

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-026-2021/22

Date of meeting: 6 December 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Customer & Partnerships – Cllr.S Kane

Subject: Off-Street Car Parks Tariff Recommendations

Responsible Officer: James Warwick (01992 564350).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) Following a review of car parking tariffs in Council owned off-street car parks, the following to be agreed for implementation from 1st April 2022:

Parking Tariffs:

- a) The existing tariffs of £0.20 for 30 minutes, £0.80/£0.90 for up to 1 hour and £1.60/£1.80 for up to 2 hours to be increased to £0.30 for 30 minutes, £1.00 for up to 1 hour and £2.00 for up to 2 hours across the District. This will create uniform tariffs across the District and simplify parking tariff.**
- b) To retain the tariffs for stays above 2 hours.**
- c) To extend full tariff on Saturday to apply to all car parks across the District.**
- d) To extend 1 hour free parking on Sunday to 2 hours across the District and increase all day £1.00 charge to £2.00.**
- e) To remove daily 1 hour free charging in Civic Offices Car Park (Sunday free allowance will remain) in consistency with other District car parks.**
- f) To agree full tariffs to be introduced in Beaumont Park Drive Car Park, with a view to exploring satisfactory resolutions for demand.**
- g) To retain free weekend and Bank Holiday parking during the month of December.**
- h) To continue free parking for Blue Badge holders and motorbikes.**

Permits & Season Tickets;

- i) To increase first residents permit charge from £50.00 to £55.00 per annum, in line with on-street charges.**
- j) Introduction of business and residents permits in Cornmill Car Park (Waltham Abbey) and business permits in Oakwood Hill East Car Park (Loughton).**
- k) Season Tickets 5% discount to be retained and prices to be adjusted in line with proposed parking charges.**
- l) To agree proposed operational hours of 08:00-18:00 in all car parks for consistency.**

m) To agree for EFDC employees and members to use MiPermit at the Civic and in certain EFDC Off-Street Car Parks

Executive Summary:

The purpose of report is to review the tariffs in EFDC off-street car parks, which has not increased since 2015. The tariff review aims to ensure tariffs are set at a level are sustainable to support the operation of car parks and to assist with budget pressures as a result of Covid-19 that have impacted maintenance and enhancement works. The review of the off-street car park tariffs also takes into consideration the climate change action plan and the need to reduce our carbon footprint and improve air quality in Epping Forest.

Epping Forest District Council review off-street parking tariffs periodically to ensure the charging regime is at an appropriate level across the District that do not undermine the vitality of our town centre economies.

A benchmarking assessment has been conducted to understand how current tariffs compare with charges in Epping (on-street and other off-street car parks) and neighbour local authorities (see Appendix A). EFDC off-street car park charges appears to be in the lower range for up to 2 hour stays, whereas tariff band charges for over 2 hours is above average. A cost-benefit analysis assessment and consultation has been undertaken with RTA Associates to propose a sustainable charging structure, balancing parking requirements and the needs of car park users.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To review the current charging regime in EFDC off-street car parks which has not increased since 2015 and to ensure the charges are sustainable to support the operation and maintenance demand of car parks.

To generate additional income for the Council to assist with the financial pressures as a result of Covid-19. Financial pressures have impacted the programme of maintenance and enhancement works of the car parks.

Other Options for Action:

The do-nothing or delay option would not address the requirement to ensure car parking charges are appropriate and would not contribute to the Council's budget objectives.

The option to increase in line inflationary across all tariffs will result in charging higher rates for above 2 hours than neighbouring authorities and may adversely impact occupancy rates, hence is not deemed sustainable.

The report has considered recommendations from the Stronger Place Select Committee. The recommendation of introducing free parking for up to 30 minutes has been modelled and this would have considerable cost impact upon Epping Forest District Council and is therefore deemed financially unsustainable. This recommendation also goes against the council's climate change action plan and the desire to reduce the volume of traffic movements and would not help to improve the District's air quality. The report benchmarks against other nearby local authorities and only East Herts and Brentwood offer free stays for 30 minutes and other local authorities do not offer 30-minute stays at all.

A further recommendation from Stronger Place Select Committee was to investigate the feasibility of the introduction of an annual payment system to allow the occasional use of all Epping Forest District Council car parks for up to 2 hours. Due to the complexity, cost and resource implications of introducing this, the viability of annual payment system will be looked at outside of the remit of this Tariff review.

