

Dunorlan Parking Consultation Response

For Cabinet on 27 July 2023

Summary

Lead Member: Councillor Christopher Hall, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Performance

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

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

Report Author: Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking

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Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Management Board	4 July 2023
Portfolio Holder	29 June 2023
Finance & Governance Cabinet Advisory Board	11 July 2023
Cabinet	27 July 2023

Recommendations

Officer / Committee recommendations as supported by the Portfolio Holder:

1. That Cabinet considers the responses from the Consultation held in November 2022 and notes the mitigations in the report.
2. That Cabinet agrees that car parking charges should be introduced in the Dunorlan Park car parks and charging option A or B will be adopted, as agreed at their meeting.
3. That Cabinet agrees for charges to be implemented on 16 October 2023, with the exception of Blue Badge Holders parked in Disabled spaces, which will be free of charge.

4. That Cabinet gives authority to the Portfolio Holders for Finance & Performance and Economic Development, in conjunction with the Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking, to make minor amendments to the proposal resulting from the comments received during the formal consultation process required to create the Parking Places Order or further operational issues that may arise.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In their meeting on 20 July 2022, Cabinet considered introducing parking charges in Dunorlan Park as part of their in-year Budget Review for 2022/23. The aim was to help to close the budget deficit for 2023/24 invoking the principle of user pays to support the cost of maintaining the park. Members deferred the decision to allow for a separate consultation on the introduction of charges.
- 1.2 This consultation took place between 7 November and 18 December 2022. In addition, letters were sent to residents, businesses and organisations that were very local to the park, to capture their specific views. Members also met informally with the Friends of Dunorlan Park and representatives and participants of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Park Run. There were 1008 respondents.
- 1.3 The questions asked and the responses to the consultation are all detailed in Appendix A. The main findings are:
 - 50% of respondents wanted the parking to be free and 34% of respondents wanted a free period followed by charges.
 - 65% of respondents said that they use the park for between 1 and 2 hours per visit, so if a free period was introduced, their parking could also be free if they curtailed their visit to within the hour.
 - Assuming a fee is paid, the most popular response was for £1 per hour (24% of respondents).
 - Most people use the park for walking, socialising or dog walking and weekends are the busiest.
 - 76% of respondents travel to the park by car, whilst 22% walk, although the majority live within 3 miles of the park.
- 1.4 The freeform responses provided by the local residents, businesses and organisations are included in Appendix B. The main comment themes are:
 - Parking should be free as residents pay council tax.
 - The park should be funded by other charges or donations.
 - Concern over the cost of implementation, maintenance and enforcement.
 - View that any income from parking charges should be ringfenced for the park.
 - Concern that introducing charging will displace parking into Halls Hole Road or nearby streets.
 - Concern about the negative effect on the café and boat businesses in the park.

- 1.5 This was an informal consultation and should the Council decide to implement charges, a formal consultation must be completed to create the necessary Parking Places Order for each of the car parks. This will give a further opportunity for users of the park, residents and businesses to comment before these charges can be introduced.
- 1.6 The Council still has a total budget deficit of £943,000 for 2023/24 which needs to be closed to protect current services. The implementation of charges would support the Borough Partnership's first priority under the focus on five of "Safeguarding the Council's Finances".
- 1.7 This report should be seen in the context of the Retail Price Index (RPI) of 11.3% and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 8.7% for May 2023. High inflation rates are forecast to continue through 2023, so this is not expected to be a short-term pressure.

2. Proposed Parking Charges

- 2.1 Dunorlan Park has two car parks, one accessible from Pembury Road, the other from Halls Hole Road. Each has 40 spaces (if they were to be properly marked). There are many charging options, but the two most popular from the consultation respondents were an hourly rate at £1 per hour or a free period followed by a charge. These options are laid out below and Cabinet will need to agree their preference.
- 2.2 It is proposed that 2 Disabled bays in each of Pembury Road and Halls Hole Road car parks be set aside for Blue Badge Holders and that these spaces will be free, providing a valid Blue Badge is displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle. This is the same as the current provision. Having a Parking Places Order in place for the car parks will allow the enforcement of these Disabled bays, which is not possible at present. Anyone can park in a disabled bay currently as the Council does not have the ability to enforce.
- 2.3 It is proposed that charges will be applicable between 8am and 6pm. The park is only open from dawn until dusk, so income will be limited in the late afternoons of winter.

2.4 Option A

Assumes charges are £1 per hour up to 4 hours and then £5 for the whole day.

