

Surrey Heath Borough Council Executive

13 February 2024

Car Parking Strategy

Executive Portfolio Holder	Councillor Helen Whitcroft, Resident & Community Services
Lead Officer:	Nick Steevens, Strategic Director, Environment & Community
Report Author:	Alan Burns, Parking Manager Julia Greenfield, Corporate Enforcement Manager
Key Decision:	Yes
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and Purpose

As part of the Council's Base Budget Review completed in July 2023, Executive agreed increases in parking tariffs to contribute to the delivery of the Council's base budget saving targets.

In September 2023 Executive determined that prior to any commitment to increase parking tariffs, a Car Parking Strategy would be developed to set out the Council's aspirations for its car parks and determine where improvements could be made to enhance customer experience. The Parking Strategy is intended to bring about a more strategic and rounded review of the Council's car parks looking at income, tariff structures, levels of usage, future technology, maintenance and required levels of future investment.

The Parking Strategy was considered at the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee in January 2023 with comments and observations being considered to inform the final iteration of the Strategy prior to consideration by Executive.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that

- (i) the Parking Strategy, as set out in Annex 1 to this report, be adopted;
- (ii) the amendments to the parking tariffs for existing car parks, as set out in page 25 of Annex 1 to this report, be approved with effect from 1st April 2024;
- (iii) the proposed introduction of car parking tariffs in Wilton Road car park be introduced from 1st July 2024 following the completion of the statutory Traffic

Regulatory Order process and after review and consideration of any feedback received; and

- (iv) the final implementation of these proposals be delegated to the Strategic Director for Environment and Community in consultation with the Resident & Community Services Portfolio Holder, following the completion of the necessary statutory processes.

1. Background:

- 1.1 In September 2023 it was agreed that a change to parking tariffs would be delayed until a strategic review of off-street parking could be conducted. This was to allow proper alignment between parking tariffs and the level of investment and improvement required in the Council's car parks within an overall strategic framework aligned to the delivery of the Council's priorities.
- 1.2 The Council is reliant on the income from parking charges to pay for the costs of providing car parks including staffing overheads, business rates, cleaning, equipment, revenue and capital investment in repairs and maintenance, all of which are essential to the enforcement of the parking regulations. A core principle of the Parking Strategy (the Strategy) is that across the borough as a whole, the portfolio of car parks should be financially sustainable, i.e. self-funding, avoiding the need for Council subsidy.
- 1.3 Following the September Executive, the Portfolio Holder for Resident & Community Services worked with officers to develop the Parking Strategy (the Strategy) as set out in Annex 1. The Strategy seeks to take a more holistic approach to our car parks, striking a balance between economic prosperity, financial sustainability, environmental preservation, social well-being, and inclusive community development.
- 1.4 In January 2024 the Strategy was considered at the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee with comments and observations being considered to inform the final iteration of the Strategy. The comments received from the Committee were:
 - (i) The proposed Strategy (page 26) needs to be amended to reflect that up to 1 hour of free parking will continue to be provided at Chobham High Street Car Park. The Car Park acts as the Car Park for Chobham Water Meadows Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and thereby should have a sufficient free-parking provision to encourage use of the SANG rather than sites on the Special Protection Area for recreation and dog walking.
 - (ii) The Strategy should consider inclusion of reference to the soon to be opened St Catherine's Road SANG Car Park.
 - (iii) There may be a notable increase in anti-social parking because of the reduction in the free parking allowance from 1 hour to 30 minutes. It was suggested that the Council should continue to push Surrey County Council to penalise on-street illegal parking.
 - (iv) Non-car users should not be subsidising car ownership in the borough through low car parking tariffs.

- (v) Car parking tariffs of £1 at Pay on Foot (POF) locations were not high enough as to lead to a significant drop in numbers of people accessing local shops and services. This was suggested when comparing the cost of the proposed tariffs to indicative items a car-user may purchase from a high-street location.
- (vi) Whilst the Strategy provides free car parking for locations outside Camberley Town Centre on Sundays in order 'to entice customers to village centres, boosting the local economy', it was noted that many shops and services did not open on a Sunday or benefitted from their own private car parks. In relation to Chobham, this would only encourage a lower turnover of cars, when the car park was already full as a result of nearby sporting fixtures.

1.5 The comments raised at the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee have been considered and either reflected within the strategy or actioned separately. One exception relates to the reference to the removal of Sunday charges, which was not proposed within the strategy, but due to a contradiction between the wording of the relevant section and the tariff tables within, generated confusion amongst Councillors. This section has now been reworded accordingly with the regularised charges across the whole week clearly set out. Sunday charges are proposed to be the same as Monday to Saturday charges in all car parks including Pay on Foot (POF) car parks, i.e. those which are not multi-storey and controlled by the Automatic Numberplate Recognition (ANPR) system.

