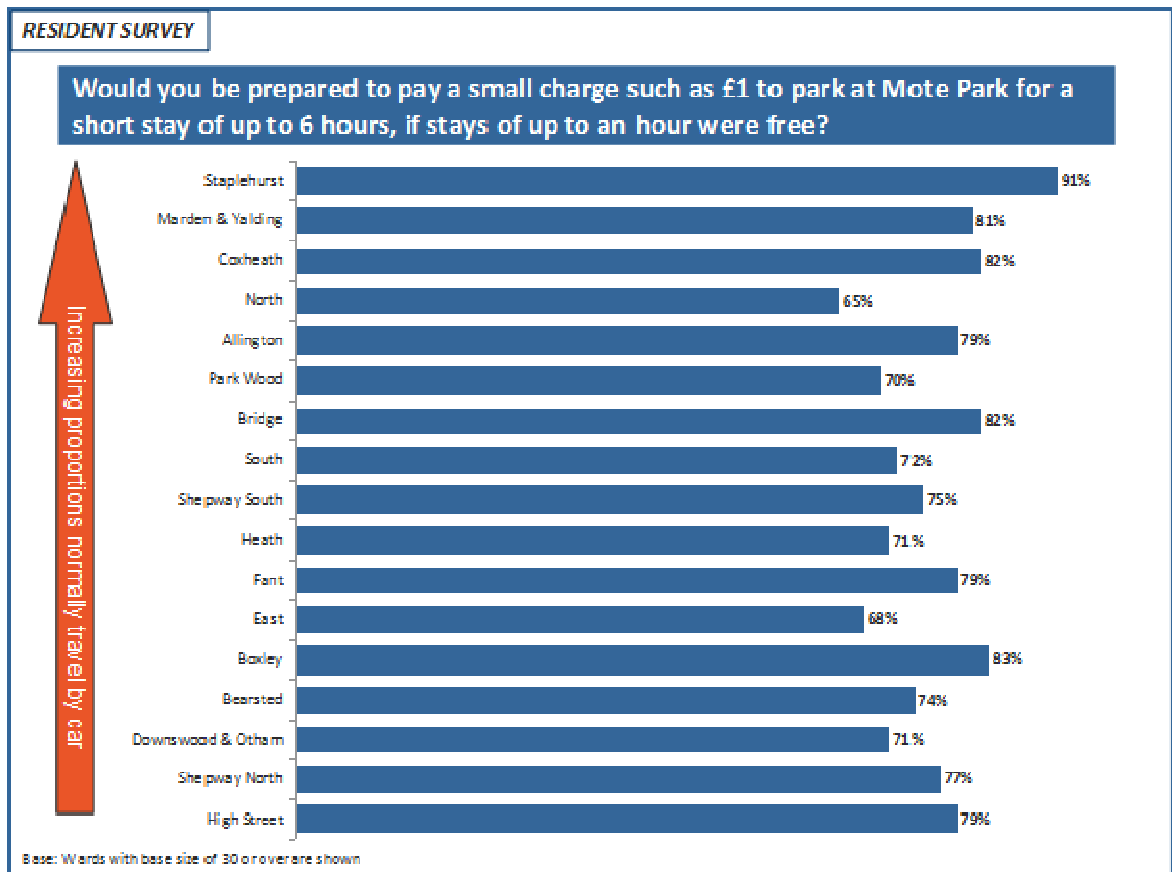
1.5 Market research – Car Parking

1.5.1 The first piece of research was conducted in order to understand the possible appetite for parking charges amongst park users and the residents of the borough. Lake Market Research was commissioned to undertake market research. Their full report is at appendix A; key points from the report are as follows:

- There were 1,508 respondents on car parking.
- The research was conducted both in and out of school holiday periods.
- Information from respondents was gathered using face-to-face interviews with park users; a representative demographic sample of residents were sent postal surveys; and the survey was advertised and published online for any member of the public to complete.
- 76% of all respondents indicated that they would be happy with a nominal charge for car parking.
- 73% of respondents who normal travel to the park indicated that they would be happy with a nominal charge for car parking.



- There are encouraging levels of agreement amongst all Maidstone wards; particularly from those with the highest proportion of residents who travel by car:



1.5.2 The second piece of research was conducted to understand the numbers of cars which visit the park. When the joint Maidstone Borough Council and Heritage Lottery fund project was completed in 2012, automatic counters of pedestrian and vehicle visitors were installed. When this data is combined with the responses to the market research, it has allowed accurate analysis of car and pedestrian visits, which can be found at appendix B. In the year 2013/14 384,796 vehicles visited the park.

