

Parking Services Update

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place / Mark Green, Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager / Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 9 June 2020, this committee requested a report on the financial implications of the Covid 19 pandemic on Parking Services, and the operational response to the lockdown measures introduced during March.

Purpose of Report

This report is for noting. Committee members are also asked to agree that the parking tariff increases agreed and planned for 1st April 2020, instead be implemented on 1st April 2021, owing to the impacts and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the update and information relating to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on parking operations, including the financial implications of this, be noted.
2. That the deferral of the planned parking tariff increases to 1st April 2021 be agreed.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee	7 October 2020

Parking Services Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. The proposed deferral of parking tariff increases is intended to support recovery by encouraging local economic revival. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This report focuses on the council's response to the Covid 19 pandemic. It is unlikely that the recommendations of this report will materially impact on cross cutting objectives. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk management implications are detailed at section 5 of this report. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial implications are detailed within section 2 of this report. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No staffing implications arise from this report. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers and follows guidance issued by the British Parking Association, London Councils and the Local Government Association (provided at Appendix 1). The Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee is responsible for car parking functions including car parking plans and strategy. As such it is for this Committee consider the recommendations in this report. 	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No privacy or data protection implications arise from this report. 	Policy and Information Team

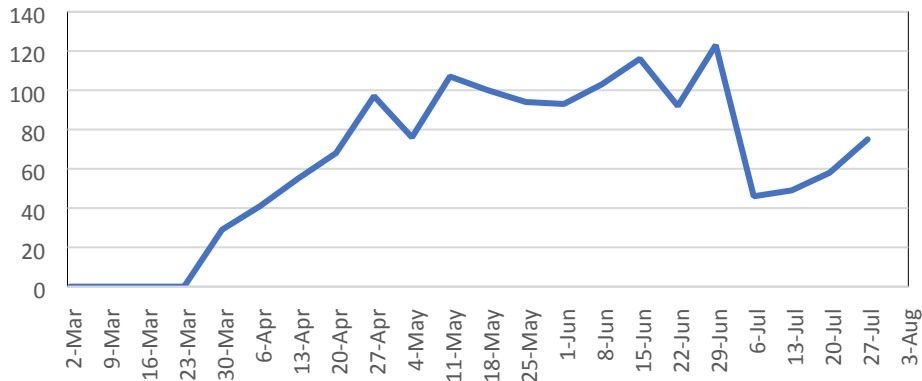
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. 	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals. 	[Public Health Officer]
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No implications relating to crime and disorder arise from this report. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no procurement implications arising from this report. 	Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the start of the pandemic lockdown in late March, car park occupancy significantly reduced to around 5% of normal occupancy levels. Vehicle movements in the town centre, residential areas and rural areas were also significantly lower than pre-lockdown levels.
- 2.2 Increases in home working, self-isolation and social distancing placed unprecedented pressure on the parking spaces available within residential streets with many roads unable to meet the increased demand.
- 2.3 On 24th March the British Parking Association, London Councils and the Local Government Association published the Local Authority Parking and Traffic Management Operational Advice during Covid-19 (Appendix 1). This guidance was issued to assist local authorities consider appropriate temporary measures in the very challenging circumstances around Covid-19.
- 2.4 To manage this unprecedented situation and to meet the requirements of government guidance, services were quickly adapted, and a number of adjustments were applied at the end of March and into April 2020.
- 2.5 Following an announcement by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick, local councils in England were required to provide free car parking for NHS staff and social care workers during the coronavirus outbreak. This initiative was designed to enable these workers to park in on-street parking bays and council owned car parks without having to worry about cost or time restrictions.
- 2.6 These critical workers were encouraged by government to display supporting evidence in their windscreen, such as photocopies of their work pass with sensitive information removed, or a letter of evidence from their employer. As a result of this informality, the government concession was quickly abused, and enforcement action became necessary to control the concession by accepting only government approved permits made

available through NHS and Social Care employer networks. The government's position has not changed, and these permits currently represent around 10 to 15 permits on display in Maidstone each day.

