

**Virtual Permit Management in Maidstone**

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| <b>Final Decision-Maker</b>           | Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee |
| <b>Lead Head of Service</b>           | Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager           |
| <b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b> | Alex Wells, Parking Services Analyst            |
| <b>Classification</b>                 | Public  |
| <b>Wards affected</b>                 | All   |

**Executive Summary**

Maidstone Borough Council currently operates a paper-based resident parking permit scheme. As this service is no longer supported by the supplier, Parking Services need to upgrade permit management systems.

As Parking Services are upgrading system, it presents an opportunity to modify how the council operate the service to improve customer experience, efficiency and demonstrate the Council's commitment to combatting climate change.

**Purpose of Report**

To recommend that Maidstone's existing paper-based permit system is replaced with a 'virtual' permit management system which lays the foundation for future projects to combat climate change.

To recommend a focus group with Members to address the misuse of Visitor Permits and discuss possible resolutions through a Virtual Permit system.

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. To update the Existing Paper-Based Resident Parking Scheme with a Virtual Resident Permit Scheme.
2. That members nominate a representative from each Party along with the Chair and Vice-Chair of SPI to attend a Member Focus Group hosted by Parking Services officers addressing the issue of Visitor Permit misuse.
3. That following the Member focus group recommendations, a report is presented to the Committee specifically relating to the management of visitor Permits in Maidstone.

| <b>Timetable</b>             |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b><i>Meeting</i></b>        | <b><i>Date</i></b> |
| Strategic Planning Committee | 09/02/2021         |
| Maidstone Borough Council    |                    |

# Virtual Permit Management in Maidstone

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue                                 | Implications  | Sign-off                 |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b> | <p>Accepting these recommendations will improve the Council's abilities to meet the following Corporate Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embracing Growth and enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>- Safe, Clean and Green</li> </ul>   | Parking Services Manager |
| <b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>The report recommendation supports the achievement of the Environmental Sustainability cross cutting objective by drastically reducing paper usage and reducing emissions used during transit of post.</p> <p>Additionally, it lays a foundation for future projects to potentially charge Resident Permits in accordance with vehicle emissions, again encouraging a reduction in highly polluting vehicles.</p> | Parking Services Manager |
| <b>Risk Management</b>                | <p>New developments incorporated into Parking Services continue to be assessed to ensure that performance and service quality are not placed at risk.</p> <p>As the project is proactive at this stage with no urgent time constraints, the levels of risk in a system upgrade are minimal.</p>   | Parking Services Manager |
| <b>Financial</b>                      | <p>CapEx required for the project will be approximately £13,000 based on figures from market leaders.</p> <p>Estimates of ongoing annual costs to the Supplier are based on a per permit pricing structure. Based on permit issues from the 2019-20 Financial Year, this equates to approximately £11,635.50 annually.</p> <p>A Virtual System will also provide savings due to</p>   | Head of Finance          |

|                 |   |                                  |
|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|
|                 | <p>reductions in banking, postage, licence fees and printing. Based on the figures from the 2019-20 Financial Year, these savings will total approximately £12,112.84.</p> <p>Following the initial £13,000 investment to upgrade the system, this will generate an estimated saving of £477.34 annually.</p> <p>Additionally, due to improved enforcement accuracy provided by Virtual Permits, there is likely to be an improved Recovery Rate for PCN Revenue; however, we have insufficient data to fully ascertain the financial impact of this.</p>   |                                  |
| <b>Staffing</b> | There are no staffing implications.   | Parking Services Manager         |
| <b>Legal</b>    | <p>The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA) sets out the legal framework under which the Council established Controlled Parking Zones and parking permits, to provide suitable, and adequate parking spaces. If any of the recommendations set out in the report would constitute minor changes to the TRO, the Council can use the minor change order procedure without the need to advertise or consult. To bring a minor order into effect the publication process would need to be followed in accordance with the legislative framework.</p> <p>Consideration, subject to legal advice, could be given in appropriate cases to prosecuting under the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984, section 115(1) offences relating to the deceptive use of parking devices or misuse of permits, which carry a maximum fine of £5,000.</p> <p>The Council must in the exercise of its functions have regard to its public sector equalities duty under section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. The public sector equality duty places a legal requirement on the Council, have due regard to the need to: (i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (ii) Advance equality of opportunity between</p> | Team Leader Corporate Governance |

|                                    |  |  |
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|                                    | <p>persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Any issues in relation to the public sector equality duty and the introduction of a virtual residents parking scheme is one which needs careful consideration and assessment for the Committee to consider in order to comply with this duty.</p> |  |
| <b>Privacy and Data Protection</b> | <p>There will be changes to Data Protection practices if recommendations are accepted and a procurement process is completed.</p> <p>Changes will be established in any supplier contract, following review from the Policy and Information Team.</p>  | Policy and Information Team              |
| <b>Equalities</b>                  | <p>An equalities impact assessment will be completed as part of the review/proposed change of service</p>  | Senior Equalities and Engagement Officer |
| <b>Public Health</b>               | <p>If recommendations are accepted and implemented there will likely be long-term net benefits to Public Health.</p>   | Senior Public Health Officer             |
| <b>Crime and Disorder</b>          | <p>If recommendations are accepted, we will be able to reduce levels of permit fraud and misuse in Maidstone.</p> <p>This will improve highway safety and maintain the free flow of traffic in residential areas.</p>  | Parking Services Manager                 |
| <b>Procurement</b>                 | <p>If recommendations are accepted there will be a full procurement process to secure a supplier.</p>  | Head of Finance                          |

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

2.1 This report sets out a foundation to ensure that Parking Services take proactive steps in facilitating improvements in air quality and the adoption of future technology.