1.5.3 The third piece of research has been to look at major parks within Kent, which are not owned by the Council and to understand what provisions for parking exist, and what charging measures are in place. A summary is as follows:

Park	Owner	Weekday charge per day	Weekend charge per day	Season ticket
Teston Country Park	KCC	£1.20	£1.70	£40.00
Shorne Country Park	KCC	£2.00	£2.50	£40.00
Trosley Country Park	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
Manor Park West Malling	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
White Horse Country Park	KCC	£1.00	£1.50	£40.00
Dunorlan	Tunbridge wells BC	FREE	FREE	
Tonbridge	Tonbridge and Malling BC	Town centre Parking		
Leybourne Lakes	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£25.00
Haysden Country Park	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£25.00
Bewl Water		£4.00 per person includes Parking		£35.00 per person (concessions available)
Bedgebury Pinetum	Forestry Commission	£9.50 per car Free entry to park		
National Trust		£2/£2.50 average if parking available	Cheaper if member	
Swanley Park	Swanley Town Council	£2 in school holidays	£2 weekends	

1.5.4 The fourth piece of research has been to ascertain the views of stakeholder groups on the impact of the introduction of parking charges. These have, or will include: Maidstone Victory Angling Club; Cygnet Model Boat Club; residents of the park; residents around the park; Mote Park Fellowship; ecological interest groups; Maidstone Model Engineering Society; British Military Fitness; Mote Park Watersports Centre; Mencap Charitable Trust.

1.6 Options

1.6.1 The table below sets out the charging options considered for Mote Park:

Option	Cumulative users	Gross revenue with a £1 charge	Gross revenue with a £2 charge
No free period	0%	£384,796	£769,592
1 hour free	14%	£330,924	£661,848
2 hours free	68%	£123,135	£246,270
4 hours free	94%	£23,087	£46,174

The cumulative user column demonstrates the percentage of the total vehicles visiting the park that could not be charged, if the Committee recommends a free parking period, by period.

1.6.2 The committee could consider whether to keep one or more of the car parks free, for local users. Free car park options include the following:

Car park	Percentage of total cars
Main car park	64%
School Lane	20%
Willington Street	16%

Therefore, any gross revenue received as set out in 1.6.1 will be reduced by the above percentages if one or more car parks are kept free. For example if the Committee recommended that the main car park were free with a £1 charge and one hour free in the other car parks the Council would lose 64% of the potential income and would receive £119,133 gross; or if the Committee recommended that Willington and School Lane were to remain free with a £1 charge on the main car park with an hour free then the Council would lose 20% (School Lane) plus 16% (Willington Street) of the available revenue and would receive £211,791.

Officers do not recommend that any of the car parks are left free if charging is introduced as this could cause confusion for the users and create problems with displaced parking and enforcement.

1.7 Summary of other factors.

The research into this proposed project has identified various factors which the Committee should consider; a summary, as follows:

Issue	Stakeholder group most affected	Mitigation
Risk that commuter parkers will come to the park	Parking Services	Ensure that long term parking (over 6 hours) attracts punitive charges
Risk that some cars will displace into residential areas	Local residents	See para. 1.7.1.
The park gates will now be able to be opened longer	Parks and Leisure	The park has remained locked until 09:00 to deter commuters
Very heavy users of the park will be disproportionately affected	Various special interest groups	Concession scheme or season tickets can be developed for special user groups
Regular dog walkers will be disproportionately affected	Park users	A one hour free period will allow dogs to be walked.
Traffic queuing into Mote Park Avenue prior to 09:00 on week days	Cabinet	Being able to open earlier will mitigate this traffic hazard
The toilets and café need improving	Park users and residents	Bring a report forward to propose improvements
Displacement of parking to or from Audley Moat House	Residents of Mote Park	Audley Raven is supportive of the idea of introducing car parking charges; subject to detailed arrangements. They do not anticipate any displacement into their own car park and, if there is, they are confident that

		their existing control measures are sufficient to deal with this.
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1.7.1 Displacement of parking into residents areas.

The issue of impact to local residents through a possible displacement of parking into surrounding areas is a potential major issue. The maximum displacement of vehicles is likely to be all of those vehicles which would be affected outside of any free parking period.

Potential displacement numbers can be shown, as follows:

	No free period	1 hour free	2 hours free	4 hours free
Maximum displaced vehicles a day	1,054	901	330	50

Of course these are maximum displacements; when considering the real number of people who will wish to park elsewhere and then walk or take other transport to the park it will be necessary to weigh the value of time against a pound.