1.6 The request to incorporate St Catherine's Road SANG Car Park into the Strategy has been discounted at this stage as the car park does not currently exist and planning consent has not yet been obtained for the SANG or associated parking. However, it should be noted that the Strategy and the Action Plan are intended to be live documents which will evolve as necessary to incorporate changes to current and future parking infrastructure.

2. Detailed Proposals:

2.1 The Strategy sets out the Council's four key aspirations for the future provision of parking services at Surrey Heath, this includes:

- (i) Protecting the Environment
- (ii) Delivering Good Service
- (iii) Providing Social & Financial Value
- (iv) Supporting Wellbeing & Social Inclusion

2.2 A full review of all Council-owned parking provision was conducted to help inform the Strategy. This included an assessment of condition and any urgent or planned preventative maintenance required; revenue and capital expenditure, footfall and where present, existing parking tariffs.

2.3 Subject to the approval of the strategy by Executive, an Action Plan will be created to deliver the following benefits:

- (i) Investment in car parks through a planned Investment Strategy to ensure they are fit for the future

- (ii) Employment of enhanced technology and information to improve customer experience
- (iii) Appropriate management and charging structures to support vitality and economic growth

Updates on progress against the action plan will be monitored as part of the Annual Plan performance monitoring.

- 2.4 The Strategy identifies multiple areas for improvement within the car parks which will be incorporated into the Action Plan, which include:
- (i) Upgrading of critical systems such as fire, electrical, CCTV and Automatic Numberplate Recognition (ANPR)
 - (ii) Improving our payment systems to improve customer experience
 - (iii) Improving the standard of surfacing and line marking
 - (iv) Undertaking structural surveys in accordance with government guidance
 - (v) Improving cleaning, addressing anti-social behaviour, graffiti management and reactive repairs following vandalism
 - (vi) Adoption of the accredited Safer Parking Scheme
 - (vii) Improving lighting, visibility to increase safety & security
 - (viii) Reducing the carbon footprint of the parking service
 - (ix) Improving landscaping and signage
 - (x) Considering other options for income generation through parking tariffs or the release of under-utilised areas of car park
 - (xi) Taking action to reduce undesirable long-term parking and increase churn to increase the number of available spaces for customers
 - (xii) Introducing planned, preventative maintenance in all of our assets
- 2.5 Currently only 9 car parks managed by Surrey Heath are chargeable. The Strategy considers the feasibility of locations where new parking tariffs could be applied in order to cover maintenance and management costs. One additional car park (Wilton Road) is proposed for the introduction of parking tariffs with a recommendation to Executive that charges will commence in July 2024 to allow time for the statutory 28-day consultation and installation of payment machines and signage.
- 2.6 As part of the review of parking provision, multiple car parks were discounted from the introduction of tariffs either due to the potential impact on local businesses, recreational activities and organised sports, or due to them being solely used as a car park for a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) intended to attract the public away from sensitive habitats which are afforded special protection. The car parks associated solely to SANGs were discounted for charges as they are an intrinsic requirement for an open space to be determined as a functional, strategic SANG. With specific reference to Bisley and Prior Road, these facilities experience very little use, and as a result, it was not considered commercially viable to invest in the necessary infrastructure for charges to be implemented. Whilst discounted at this point, all of the Council's parking assets will be routinely reviewed to determine

whether there is any merit in the introduction of future charges.

- 2.7 Additional car parks which will require further assessment and the development of a detailed business case are Frimley Lodge and Lightwater Country Park car parks. This is due to the substantial cost associated with repairing the car park surfaces, for which there is an increasing need to avoid future safety concerns arising from their deteriorating condition. A detailed financial analysis of the costs associated with maintenance and addressing these safety concerns in these locations is being conducted.
- 2.8 The Strategy sets out key proposals to the parking tariffs within the Council car parks including:
- (i) The simplification of tariffs, including the shift to a standard hourly rate, removing Sunday tariffs and developing a 7-day per week standardised rate
 - (ii) The retention of free evening parking in pay-on-foot (POF) car parks
 - (iii) A reduction in the free period in POF car parks from 1 hour to 30 minutes, with the exception of Chobham where the location of the SANG would preclude such a limited free period
 - (iv) The shift from an evening rate to hourly tariffs in the multi-storey car parks
 - (v) An increase in the tariffs, including season tickets, for all chargeable car parks to reflect the increasing costs associated with their management and upkeep
 - (vi) The inclusion of Wilton Road car park as a chargeable POF car park
 - (vii) The introduction of a 12-hour maximum stay in free parking services car parks to encourage churn and increase the number of available parking spaces
- 2.9 As part of the development of this strategy, tariffs were compared with other nearby locations to ensure competitiveness and alignment with industry standards. These figures are shown in Annex 4, however, it must be noted that at the time of this report being collated, only 2023 tariffs were available, with other areas still in consultation regarding potential uplifts. This information underscores the dynamic nature of tariff considerations and emphasises the need for ongoing monitoring and adjustment to reflect the evolving market conditions.
- 2.10 The costs associated with the running of the car parks managed by Parking Services are set out in the Confidential Annex 2 and Annex 3, and identify the capital and revenue expenditure alongside the income generated by parking tariffs. These financials do not show the running costs for recreation & leisure car parks. Whilst these car parks should be accounted for as part of the financial analysis, the nature of the recreation & leisure service budgets means that further work is required to separate out these costs from the wider settings they serve.
- 2.11 The comparison of income against parking services revenue and capital expenditure for the current financial year shows that these costs exceed parking income by approximately £128,000. Taking into account the need for

