

Response to Car Parking Consultation 2022/23

For Cabinet on 22 September 2022

Summary

Lead Member: Councillor Justine Rutland, Cabinet Member for Tunbridge Wells Town and Local Areas

Lead Director: Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy & Development

Head of Service: Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking

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Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Management Board	24 August 2022
Portfolio Holder	24 August 2022
Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board	21 September 2022
Cabinet	22 September 2022

Decisions to be made:

Cabinet can decide to:

1. Increase the charges for parking as stated in the Sales Prices, Fees and Charges Cabinet report 20 July 2022 (excluding Dunorlan Park) in its entirety, with prices to be amended from 1st December 2022.
2. Increase the prices for parking as stated in the Sales Prices, Fees and Charges Cabinet report 20 July 2022 (excluding Dunorlan Park) from 1st December 2022, with the exception of:
 - i. The free period for Yew Tree Road, Southborough and/or
 - ii. The free period for Paddock Wood

which will be maintained while other options for funding, including those suggested in the consultation, are explored. The Council will engage with Southborough Town Council and/or Paddock Wood Town Council to discuss funding the revenue foregone by retaining the current free parking periods.

3. Cabinet agree for officers to commence an informal public consultation, seeking views on options to improve the amenity value of Dunorlan Park, including the introduction of parking charges.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 A Sales Prices, Fees and Charges report was presented to Cabinet for approval on the 20 July 2022. The link to the report is:

<https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/g5183/Public%20reports%20park%2020th-Jul-2022%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

The intention was to bridge some of the £944,000 revenue budget deficit for 2022/23 and support the budget setting process for 2023/24, thereby protecting other council services.

- 1.2 The proposals in the report regarding parking charges were approved by Cabinet, with the exception of the parking charges for Dunorlan Park, which are subject to a statutory consultation process. The decision is documented:

<https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/g5183/Decisions%2020th-Jul-2022%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=2>

- 1.3 The report was subsequently called in on the basis of inadequate consultation and lack of information, but the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided that no further action was required.
- 1.4 Due to the additional consultation period and the 10 day mourning period for the Queen, it is no longer possible to implement the price increases on the 1 October 2022. Implementation is now proposed for 1 December 2022.

2. Online Consultation and Responses

- 2.1.1 A consultation has now been undertaken in the form of an online questionnaire, the results of which are included in Appendix A. This ran for a period of 6 weeks, from 25 July 2022 to the 5 September 2022.
- 2.2 There was a total of 921 respondents, many from Southborough or Paddock Wood postcodes. Whilst general questions were asked about parking charge increases, specific questions were asked about Yew Tree Road car park in

Southborough and the Paddock Wood East and West car parks. These were considered the most contentious changes to charges.

- 2.3 The results show that 80% of the respondents were opposed to paying 50p for the first 2 hours of parking in Yew Tree Road car park and similarly, 79% were opposed to paying 50p for the first hour of parking at Paddock Wood. This may however, reflect the fact that around half of the respondents may come from the areas that currently benefit from free car parking. Of the 506 respondents (out of 921) who gave their postcode in the survey, 253 came from the wards of Paddock Wood and Southborough.
- 2.4 95% of 147 respondents in the Southborough wards and 87% of 106 respondents in the Paddock Wood wards opposed the charges. This compares with, for example, 35% of 20 respondents in the St James' ward and 37% of 16 responses in the Rusthall ward. This illustrates that the strength of opposition to the charges is not consistent across the borough.
- 2.5 Respondents were asked for comments about the general parking charge increases proposed and for their suggestions on how to bridge the budget deficit if parking charges were to remain unchanged. The main suggestions from respondents were for the number/cost of councillors and staff to be reduced.
- 2.6 In a diversion from previous surveys, 53% of the respondents of this survey felt that all Council Tax payers in the borough should subsidise free parking in Southborough and Paddock Wood. The council has set its fees and charges on the premise of "user pays", which is what previous surveys have indicated is the preference of the taxpayer in the borough.
- 2.7 The survey also explored whether respondents would rather pay for car parking via a £10 rise in Council Tax. 47% said that they would support, but the council is currently prevented from doing this. The limit on the annual increase for this council is currently £5 per annum, but this 'cap' is reviewed annually and subject to four weeks consultation by the Government. It was noted that those who were supportive of retaining the free parking in Yew Tree and Paddock Wood, were also generally in favour of Council Tax being increased.
- 2.8 This report should be seen in the context of the Retail Price Index (RPI) of 13.6% and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 10.1% for July 2022. This is not expected to be a short term pressure as inflation is forecast to continue rising well into 2023.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 Cabinet has already approved the increases in car parking charges, subject to the consultation responses, as set out in the decision on 20 July 2022.
- 3.2 Cabinet now needs to consider the consultation responses and decide whether it would like to pursue its original decision or amend its decision following the consultation.

4. Preferred Option and Reason

4.1 Cabinet discuss their options and make a decision.

5. Consultation on Options

- 5.1 This paper explains the consultation process and Appendix A contains the findings.
- 5.2 Various Cabinet members attended public meetings held on 3 August at Southborough and 9 August at Paddock Wood, to hear the views of residents.
- 5.3 Emailed and hard copy responses not submitted using the survey form have been added to the survey results.

Recommendation from Cabinet Advisory Board

5.4 The Finance & Governance Cabinet Advisory Board were consulted on 21 September 2022. A verbal update will be given at Cabinet, due to the proximities of the meetings.

6. Implementation

- 6.1 Finance will communicate decisions to the appropriate services and notification to the public will be made via the Internet.
- 6.2 The presentation can be viewed as an appendix to this report. It will also be shared with respondents who provided their email addresses when registering to complete the survey and distributed as a link in the weekly newsletter to residents.

7. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Consultation Responses

Cabinet Report dated 20 July 2022

<https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/g5183/Public%20reports%20pack%2020th-Jul-2022%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Cabinet Report Decision 20 July 2022

<https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/g5183/Decisions%2020th-Jul-2022%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=2>

Overview and Scrutiny 27 July 2022

<https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/b50015053/Agenda%20supplement%20Call-In%20of%20Cabinet%20Decision%2027th-Jul-2022%2018.30%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=9>

8. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 permits best value authorities to charge for discretionary services provided the authority has the power to provide that service and the recipient agrees to take it up on those terms. The authority has a duty to ensure that taking one financial year with another, income does not exceed the costs of providing the service.

A number of the fees and charges made for services by the Council are set so as to provide the service at cost. In other cases the fee is set by statute and the Council must charge the set fee. In both cases the proposals in this report meet the Council's obligations.

Claudette Valmond, Interim Head of Legal, MKLS 24/08/22

B. Finance and Other Resources

This report will support the budget for 2022/23, reducing the need to use reserves. It is vitally important for the Council that decisions are made to balance the revenue budget after the effects of the pandemic and that the threats to council services are managed during the current economic uncertainties.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking 24/08/2022

C. Staffing

Where income activity undergoes significant change, staffing resources associated with the activity will need to be reviewed. Any additional costs of changing staffing levels would need to be weighed against the changes in income.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking 24/08/2022

D. Risk Management

There is considerable risk around the volumes projected in this report, due to the current economic uncertainties. Whilst each manager has reviewed the position of their area, circumstances are changing constantly and are mostly out of our control.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking 24/08/2022

E. Environment and Sustainability

No implications

F. Community Safety

No implications

G. Equalities

No implications

H. Data Protection

No implications

I. Health and Safety

No implications

J. Health and Wellbeing

No implications