Various measures are in place to help mitigate the impact of displaced parking:

Measure	Impact	Comment
Existing residents parking zones	Will control displaced parking into these zones between 08:00 and 18:30 from Monday to Saturday.	<p>Extension to Sunday will improve the mitigation.</p> <p>This would require a TRO amendment including a consultation with sufficient representatives of those affected and residents.</p> <p>Analysis of roads and areas at risk, and which are not covered</p>

		by the existing TROs will be undertaken with the local community.
Increasing Civil Enforcement Officer presence	Will improve deterrence for those willing to break the residents' TROs.	The cost will be borne out of the revenue derived from the parking charges.
Working with Arriva to offer park and ride to Maidstone	Will provide an alternative, free transport option for those visiting the park	Already negotiating with Arriva as part of the museums review
Sufficient advertising	Will help inform users about the new arrangements	
Offering Willington Street park and ride as an overspill	Could provide 400 spaces after 18:45 Monday to Saturday and on a Sunday. We could also charge for parking when the site is not being used for park and ride.	Will need operational de-confliction by Parking Services

1.8 Recommended option.

When the options are considered taking account of the other factors, the recommended option is:

- To implement parking charges in Mote Park
- The first hour of parking is free.
- The charge should be £1 for up to 6 hours of parking.
- Parking beyond 6 hours should be at twice the town centre parking rate, to deter commuter parking.
- A concessions scheme should be developed to protect the interests of special interests groups and very regular users.
- The park should now be opened earlier at the discretion of the Parks and Leisure Manager who will take into account demand and practicalities (for example during major park events).
- A report should be bought forward to identify options to improve the toilets and the café.

This option would realise a potential net annual contribution of up to: **£300,000, subject to the operational costs.**

Alternative Actions and why not Recommended

1.9 The Committee could recommend to Cabinet not to introduce parking charges in Mote Park. This is not recommended because:

- The projected revenue received from this proposal will count towards the Medium Term Financial Strategy's and the Council's savings targets. If this revenue was not available then alternative savings would have to be found putting Council services, including the Borough's parks and open spaces, at risk.
- The revenue received from this proposal will contribute to the improvements the research showed the Borough's residents want in Mote Park, namely improved toilets and an improved café.
- Research shows wide support amongst residents and park users if revenue is seen to be used to maintain the park and improve the facilities available.

1.9.2 The Committee could recommend to Cabinet a longer period of free parking. This is not recommended because:

- A free period of 2, or more hours will reduce the available income by at least 68%. When the operating costs are deducted this will make the scheme unviable.

1.9.3 The Committee could recommend to Cabinet a higher charge. This is not recommended because:

- The research shows public support for the £1 charge.
- The £1 charge will generate the savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.9.4 The Committee could recommend to Cabinet that we charge only visitors who come from outside the borough. This is not recommended because:

- The complexities and costs of administering this would make the scheme unviable.
- The available vehicles to charge parking fees would make the scheme unviable; especially if a free period of parking is recommended.

1.10 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.10.1 This project clearly supports MBC's Corporate Priority:

For Maidstone to be a decent place to live.

Continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit the borough.

And:

Corporate and Customer Excellence.

Efficient cost effective services are delivered across the Borough.

1.10.2 This proposal supports the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Maidstone Culture and Leisure business plan.

1.11 Risk Management

1.11.1 A number of risks have been identified as part of the market research and these will need to be managed. A risk assessment of this project has been conducted and the risks identified will be managed as part of the formal project management arrangements.

1.12 Other Implications

1.12.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	X
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	X
9.	Asset Management	

1.12.2 Financial – Revenue received will contribute to the savings targets identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The final operational model will determine the capital and operating costs, but the indications contained in the ACPOA options proposal indicate that operational costs will be around £25,000 to £50,000 per annum and capital costs will be in the region of £35,000 to £115,000. Car park charges are subject to VAT and so any net income received will need to be discounted for tax.

1.12.3 Staffing – The final operational model selected will determine whether there will be a requirement to recruit staff to enforce charging.

1.12.4 Legal – A legal basis to conduct this project will be clarified by Mid Kent Legal following the identification of the final operational model.

1.12.5 Equality Impact – Disabled users will be catered for by an extension of the current blue badge scheme. Other at risks groups will be identified during pre-implementation consultation.

1.12.6 Environmental – The contribution to the Medium Term Financial Strategy will allow the maintenance of the Parks and Leisure budget which will help maintain the environment in Mote Park.

1.12.7 Procurement - The project will be undertaken in accordance with EU and UK public procurement rules as appropriate, together with the Council's Contract Standing Orders. Input from the Procurement team will be provided as part of the project management arrangements.

1.13 Conclusions

1.13.1 The Council has been considering options to charge for parking in Mote Park for some time. The financial landscape is now such that implementation is important to preserve and improve the park. The research undertaken shows that, when made aware of the reasons the implementation is being considered, the significant majority of residents and park users support a modest charge.

1.14 Relevant Documents

1.14.1 Appendices

- A – Lake Market Research report.
- B – Car park use analysis.

1.15.2 Background Documents

- APCOA options proposal.

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED

Yes

No

If yes, this is a Key Decision because: It will result in over £250,000 of charges being raised; in accordance with the Corporate Fees and Charges Policy, para. 10.1 (a).

Wards/Parishes affected: All.