	£'s including VAT
up to 1 hour	1.00
up to 2 hours	2.00
up to 3 hours	3.00
up to 4 hours	4.00
All Day	5.00

2.5 The forecast income is as below:

Parking Income	Capacity excl. 2 disabled spaces	Utilisation	Hrs Between 9am & 3pm	Days per Year	Income per Hr	Total Income inc VAT	Total Income Excl VAT
Pembury Road - Weekdays	38	50%	6	261	1	29,754	24,795
Halls Hole Road - Weekdays	38	50%	6	261	1	29,754	24,795
Pembury Road - Weekends	38	80%	6	104	1	18,970	15,808
Halls Hole Road - Weekends	38	80%	6	104	1	18,970	15,808
TOTAL						97,447	81,206

It can be seen that on the assumption of 50% utilisation on weekdays and 80% utilisation at weekends, between 9 am and 3 pm, income of £81,206 per annum (net of VAT) could be raised. The utilisation rates have been estimated from vehicle counts taken in October/November 2022. The 6 hour time period between 9 am and 3 pm is, according to the consultation responses, when the majority of visitors will park. Outside of these times, there are relatively few visitors to the park.

2.6 **Option B**

Assumes the first hour of parking is free, 2 hours is £2, then an additional £1 per hour up to 4 hours and then £5 for the whole day.

	£'s including VAT
up to 1 hour	Free
up to 2 hours	2.00
up to 3 hours	3.00
up to 4 hours	4.00
All Day	5.00

2.7 It is difficult to estimate the income for Option B as the Council does not have any empirical data on dwell time in the Dunorlan car parks. However, 65% of the consultation respondents only use the park for between 1 and 2 hours and there is data from the Council's other car parks, showing that the first hour of parking on all parking sessions except those who park all day, constitutes about 66% of total income. Using this assumption, the forecast income would be around 34% of £81,206, so £27,610 per year.

2.8 In addition to the parking income, there is likely to be around £14,000 of enforcement income from Penalty Charge Notices issued. This estimate is based upon income from the Coach Park car park which is a similar size and the same pricing structure. The total income is therefore forecast to be £95,206 excluding VAT for Option A or £41,610 for Option B.

2.9 One-off implementation costs are estimated to be £10,000. This is comprised £3,000 to make the Parking Places Order, £4,000 to relocate a payment machine and attach a solar panel to it and £3,000 for signing and lining.

- 2.10 Additional annual operational and maintenance costs are estimated to be £6,600. This is comprised £700 for machine maintenance and software costs, £1,400 in card transaction costs (RingGo transactions are free to the Council and the motorist) and £4,500 staff costs for enforcement. Other maintenance costs must be paid for whether or not the parking is charged.
- 2.11 It is proposed that these charges be implemented from 16 October 2023 to give time for a Parking Places Order to be written, a payment machine to be relocated, signage to be designed and installed and lines repainted where necessary.

3 Addressing the Consultation Responses

- 3.1 The consultation showed that 50% of the 1,008 respondents, would rather that parking in both car parks remain a free service. Similarly, another 34% would rather there be an initial free period, making their visit free as well. The local residents, in their freeform responses, also said that they thought the parking should remain free as they pay via their council tax. However, Councils all over the country have severe budget funding shortfalls. Residents are not paying sufficient Council Tax to pay for the services they receive. Tunbridge Wells currently has a budget deficit for 2023/24 of £943,000. Council tax can be increased by a maximum of 2.99% but inflation is running at around 10%. Government began reducing Council funding back in 2010, so there have been many years of finding efficiencies and improving productivity, but this has been exhausted so the shortfall must be found from increasing fees and charges revenue or reducing services and thereby costs. Charging for parking is thought to be preferable to reducing services.
- 3.2 Benchmarking has shown that other Councils in Kent have been charging for parking in their country parks for some time. The charges do vary. Canterbury charges £5 for 2 hours parking at their Westgate Gardens, whilst Tonbridge and Malling charge £1.80 for 4 hours parking at Haysden Country Park (note that the consultation responses state that most visits are of up to 2 hours, making it comparably £1.80 for 2 hours parking). Mote Park in Maidstone charges £2 for 6 hours and Sevenoaks Wildlife reserve is £2.50 all day (again similar charges on the assumption of a 2 hour visit). A lower charge for a longer time period was considered, but there was a desire to encourage a turnover of users and to deter all day parking, which could mean that workers from local employers could monopolise the use of the space.
- 3.3 26 respondents to the consultation requested an annual season ticket. Surveys of the car park have shown that there are a small number of users who park daily, but the intention is for there to be a healthy circulation of vehicles to enable the limited spaces to be used by park visitors, rather than the spaces being occupied by shoppers and workers benefiting from the cheaper parking and walking into town. Permits are also offered at a heavily discounted rate, so the revenue forecast would also be adversely affected. It is therefore not proposed to offer an annual permit.