- 2.2 Maidstone Borough Council remains one of the larger residential hubs in Kent with an estimated population of 180,000 people and an ever-growing pressure to build more housing to meet increasing demand.
- 2.3 Whilst households on the edge of the town centre and surrounding villages are more likely to have driveways, in the town centre especially, this is often not the case.
- 2.4 Residents without a driveway must rely on Maidstone's Resident Parking Scheme, a scheme which has for the most part remained unchanged in how we administer permits for over a decade in the face of drastically changing priorities and technologies.
- 2.5 Residents are more aware than ever of the environmental impact of their own actions, including harmful vehicle emissions and paper waste.
- 2.6 Residents are also becoming increasingly used to smoother user experiences facilitated by online and digital services thanks to the proliferation of 'smart devices' and the simplicity of modern service design.
- 2.7 Bringing services in-line with modern user experience and climate-conscious design will help improve quality of life for all those in the Borough of Maidstone.
- 2.8 Existing Service Operation
- 2.9 Supplier support for the current solution has been discontinued which is leading to increasing manual input by our back-office team to process permits.
- 2.10 This means that over the next year Parking Services will need to upgrade or change systems to ensure that our systems are fit for purpose in continuing to administer the Resident Parking Scheme.
- 2.11 As an upgrade is necessary, it would be prudent to use this opportunity to help meet as many of Maidstone's Strategic Goals as possible by:
- Reducing vehicle emissions
  - Promoting adoption of less-polluting vehicles
  - Reducing paper waste
  - Improving operational efficiency
  - Improving Customer experience
  - Improving the quality of data to allow for better service analysis and product development
  - Creating an ecosystem of connected technologies to improve service delivery
  - Improved Enforcement
- 2.12 In addition, it gives us an opportunity to adopt further innovations or at least create a foundation from which these can easily be adopted in the future.

- 2.13 One example would be the shift towards emissions-based tariffs by some cashless parking payment providers such as RingGo, who have already announced their success in developing variable tariff software for their customers.
- 2.14 Using this software, parking tariffs based on vehicle emissions has been successfully introduced in some Greater London authorities where cashless parking (using a mobile APP, text, or call) is the only option available to the motorist. Using vehicle registrations, combined with information from the DVLA, the system automatically adjusts parking tariffs between higher and lower polluting vehicles at the point of purchase.
- 2.15 By establishing the foundation now, a shift to this sort of scheme could be facilitated at a lower cost in the future if there was suitable demand.
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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

#### **Option 1**

#### **Update the Existing Paper-Based Resident Permit Scheme with a Virtual Permit Scheme / Seek a Virtual Solution for Visitor Permit Misuse.**

- 3.1 If members agree to the implementation of a Virtual Permit System we will take a specification to market and complete a full procurement exercise for the required system.
- 3.2 There are many benefits to doing so which link directly to Maidstone's Strategic Goals which I will outline below:
- 3.3 Improved Customer Experience
- 3.4 The Current resident permit system operates on the following process (simplified):
1. Complete permit application form on website
  2. website checks eligibility
  3. customer must submit proofs if eligible
  4. staff must review proofs
  5. if confirmed a permit is created on the back-office system
  6. permit is sent to print-room
  7. print-room process and package the permit
  8. permit is posted to customer
  9. permit must be physically displayed in target vehicle once received
- 3.5 The new process would operate as follows:
1. Create and verify account with proofs
  2. Activate Permit
  3. Pay