Report:

1. Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) operate 22 off-street car parks in the Epping Forest District area. The car parks are located in key population areas and/or commuter towns of Buckhurst Hill, Debden, Epping, Loughton, Ongar, Waltham Abbey and Roydon.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in significant financial pressures on the Council's budget and income. Current data suggest parking income is circa 80% of pre-pandemic levels, with occupancy of short stay car parks recovering well, but long-stay car parks remain affected. Further financial pressures to the car parking budget are expected with the Cottis Lane & Bakers Lane Car Parks redevelopment projects.
3. The last tariff review was conducted in 2018 and the decision to retain tariffs was applied (formerly reviewed in 2015) and a linear hourly tariff structure for stays above 2 hours was introduced.

Existing & Proposed Off-Street Parking Charges

Table 1: Existing Tariff Structure

	<i>Epping, Loughton & Buckhurst Hill</i>	<i>Waltham Abbey and Ongar</i>
Mon-Fri		
Up to 30 min	£0.20	£0.20
Up to 1 hour	£0.90	£0.80
Up to 2 hours	£1.80	£1.60
Up to 3 hours	£3.00	£3.00
Up to 4 hours	£4.00	£4.00
Up to 5 hours	£5.00	£5.00
6 hours +	£6.00 (Long Stay) / £10.00 (Short Stay)	£6.00 (Long Stay) / £10.00 (Short Stay)
Sat		
Up to 1 hour	Full Tariff / Free*	Full Tariff / Free*
1 hour +	Full Tariff / £1.00*	Full Tariff / £1.00*
Sun		
Up to 1 hour	Free	Free
1 hour +	£1.00	£1.00

*Saturdays 1 hour free - £1.00 all day tariff is applicable to Burton Road, Burton Road South, Civic Offices, Bakers Lane, Smarts Lane, Traps Hill, Pleasance, Cornmill and Darby Drive Car Parks.

NB: 30-minute stays are cash only.

Table 2: Proposed Tariff Structure

	<i>All EFDC Off-Street Car Parks</i>
Mon-Fri	
Up to 30 min	£0.30
Up to 1 hour	£1.00
Up to 2 hours	£2.00
Up to 3 hours	£3.00
Up to 4 hours	£4.00
Up to 5 hours	£5.00
6 hours +	£6.00 (Long Stay) / £10.00 (Short Stay)
Saturday	Full Tariff
Up to 2 hours	Free
2 hours +	£2.00

4. The proposed tariff structure recommends the following changes (highlighted above):
 - £0.30 for 30 minutes, £1.00 for up to 1 hour and £2.00 for up to 2 hours across all EFDC off-street car parks. Retain tariffs above 2 hours which has not incurred any price changes since 2015.
 - Full tariffs on Saturdays to be retained and apply to all car parks for consistency, and to align with other parking in Epping and neighbouring authorities generally.
 - Increase free parking on Sundays for up to 2 hours (ticket required) and increase all day tariff to £2.00.
5. The modelling assumes the proposed increases will not affect car park occupancy rates. This is supported by British Parking Association and Government research that there is no clear relationship between car parking charges and footfall levels. Research shows the better-quality retail offer can boost footfall and local economies and not car parking charges.
6. The Council are aware of its legal obligations when setting charges, however it is recognised that the proposed changes are essential with increasing operational and maintenance costs, and to accommodate future enhancements for high quality service. The proposed charges will remain in the lower range within charging in Epping and competitive with neighbouring local authorities. With the exception of Sundays, we are not proposing any changes to stays over 2 hours to ensure costs remain reasonable to support businesses and local traders.
7. The recommendation from Stronger Place Select Committee of free parking for up to 30 minutes has been considered and it has been concluded that it is financially unsustainable and does not support the Council's sustainability and air quality commitments. Research indicates that it would offer little value with regards to High Street/Town Centre regeneration as it will not support/increase High Street visit duration (the average shopping trip is around 2 hours). It can also be argued that providing free 30-minute parking will lead to congestion, obstructions, pollution and spaces being occupied and will not make towns/high streets more pedestrian friendly. Data on streets where the pedestrian experience has improved shows footfall increasing 20-35% (Living Street Org.). Offering free 30-minute stays does not influence a modal shift in the transport choices of people. Most local authorities do not offer 30 minute stays. At present, EFDC car park users who use MiPermit pay for 1 hour parking as 30-minute stays are not offered via MiPermit.
8. Proposed tariffs will result in uniform tariffs in all EFDC off-street car parks across the District.
9. It is recommended that free parking for Disabled Badge holders and motor bikes is to be continued. It is also recommended that free weekend and Bank Holiday parking during the month of December is also continued, as this assists the change in increasing footfall during the Christmas period.
10. The proposed tariff structure is estimated to generate an additional net income of £158,000. (£40,000 would need to be deducted in year 1 from this to satisfy legal duties in changing Traffic Regulation Order, consultations, advertisements and replacing notice boards and signs in car parks. This based on modelling, with assumptions including the same car park usage and that the car parks will achieve pre-Covid occupancy levels. Cottis Lane Car Park has been excluded from this modelling.
11. At present, EFDC off-street car parks have different operational hours of 08:00-18:00, 08:30-17:30 and 09:00-18:00. Uniform operational hours of 08:00-18:00 is recommended across all car parks and during these hours the car parks will be subject to parking enforcement. Parking outside these hours will be free for all car park users.