- 3.4 The consultation respondents explained that they use the park mostly for walking, socialising or dog walking and there was concern that imposing a parking charge would create a financial barrier to residents being able to access green spaces. Research has shown that residents in Tunbridge Wells enjoy one of the greenest towns in the country. Appendix C shows a map of Tunbridge Wells highlighting the available green spaces and the addresses of the consultation respondents as purple dots. Whilst 76% of respondents said that they travel to the park by car, it can be seen that this is a choice as they do have access to local green spaces that they can walk to.
- 3.5 The Council is proposing to implement these parking charges to help mitigate against the £175,000 per annum cost of maintaining Dunorlan Park and the unfunded increases in the grounds maintenance costs expected due to inflation. This income will therefore directly support the park.
- 3.6 It was suggested that this income should instead be raised by increasing charges to event organisers and/or asking for donations. There is a market rate for events spaces and charges must be competitive to attract events to the town. It is not possible to attract sufficient events to raise sums comparable to those achievable by implementing parking charges. Experience of requesting donations at our museum suggests minimal contributions will be raised.
- 3.7 Concerns were expressed over the impact upon the café and boat businesses in the park. Benchmarking suggests that cafes in Haysden and Moat Parks, both of which are chargeable car parks, operate successfully. It should be noted, that unlike other businesses in the town, these businesses are exempt from business rates. The Council is also their landlord, so should they evidence an adverse financial impact due to the introduction of parking charges, the council may choose to amend the rents charged.
- 3.8 It was raised that there are many volunteers who generously give their time to support the maintenance of the park. Similarly, there are events organisers and potentially the café and boat business staff, who would be impacted by the introduction of charges. The Council is able to list vehicles against whom they will not enforce in the park. Should Members agree to give certain groups free parking at certain times, this can be accommodated.
- 3.9 It is possible that the introduction of parking charges in Dunorlan Park will cause the displacement of parked vehicles. At present, it is not possible to foresee exactly what the impact will be, but the situation will be closely monitored and action will be taken to mitigate issues should they arise. Any on-street restriction amendments will need the support of Kent County Council, as the Highways Authority for Kent, but if charges are approved, work will start immediately to ensure that any necessary changes can be made in a timely and cost-effective manner.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 Leave the car parks free of charge. This does not support the Council's principle of "User Pays" and does not support the Borough Partnership's first priority under the focus on five of "Safeguarding the Council's Finances".
- 3.2 Implement parking charges under Option A. This would raise a forecast net income of £78,606 in Year 1 and £88,606 thereafter, towards the maintenance of the park. It also supports the Borough Partnership's first priority under the focus on five of "Safeguarding the Council's Finances" and the principle of "User Pays". Concerns raised from the consultations can be mitigated and managed as explained in the report.
- 3.3 Implement parking charges under Option B. This would raise a forecast net income of £25,010 in Year 1 and £35,010 thereafter, towards the maintenance of the park. It does support the Borough Partnership's first priority under the focus on five of "Safeguarding the Council's Finances" and the principle of "User Pays", however, the business case is not nearly as strong. Concerns raised from the consultations can be mitigated and managed as explained in the report.

4. Preferred Option and Reason

- 4.1 That charges are implemented to safeguard the Council's finances as there is a current budget deficit of £943,000 in 2023/24 which is forecast to become larger in the following 5 years.
- 4.2 That Members select Option A or B from the above.
- 4.3 This report sets out the details and reasons for the recommendations.
- 4.4 The Council can no longer absorb the significant inflationary pressure on its operating costs and new income streams must be found if services are to be protected.

5. Consultation on Options

- 5.1 A residents' consultation was carried out resulting in 1,008 responses. The results can be found in Appendix A.
- 5.2 A local residents, businesses and organisations freeform consultation was carried out. The results can be found in Appendix B.
- 5.3 A further "formal consultation" will be carried out prior to making the Parking Places Order.

Recommendation from Cabinet Advisory Board

- 5.4 The Finance & Governance Cabinet Advisory Board were consulted on 11 July 2023 and agreed the recommendations set out in the report be supported.

6. Implementation

- 6.1 Finance will communicate the decision to the appropriate services and notification to the public will be made via the Internet. Parking will commence the operational tasks to prepare for implementation if Cabinet decide to introduce charges.

7. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Dunorlan Parking Consultation November 2022
- Appendix B: Dunorlan Parking Consultation to Local Residents November 2022 – Freeform responses
- Appendix C: Map of green spaces

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 30/06/2023

B. Finance and Other Resources

This report will support the budget for 2023/24, 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 30/06/2023

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 30/06/2023

D. Risk Management

There is risk around the volumes projected in this report, due to the current economic uncertainties and the lack of existing data. Performance will need to be monitored closely.

It is possible that the introduction of parking charges will cause the displacement of parked vehicles. At present, it is not possible to foresee what the impact will be, but the situation will be closely monitored and action will be taken to mitigate issues should they arise.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking 30/06/2023

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