Consultation on Potential Borough-Wide Car Park Charging

To: Cabinet

Date: 15 December 2011

Main Portfolio Area: Planning and Transportation

Author of report: Emma Pell – Parking Manager

Classification: Non-Exempt

Ward: All

SUMMARY

This report seeks the approval of the consultation document relating to the consideration of potential Borough wide car park charges and agreement to commence the consultation from 1 January 2012 for a period of 6 weeks. The consultation will be made available to all those members of the community affected including residents, local businesses and parish councillors and ward councillors and will be subject to the Parish Council investigations of taking over the car parks in Cranbrook.

LINK TO STRATEGIC COMPASS

This will ensure that we offer the best value and service to our customers and provide a well managed, good quality service. It seeks the opinions of our customers and engages them in the decisions being made.

Report status

For decision

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

Once consultation details approved that formal consultation commence with the results being returned to Select Committee prior to a decision on the outcome being made by Cabinet.
BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

1. A report was submitted by the Local Economy and Housing Select Committee to Cabinet on 13 November 2009 (CAB101/09) concerning proposals to look at borough wide car park charges recommended that, before any decisions were made, a full formal consultation be carried out with a report on the outcome being considered by the Select Committee before a final decision on the consultation being made by Cabinet.

2. The Local Economy and Housing Select Committee made recommendations to Cabinet as follows:
   1) That formal consultation on car park charging across the borough be commenced, to include residents, Parish and Town Councils, local Ward Members and local businesses;
   2) That consideration of public transport and economic impact be included in this consultation due to the lack of detail in the Car Parking Study report; and
   3) That the consultation, once completed, returns to the Select Committee prior to a decision being made by Cabinet.

3. The Cabinet considered the car parks within the borough that currently do no charge for parking and agreed to formal consultation to take place on certain agreed car parks with a suggestion of four options:
   1) No change;
   2) Introduction of an up to two hours free, thereafter be charged at an hourly rate yet to be determined, together with residents’ permits and season tickets.
   3) Introduction of an up to two hours free, thereafter be charged at an hourly rate yet to be determined; or
   4) Introduction of full charging at a rate yet to be determined together with residents’ permits and season tickets.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE THAT REQUIRES A DECISION AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS?

Council Financial Position

4. There are increasing costs associated with the car parks and it is becoming imperative that the car parks at least provide the income needed to run the service. The actions that the Council implemented prior to the Comprehensive Spending Review were largely sufficient to off set the £1.5 million reduction in government grant. However recent events have created a significant budget deficit for next year and if left unmanaged this will accelerate the call on reserves in an unsustainable manner.

5. Should the Council agree to accept a further freeze on Council Tax this would cost an additional £1.5m over 10 years as the government grant is not fully funded. Inflation has also continued to remain well above the Bank of England’s target which has a direct impact on the Council’s costs particularly on major contracts, utilities and business rates on Council’s assets. The government and the Office for Budget Responsibility had forecast economic growth of 2.1% for this year and into the future however this has failed to materialise and has significantly reduced income for fees and charges.
6. The Council now has a number of financial challenges and as such need to consider the possibility of either making changes to services to reduce costs or to increase income which can only come from fees and charges to cover the costs of the currently free car parks. The evidence from the SIMALTO consultation carried out for the Council with local residents was that they were in favour of the user contributing to the costs of services received rather than the tax payer.

**Proposals**

7. The car parks under consideration are Pennington Road and Yew Tree Road car parks in Southborough and Regal, Tanyard and Jockey Lane car parks in Cranbrook. Stone Street car park in Tunbridge Wells is also to be subject to consultation but with the option of introducing season tickets only.

8. Both Pennington Road car park and Jockey Lane car park are not owned by the Council but are leased from Southborough Town Council and Cranbrook Parish Council respectively. The lease on Pennington Road car park is currently expired and this would need be reviewed and reissued before any further considerations can take place.

9. It is proposed to offer charges with free parking for up to 2 hours, 40p for up to 4 hours, 60p for up to 6 hours. All day parking charges are proposed at a charge of £5.00.