- 3.6 This reduces the wait time for customers significantly in verifying proofs, and once proofs have been verified, reduces wait time for a permit from several days (dependent on postal service) to less than 30 seconds.
- 3.7 Reducing Paper Waste
- 3.8 We anticipate the removal of >90% of paper usage within the first year of implementation, with a gradual increase over time.
- 3.9 This would largely be due to the removal of permit paper/printing and reduced written correspondence being required.
- 3.10 By removing the printed aspect of the permit process, we additionally remove the processing time as no postage is required. This enables the customer to have instant access to a permit the moment they need it once their proofs have been verified.
- 3.11 Reducing Harmful Vehicle Emissions / Promoting Less-Polluting Vehicles
- 3.12 Moving to this system has added benefits including the ability to offer emissions-based permit pricing in the future, either offering discounts to vehicles with low emissions, or by charging the most polluting vehicles on the road.
- 3.13 Please note that the purpose of this report is not to make decisions about emission-based parking tariffs and permit pricing, which would be agreed as part of a later proposal if required.
- 3.14 This system would work by allowing a vehicle lookup at the time a vehicle registration mark (VRM) is entered and checking the vehicle emissions against the limits we would set before generating the permit pricing.
- 3.15 All of this would be done without any input needed from the back-office and only requiring the customer to enter the VRM, creating a seamless solution.
- 3.16 Reducing Misuse of Visitor Permits
- 3.17 Visitor Permits are currently offered to Maidstone Residents as a single Paper Permit that is not 'locked' to any single Vehicle Registration. They make up 46% of all Permits issued in Maidstone.
- 3.18 Subsequently, permits are easily transferred between vehicles. Whilst this is in the spirit of a Visitors Permit (easily given to visitors as needed), both anecdotal (through resident complaints) and official (through Maidstone's Civil Enforcement Team) evidence has identified misuse of these permits, predominantly in the Town Centre.
- 3.19 Visitor Permits have been identified on online auction sites such as Facebook Marketplace on numerous occasions being marketed at both local residents and businesses who would benefit from using resident parking bays.



- 3.20 Customer complaints have historically identified the roads surrounding KCC's offices on County Road as a particular hotspot for Visitor Permit misuse.
- 3.21 By going virtual, we plan on removing the ability to misuse Visitor Permits by offering them as individual tokens allotted to a residence rather than as a single perpetual session.
- 3.22 This means that if I have a visitor; I would use either a phone, computer, or Smartphone app to confirm the vehicle registration of my visitor in a manner similar to making a Cashless Parking payment (typically taking less than thirty seconds).
- 3.23 It is worth noting that this would not interfere with Residents who require carers to visit, as we will continue offering a dedicated Carer Permit.
- 3.24 The number of these Virtual Visitor Tokens allotted to a residence can be set by the Council.
- 3.25 By continuing to offer enough tokens to facilitate one visitor per day for every day of the year, it's likely that we will significantly reduce the number of Visitor Permits being used by commuters and for people with a number of vehicles over their allocated allowance.
- 3.26 However, this may not prevent residents using a visitor permit in lieu of a 'third permit' for their own vehicle.
- 3.27 If we wanted to prevent misuse of these permits for people using them as a third permit rather than for visitors as intended, we could change the token allowance to a number lower than 365, thus creating a vacuum from when their allowance renews in which time, they will be in contravention of corresponding parking restrictions by choosing to park in resident bays without a valid token.
- 3.28 This would likely have a net positive impact in the medium to long term by phasing out the number of vehicles in the town centre used by properties exceeding our limitations. This would have the knock-on effect of improving the free flow of traffic, reducing hunting for spaces (reducing harmful emissions) and improving highway safety in crowded roads.
- 3.29 However, in the short-term the more accurate enforcement of this rule would be a controversial and potentially disruptive move, despite being in-line with our own historic guidance.
- 3.30 Subsequently, as it will affect all Wards, it would be useful to engage with members from across the Borough for a workshop in February addressing how we tackle this issue.
- 3.31 Attendees should include the Chair and Vice-Chair of SPI committee as well as one representative from each party, nominated by Members.

- 3.32 The workshop would allow members to voice potential concerns of the Maidstone's residents and help shape a proportionate and fair solution for dealing with visitor parking in the Resident Parking Scheme.
- 3.33 Findings from this workshop would then be presented in a separate report for members to formally agree on an option.
- 3.34 Following a Committee decision, we would then be able to add these details to a service specification and procure a system able to meet these requirements.

**Option 2**  
**Do Nothing / Remain with Existing Paper-Based Resident Parking Scheme**

- 3.35 This option would require us to continue operations as normal with no change in how we administer the Resident Parking Scheme.
- 3.36 Whilst this would not have any short-term negative effects, it also would generate any short to long-term benefits, specifically those listed above and in Section 2.
- 3.37 Over the lifespan of the scheme, due to the back-office no longer being supported, the number of errors in the system would likely increase or changes in technology within our own IT would render the system unusable, requiring us to ultimately upgrade to a Virtual System in the future anyway at a less strategically advantageous moment.

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**4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 It is recommended to proceed with Option 1.
- 4.2 Committing to a Virtual Permit solution as per Option 1 generates numerous strategic benefits, improving efficiency, customer experience and meeting our commitments to combatting climate change.
- 4.3 Given the potential impact of how we deal with Visitor Permits, it is prudent to allow members more time to discuss the issue and make a formal decision at a later date as suggested by Option 1.

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**5. RISK**

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

**6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 None

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## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 Work with our Procurement, Data Protection and Legal Teams with the IT Commissioning Group to prepare for the implementation of a Virtual Permit System.
- 7.2 Arrange a workshop for members to address Visitor Permit Misuse at a date to be confirmed in February.
- 7.3 SPI Committee to present the findings of the Member Workshop and agree on Options before going to market.
- 7.4 Work with the Comms and Digital teams to advise Members of the Public on planned changes.

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## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

- 8.1 None

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1 None