essential maintenance and improvements in the condition of these car parks, the proposed increases in parking tariffs for 2024/25 are only projected to generate a contribution to the Council's tax account of £43,000. The current capital expenditure projected for 2024/25 does not take account of any additional works identified during structural surveys nor does it account for any works required to leisure & recreation car parks. Additionally, substantial future works such as improvements/replacements to lifts in the multi-storey car parks and revenue expenditure for replacement parking vehicles are currently uncosted and will need to be considered.

- 2.12 If adopted, the proposed changes to parking tariffs in existing chargeable car parks will take effect from April 2024. Charges in Wilton Road car park will be implemented in the summer with improvements sought to the access road to resolve unsafe and anti-social parking leading up the implementation date.

3. Potential impact of change

- 3.1 The increase in parking charges is projected to deliver an estimated £410,000 of additional income as shown in Annex 3. This income is required to undertake essential maintenance and much-needed improvements in the Council's car parks. Without an increase in parking tariffs the council would need to cover the projected budget deficit of close to £400,000.
- 3.2 A customer consultation was carried out to gather customer perception and obtain views on how and where we can make improvements in our facilities. The consultation commenced on the 21st December 2023 and closed on the 16th January 2024 with close to 1,000 responses received. A summary of the quantitative data is now reflected in the Strategy and shown in Annex 5.
- 3.3 Separate to the consultation, customers complaints received by Parking Services encompass a wide range of concerns, including issues with space sizes, poor lighting creating concerns of personal safety, potholes, inadequate line marking, and insufficient wayfinder signage around our Pay on Foot facilities. Additionally, customers have expressed dissatisfaction with the antisocial activities and the subsequent housekeeping issues in Main Square Car Park.
- 3.4 Due to the proposal to include an additional chargeable car park and new maximum stay restrictions in our free car parks, a review of staffing capacity within the parking service will be conducted to ensure there are sufficient Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to patrol the car parks to resolve inappropriate parking. It is anticipated that the introduction of an additional full-time equivalent CEO position could be self-funding and would not incur any additional revenue costs. The introduction of the additional post will also provide an opportunity to increase the breadth of operational resource throughout the working week, increasing the frequency of patrols.
- 3.5 Whilst the introduction of new parking charges and increasing existing tariffs is not popular, the increase in income is necessary to cover the costs of

providing off-street parking, including essential repairs and improvements to the Council's car parks. These include, lighting, CCTV, safe walking routes, improved cleaning, general maintenance and a more inclusive safer environment. The increase in parking charges ensures the costs of these essential works are incurred by users of the car parks and not through Council subsidy.

- 3.6 The introduction of charges in the Wilton Road car park could cause overspill into adjacent residential roads. The Council has engaged with Surrey County Council as the highways authority to outline the proposals within the Strategy and seek to resolve the antisocial parking on the roadway outside of the location in order to combat this.

4. Proposal and Alternative Options:

- 4.1 The Strategy brings about much needed improvements to the Council car parks. Failure to adopt the Strategy will restrict the opportunity to properly assess and prioritise improvements in our car parks for the benefit of residents and other service users.
- 4.2 It could be determined that no change is made to the current tariffs or to the number of chargeable car parks. In this instance it would be necessary to cover the increasing cost of managing these assets through the use of the Council's reserves or through the cessation of other services provided by the Council.
- 4.3 Parking is a discretionary service and the Council could consider closing some or all of its car parks, particularly those requiring significant investment. This would have substantial impacts linked to the viability of town and village centres and would have the knock-on impact of causing anti-social parking on highways and other public spaces.
- 4.4 Consideration could be given to alternative methods of delivering car parking within Surrey Heath, such as the use of a private sector provider for management and parking enforcement. It is likely that the costs of a management contract such as this would be greater than delivering the service in-house.

5. Contribution to the Council's Short Term Plan / Five Year Strategy

- 5.1 **Environment:** This holistic approach to parking will assist in delivering a more environmentally sustainable means of providing car parking for our service users through improvements to infrastructure that support reduction in carbon and climate change.
- 5.2 **Health & Quality of Life:** supporting the local community by ensuring that quality, convenient and safe parking is provided in our towns and villages. Providing parking facilities in our parks & open spaces encourages physical activity to improve physical & mental health and wellbeing.