NHS & Social Care permits in paid parking bays



- 2.7 To ease levels of inconsiderate and illegal parking, residents and businesses displaying a valid permit were allowed to park in the councils underutilised off-street car parks until 1 July 2020 to absorb the additional demand. This supported local residents adhering to government advice to stay at home and eased congestion in many residential streets.
- 2.8 As car park charges remained in place throughout the lockdown period, those residents using the car parks without resident parking permits paid for parking in the normal way.
- 2.9 The resident parking scheme is applied to roads close to the town centre to deter long stay non-resident and commuter parking. As non-resident demand in these roads decreased due to the lockdown, Parking Services in consultation with the Chief Executive were able to ease the restrictions applied to resident parking bays during the emergency period to accommodate the additional demand from residents.
- 2.10 To facilitate controlled parking, 1500 letters were hand delivered to residential properties in the worst affected roads which coincided with a press release to help reduce levels of inconsiderate and dangerous parking as an alternative to enforcement action.
- 2.11 Restrictions placed to manage commuter parking in rural villages such as those where a 30-minute restriction is applied during the day, were also relaxed until 1 July 2020 to improve on-street parking capacity for residents living in these areas.
- 2.12 Lockmeadow housed the Maidstone Community Hub at the start of the pandemic and with business closures within the facility, the car park was closed to customers until 8 June 2020.
- 2.13 The car parks within Mote Park and Cobtree Park were also closed during the emergency period to facilitate public social distancing in line with Government guidelines. These reopened once government restrictions eased on 13 May 2020.

2.14 All other car parks have remained open and normal tariffs have applied throughout the emergency pandemic period.

2.15 An officer decision was submitted on 23 March 2020 and copied to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee for noting which recorded:

That the on-street and off-street parking regulations in relation to resident parking bays and single yellow lines restricting waiting for 30 minutes are eased to support residents and business until 1 July 2020.

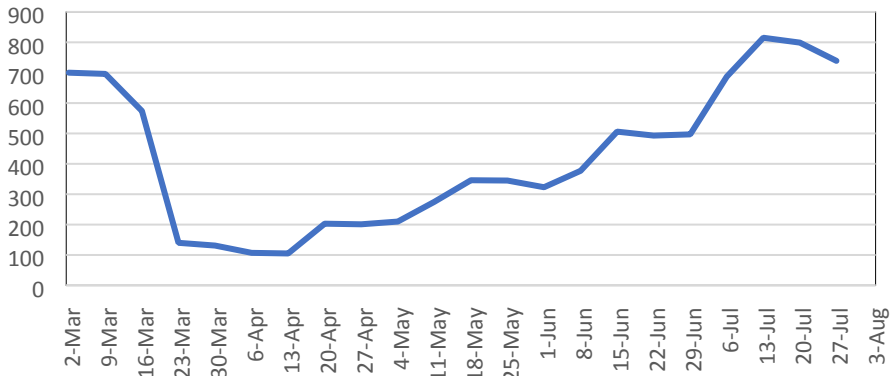
That resident parking permits and business permits are valid in off-street car parks to ease on-street parking demand until 1 July 2020.

That regulations in off-street car parks are eased to provide NHS and Social Care workers with free parking concessions as result of the Covid-19 outbreak.

That the car parks at Mote Park, Cobtree Park and Lockmeadow are closed to facilitate public social distancing in line with Government guidelines.

2.16 Civil Parking Enforcement activity remained critical throughout Maidstone during the emergency lockdown period to preserve highway safety and maintain good access for emergency services and refuse teams. As a result, the level of deployed hours of enforcement patrols has remained consistent with contracted levels. However, the number of contraventions was reduced due to the limited number of vehicle movements throughout the lockdown period.

Contraventions / Notices issued



2.17 Enforcement patrols continued to manage school keep clear markings as it was necessary to keep school entrances clear for key worker’s children who had to continue going to school.

2.18 Enforcement of loading bays also remained important to maintain essential food store deliveries as was the management of disabled bays to ensure that Blue Badge Holders had good access to those facilities that remained open.

- 2.19 The processing of Civil Parking Enforcement appeals, and case progression continued throughout the period of lockdown in line with current legislation. Mitigation presented as part of an appeal in relation to Covid-19 continues to be carefully considered to ensure a fair and balanced enforcement process.
- 2.20 Following a return to normal operations on 1 July 2020, a press release was published in tandem with the issue of advisory notices to those drivers continuing to display resident permits in car parks or parking on 30 minute yellow line restrictions to improve compliance levels before Penalty Charge Notice issue.
- 2.21 Following the introduction of The Taking Control of Goods and Certification of Enforcement Agents (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 in March, Warrant enforcement at residential premises and on highways was suspended by bailiff recovery teams. However, Warrants remain active for 12 months and normal recovery operations have recently been reintroduced on 24th August 2020 in line with current legislation.

Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders

- 2.22 KCC were successful in a bid to the DfT for Emergency Active Travel Funding (EATF), to deliver experimental road space reallocation schemes in order to encourage and active travel and enable social distancing. For Maidstone, KCC have been able to secure the funding to deliver trials of two schemes which MBC had previously identified as part of the 2016 Infrastructure Delivery Plan. These schemes include the pedestrianisation of Earl Street and the installation of a cycle lane along King Street, between the A249 and Wyke Manor Road.
- 2.23 These measures are being delivered using Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders, which involves installing a trial version of the scheme, then undertaking a public consultation process while the trial is live in order to fine tune the scheme and form a view as to whether a permanent solution may be viable and supported.
- 2.24 These schemes are intended to provide suitable infrastructure so that more journeys can be safely undertaken in a way that does not worsen air pollution or congestion, does improve health (particularly respiratory health), and has proven benefits to local economies. These aims are of particular importance during the current pandemic; however, it is also true that achieving them has inherent costs. Principally, aside from the funding, achieving the above described goals requires the addition of some highway space being allocated to cycles and, therefore, some reallocation away from existing uses.
- 2.25 One such use is parking and the EATF schemes for Maidstone do involve some slight reduction in the number of on-street Pay & Display parking spaces in the town centre. As a result, there is a potential loss of revenue from parking provision during this trial however it is also possible that this will have no discernible impact on parking revenue. The reason for the uncertainty around revenue impact is the lack of evidence to support whether the removal of a small number of parking spaces would mean that

visitors abandon entirely parking in a town centre P&D space, or simply go to another location. It is also unknown what proportion of individuals in that latter group would go to an MBC car park, or a private one.

- 2.26 Consultation on this scheme will be ongoing throughout the trial and it is recommended that the Parking Services team observe any discernible impact on parking revenue during and raise any resultant issues with Kent County Council, so that proportionate solutions can be identified.

Financial Implications

- 2.27 Covid-19 and the lockdown have had a significant impact on parking income with a dramatic reduction in occupancy levels. The table below provides a summary of income levels for off street pay and display car parks for the first 18 weeks of the year and illustrates the decline in income compared to the same period in 2019/20. It does also however show the early signs of recovery as the town centre reopened in early July (week 14), although occupancy rates are still only around 40% of what would normally be expected at this time of year.

Week No	Budget 20/21	Income 20/21	Income 19/20	Variance 19/20- 20/21	Year on Year variance (%)
1	£39,133	£8,924	£38,080	-£29,156	-77%
2	£43,794	£1,082	£39,392	-£38,310	-97%
3	£42,902	£1,085	£36,813	-£35,729	-97%
4	£39,502	£1,290	£33,804	-£32,514	-96%
5	£41,945	£1,439	£38,993	-£37,554	-96%
6	£38,968	£5,390	£36,947	-£31,556	-85%
7	£40,732	£4,921	£35,992	-£31,071	-86%
8	£38,194	£4,448	£35,677	-£31,229	-88%
9	£40,458	£3,778	£36,924	-£33,146	-90%
10	£41,172	£11,743	£35,306	-£23,563	-67%
11	£40,822	£5,753	£37,357	-£31,604	-85%
12	£39,663	£13,700	£36,615	-£22,915	-63%
13	£40,697	£10,180	£36,961	-£26,781	-72%
14	£40,432	£23,200	£36,697	-£13,496	-37%
15	£39,726	£14,460	£36,449	-£21,989	-60%
16	£41,979	£17,475	£37,309	-£19,834	-53%
17	£42,022	£17,520	£36,988	-£19,468	-53%
18	£43,794	£17,663	£37,695	-£20,033	-53%
Total	£735,935	£164,051	£664,000	-£499,949	-75%

- 2.28 This, along with a marked reduction in income from on street parking and penalty charge notices is expected to give rise to an overall budget shortfall of £1.1m in this area. Further detail and contextual information regarding these variances are provided within the first quarter financial update report which is also on the agenda for this committee meeting.

2.29 As part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee is asked to consider a recommendation that the parking tariff increases agreed and planned for 1st April 2020, now be implemented on 1st April 2021, owing to the impacts and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic. These increases were originally agreed by the Committee on 7th January 2020. The reasons for implementing the increases remain valid, namely that the increases are consistent with the Council's charging policy and they support the requirement that the Council delivers a balanced budget. Failing to implement the increases would create budget pressures elsewhere at a time when the Council's budget is already under severe pressure owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Option 1 - The committee is asked to note the update and agree that the parking tariff increases agreed and planned for 1st April 2020, now be implemented on 1st April 2021, owing to the impacts and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

Option 2 - The committee could elect to reinstate the planned increases to parking charges sooner, however this is not recommended at this stage as the deferral of the increase is intended to stabilise operations and support local economic recovery.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is Option 1 as set above. The proposed deferral of parking tariff increases is intended to stabilise operations and support recovery by encouraging local economic revival.

5. RISK

5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications which arise from the recommendations.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 The situation will continue to be monitored closely by officers. Budgetary implications will be given further consideration as part of future financial updates to the committee, and through the development of the medium-term financial strategy for 2021/22 onwards.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Local Authority Parking and Traffic Management Operational Advice during Covid-19
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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.