10. It is proposed to offer season tickets in Regal car park in Cranbrook and Pennington Road car park in Southborough only. This would be limited to 100 permits available in Regal car park and 10 permits available in Pennington Road car park. It is proposed to charge £300 per annum for the season tickets.

11. Additionally, it is proposed to offer residents permits in Tanyard car park in Cranbrook and Pennington Road car park in Southborough. This would be limited to 50 permits available in Tanyard car park and 10 permits available in Pennington Road. We would suggest a rate of £150 per permit per annum.

12. Stone Street car park is limited to 26 spaces and is small in size with limited space for ease of movement. It is currently used predominantly by local residents as the parking on street is at a premium in this area and we would propose making the car park Permit Holder only to protect the parking stock for local residents. We would propose a charge of £150 per permit per annum in line with other outer area car parks.

**WHO HAVE WE CONSULTED AND HOW? (OR WHO WILL WE CONSULT FOLLOWING THE DECISION?)**

13. The Local Economy and Housing Select Committee in October 2009 examined a Car Parking Study Report commissioned by the Environment and Street Scene Service to assess options and costs associated with upgrading the free to park car parks operated by the borough council and to look at introducing a pay to park system.
14. Representations were heard from members of the public and visiting Members all of which were opposed to any proposal to introduce car park charges. The Select Committee also heard that local public transport arrangements were not a currently viable alternative to private car use for residents in the rural areas of the Borough. It was further felt that there were significant deficiencies in the information contained in the Car Parking Study Report and that further information was needed before making any informed decisions and therefore further consultation was needed.

15. Additionally, a petition was presented in 2009 with over 800 signatures in opposition to the introduction of car parking charges in Cranbrook with concerns that it would seriously damage the economy of the town and its workforce and cause serious hardship for some of its residents. An additional petition with over 1,000 signatures was received and considered by Full Council on the 19 October 2011.

16. The proposed document for consultation is included in Appendix 1 and additionally asks questions such as “If you consider the charges unreasonable, what would you propose as a reasonable amount to pay?” “What alternative solution to car park charges would you propose to maintain the car parks to at least their current standard?”

**HOW WILL THE DECISION BE COMMUNICATED?**

17. The consultation would be made available to all members of the public on the Council’s website through the Limehouse system. Copies of the questionnaires would be provided to Southborough Town Council, Cranbrook Parish Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council offices. We would also propose sending a press release on the consultation to the local press with information on how to obtain the questionnaire. We would send copies of the questionnaire to all residents in Zone B for their feedback on Stone Street car park.

**WHAT ALTERNATIVE ACTION COULD WE TAKE?**

18. Do nothing – to meet the current financial challenges by reducing costs and services or to continue to subsidise free car parking through fees and charges elsewhere in the borough.

19. Cranbrook Parish Council is currently undertaking investigations into the feasibility of taking over the car parks in Cranbrook with proposals to be made to the Council by end March 2012. This alternative course of action will run concurrently with the consultation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

20. As recommended by both Cabinet and the Local Economy and Housing Select Committee a full and formal consultation on potential borough wide car park charges should be undertaken and once completed be submitted to the Economy and Governance Select Committee in place of the previous select committee. That this consultation be commenced from 1 December and last for a period of 6 weeks.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

1. That formal consultation commence from 1 December 2011 for a period of 6 weeks as outlined in Appendix B; and
2. That the results of the consultation are reported to the Economy and Governance
Select Committee for their consideration before being presented to Cabinet for
decision.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

To ensure that the Council complies with its obligations to consult on aspects of change
affecting Town and Parish councils, local businesses and residents.

Contact Officer: Emma Pell – Parking Manager ext. 3422

Name of Director/Head of Service
Jonathan MacDonald – Director of Regeneration and Sustainability
David Candlin – Head of Economic Development

Background Papers
List any background papers used in the preparation of this report or where appropriate state
‘None’

APPENDICES TO REPORT
APPENDIX A Cross cutting issues
APPENDIX B Consultation questionnaire