5.3 **Economy:** supporting the local economy by ensuring customers have access to quality facilities across the borough and paying customers have access to a car parking space when and where they need it.

5.4 **Effective & Responsive Council:** Parking Services consulted with the public to seek their views on how to improve our parking provision on the 21st December with the consultation closing on the 16th January. Comments in relation to the condition of the Council's car parks have been considered and will be incorporated into the Action Plan.

6. Resource Implications:

6.1 If agreed, the Strategy will increase parking revenue which will be reinvested in the Council's car parks. For major works funding will be sought from the most appropriate means to avoid additional financial pressure on the Council.

6.2 The delivery of the Parking Strategy and development of the action plan will be met from within existing staff resources. An additional CEO will be appointed on a trial basis to determine whether this can be continued on a cost-recovery basis.

7. Section 151 Officer Comments:

7.1 The anticipated increase in income has been factored into the budget proposal considered elsewhere on this agenda. It is important that the income from car parking is sufficient to cover the direct and indirect costs of the service and also to support the capital investment that is required on an ongoing basis to maintain the fabric of all the car parks.

7.2 Future major capital works within the car parks will be subject to a full business case and are expected to be self-financing from an increase in income for the car parks.

7.3 Future rises in parking fees are expected to be in line with the prevailing rate of inflation.

8. Legal and Governance Issues:

8.1 The Committee should be aware that the Council has power to provide and to regulate off-street car parks under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 set out the procedures to be followed before and after making any order regulating the use of car parks. Public consultation would be required for any increase in charges.

8.2 The setting of off street car parking charges is an Executive function.

9. Monitoring Officer Comments:

9.1 No matters arising

10. Other Considerations and Impacts:

Environment and Climate Change

10.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency which seeks carbon neutrality across its own estate by 2030 and to support net zero across the borough by 2050. Transport is estimated to cause 46% of emissions in Surrey with a switch to more sustainable travel playing a key role in achieving net zero. With 17% of vehicles sold in the UK in 2022 being Electric, increasing revenue to cover maintenance and improvements in SHBC's car parks is intrinsic to the decarbonisation of the borough.

10.2 Whilst the shift to electric vehicles and more sustainable means of transport is advancing, internal combustion vehicles will continue to be used by many for years to come. Well managed car parks can help to tackle climate change by ensuring parking spaces are available when needed to help avoid queuing, avoidable journeys and associated congestion. Our car parks can also be an important link between essential private vehicle travel and key public transport centres, such as train stations. The Council's Parking Service will be investigating further options to encourage and incentivise the take-up and use of zero emission vehicles as part of its climate change commitments.

Equalities and Human Rights

10.4 Providing safe, accessible and financially sustainable car parks, including dedicated spaces for Disabled Drivers, is key to ensuring that everyone in the community who needs to park their car is able to do so. Well managed car parks can increase accessibility by having dedicated, easily accessible spaces for the disabled and parents of young children. Additionally, imposing restrictions on parking duration ensures parking spaces are freed up more quickly, increasing available spaces and ease of access.

Risk Management

10.5 The Council's Parking Strategy seeks to balance a number of risks including ensuring that our car parks remain competitive. The Council also faces risks associated with the further deterioration of its assets if essential maintenance and improvements are not carried out. Like with many other areas of the Council's business, inflationary pressures associated with the operating our car parks are increasing and these costs need to be passed on to the customer.

10.6 Officers have considered scenario planning around drop-off and bounce-back of parking demand as a consequence of the change to parking tariffs. The Council's Economic Development team were consulted on the proposed tariffs who made the following comments:

(i) Several reports reference the positive impact of having a pleasant parking experience and the importance of aspects like safety, cleanliness,

simplicity etc. The council has an obligation to provide these factors as part of regeneration and economic development. If increasing parking tariffs is a way of supporting the achievement of this then it should be viewed as a positive change.

- (ii) The requirement to continue to invest in town centres and maintain the Borough as an attractive place to visit far outweighs the impact of increasing parking fees, especially when you consider the long term vision.
- (iii) An increase in parking fees may lead to a temporary drop in footfall however this is not anticipated to be a long term change.
- (iv) The introduction of signage and wayfinding is noted as an improvement which would be welcomed by businesses and is important in terms of placemaking.

Community Engagement:

10.6 As stated above, a customer consultation was undertaken from the 21st December 2023 to the 16th January 2024.

Annexes:

- Annex 1 – Parking Strategy
- Annex 2 – Confidential Financial Annex
- Annex 3 – Financial Annex
- Annex 4 - Parking Tariff Comparison Table
- Annex 5 – Customer Consultation Responses