Beaumont Park Drive Car Park, Roydon

12. Beaumont Park Drive Car Park, Roydon is the only free Council owned car park in the District. The provision of free parking is not sustainable, considering cost of running the car park, including maintenance and future car park enhancements. It is recommended for the Council to introduce parking tariffs to meet the cost of the provision and maintenance by the Council of the car park and create consistency across the District.

13. The Council is mindful of the user groups that make use of Beaumont Car Park (primarily the local school which has its own car park, business and residents) and it is prudent to explore satisfactory resolutions of demand through measures such as residents permits, business permits and no enforcement during school pick up/drop off times.

14. Introducing charges in Beaumont Park Drive is estimated to generate an additional net income of £30,000 per year.

Permits and Season Tickets

15. It is recommended that the off-street parking first residents permit is increased from £50.000 per annum to £55.00 per annum, to be in line with on-street permit costs.

16. It is advised to utilise Cornmill Car Park (Waltham Abbey) by providing business and resident permits, and Oakwood Hill East (Loughton) by providing business permits to satisfy the local demand and create additional use for the car park. The number of permits and extent of properties/businesses to be included within the schemes are to be explored.

17. Where season tickets are available in car parks, prices will be adjusted in accordance to the revised tariff charges, which is a reduction of 5% of all day parking charge over a month.

18. Due to the reduction in car parking spaces available at the Civic Offices, it is proposed that employees and members are given access to an EFDC MiPermit account to enable booking of parking spaces at the Civic and to use MiPermit in Bakers Lane Car Park if parking is not available at the Civic Offices subject to parking spaces being available.

EV Charging

19. EFDC are partnering with InstaVolt Ltd to install 2 x rapid Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations at Oakwood Hill East Car Park (Loughton) by the end of 2021. Providing public EV charging in Oakwood Hill will support key EFDC policies of reducing road transport emissions, helping meet the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy for a 10% conversion of cars to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles by 2025 and working towards becoming a carbon-neutral district by 2030. EV drivers will be required to pay parking charges, as per industry standard.

20. The Parking Team are investigating the prospect of introducing discounts for EV drivers in all EFDC car parks, which will include an online process for drivers to register for the discount and subsequent validation. Further work is necessary to explore the process and resources required to be able to implement EV discounts.

Resource Implications:

The changes to the tariff structure will require a statutory consultation, advertisement and Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to be formally made and introduced under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. North Essex Partnership (NEPP) will be commissioned to carry out the associated necessary legal and technical work.

Changes to car park signs, replacing notice boards and system upgrades will also be required to implement the tariff changes.

A budget of £40,000 is required to implement the tariff changes, which will be deducted from the car park income.

The proposed tariff structure is estimated to generate an additional net income of £158,000. This based on modelling, with assumptions including the same car park usage and that the car parks will achieve pre-Covid occupancy levels. Cottis Lane Car Park has been excluded from this modelling. The £40,000 required to implement these changes would be deducted from this in year 1 which would leave estimated income of £118,000.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, any changes to car parking charges will require a Traffic Regulation Order and will be advertised. Any objections and observations will be formally considered and reported to the Select Committee and Cabinet Board.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Installation of EV charging points will provide charging opportunity in the District and assist in EV uptake, contributing to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.

The Council is committed to improve air quality in the District and the proposed tariff charges may encourage car park users to use more sustainable modes of transport. Car park users unable to make different transport choices may benefit from reduced overall demand which maximises the turnover of spaces.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation has been undertaken with RTA Associated for the validation of parking and estimated income modelling. Members have been consulted on the tariff charge options.

A statutory consultation will be carried out in accordance with requirements under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Background Papers: None

Risk Management:

There is a risk around the modelling assumptions and until the new tariff is implemented, it would not be possible to ascertain if the income assumption will be realised or not. Subject to the implementation of the proposed tariffs, the financial/occupancy data will be monitored to ensure any adverse impact can be corrected. Members need to be aware that there is a risk element to the change in tariff structures should members of the public fail to meet demand then any loss of income would need to be absorbed by the relevant accounts.

Equality Impact Assessment:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. The equality information is provided as an Appendix B for the consideration of this report.