

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/067/2006-07.

Date of meeting: 13 November 2006.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Civil Engineering & Maintenance.

Subject: Free Saturday Car Parking.

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To retain car parking charges in the Council's short stay car parks but provide free car parking on Saturdays in the Council's long stay and combined car parks as set out in paragraph 11 of the report;**
- (2) To make any necessary changes to the existing traffic regulation orders; and**
- (3) To note the revenue consequences of approximately £75,150 (CSB) per annum and the one off cost of £10,000 (DDF) for signage and traffic regulation orders.**

The Task and Finish Panel looking at Town Centres & Parking have considered this report and the views of that Panel and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be reported at the meeting.

Report:

1. One of the new Administration's 6 "Key Messages" is the provision of free car parking on Saturdays as a way of providing further support to the District's town centres. Free parking is already provided on Saturdays throughout the District during December each year as part of supporting the Christmas trading period.
2. There are a number of factors that need to be considered in determining the most appropriate strategy for the provision of free parking:
 - (a) should all car parks be free, given that those owned by Sainsbury's but managed by the Council will have to be excluded?
 - (b) should the free parking allow for an unlimited stay during Saturday or should there be a maximum period of free parking? And
 - (c) what are the costs through lost income and the processes involved in change?
3. The Council manages 22 car parks, 20 of which it also owns. The short stay car parks at Sainsbury's in Loughton and Ongar are owned by Sainsbury's but are managed by the Council. Sainsbury's retain the income generated, but the Council levies a 10% management fee and retains all penalty charge notice (PCN) income. Sainsbury's operate a refund of up to 2 hours parking if customers spend beyond a certain amount in the store, thereby making the car parking free for the majority of shoppers. There are a number of privately owned and operated car parks which the public can use, notably those associated with Waitrose at Buckhurst Hill, Tesco at Waltham Abbey and Epping, and Marks and

Spencer in Loughton.

4. The Council's car parks are categorised as:

- short stay;
- long stay; and
- combined (have both short & long stay tariffs).

Short stay car parks are intended, as the name suggests, for short visits and tariffs are set accordingly to discourage long term usage. Conversely, long stay tariffs are set to encourage long usage although a 2 hour stay can be had in both types for the same tariff (£1.20). Combined car parks utilise the short stay tariff for stays up to 2 hours and the long stay tariff thereafter. This enables better car park utilisation of otherwise less used car parks.

The Appendix sets out the car parks, the number of spaces and the category.

5. There is already some free car parking within the District, at the Broadway (Burton Road and Vere Road), in Roydon and at Quaker Lane in Waltham Abbey, where there are 24 free spaces operating with a 2 hour no return within 3 limitation. There are no limits in Roydon or at The Broadway although the town centre enhancement proposals will bring into place a time limited pay and display regime. There are also free car parks associated with supermarkets and village halls etc.

Income On Saturdays:

6. Officers have undertaken a detailed study of income generated on Saturdays. The analysis shows that approximately £2,900 of income is generated from all car parks (excluding both Sainsbury's) on a Saturday. Allowing for the fact that Saturdays in December are already free this amounts to approximately £140,000 per annum. Of this approximately 60% (£84,000) is generated in the short stay car parks and 40% (£56,000) in the long stay/combined car parks. Further income is generated from PCNs which approximates to £43,500 per annum. This can be broken down into 56% short stay (£24,350) and 44% long stay/combined (£19,150).

7. The Saturday income from the Council's only on-street pay and display regime in Queens Road Buckhurst Hill generates around £12,000 per annum based on 18 pay and display machines. This equates to approximately £670 per machine per annum. Whilst direct comparisons are difficult, the presently agreed proposals for The Broadway and Loughton High Road include the provision of on-street pay and display regimes, and the installation of 14 machines. Using the figures from Queens Road, this would generate an additional £9,400 in income. The income from PCNs at Buckhurst Hill is approximately £6,000 per annum or £330 per machine. Taking this forward to The Broadway and Loughton High Road would realise PCN income of approximately £4,600 per annum. It should be noted that the on-street income is ring fenced to meet initially the County Council set up costs of decriminalisation and then by law to parking or related environmental matters.

8. The above can be summarised as follows:

	Short stay	Long stay & combined	Total
Off street P & D	84,000	56,000	140,000
Off street PCN	24,350	19,150	43,500
On street P & D	12,000	N/A	12,000
On street PCN	6,000	N/A	6,000
Future on street P & D	9,400	N/A	
Future on street PCN	4,600	N/A	
Total	140,350	75,150	215,500

Enforcement Regime:

9. It is important to determine whether the car parks are to be free all day for all to use or whether the free period is, as at Quaker Lane, to be time limited. The free spaces at Quaker Lane operate all through the week and therefore the time limit is imposed to prevent their use by commuters or local employees. This may not be considered necessary on a Saturday, although in towns with LUL Stations it is likely that free car parking all day will result in some long stay use by those not intending to shop locally. However, current data indicates that the level of income from those staying more than 2 hours is very limited and this income would probably be outweighed by the costs of a more complicated enforcement regime. A free Saturday regime would also be much simpler for the users to understand.

Possible Saturday Regime:

10. Given that two of the larger short stay car parks are in the ownership of Sainsbury's and therefore cannot be included in a free regime and the fact that those shop based car parks under private management are required to operate as short stay car parks using a tariff broadly similar to the Councils, it is suggested that only the long stay and combined car parks should be free all day on Saturdays.

11. This approach would provide free parking in all town centres as follows:

Town centre	Location
(i) Loughton	Traps Hill (197 spaces) and Smarts Lane (22 spaces)
(ii) Buckhurst Hill	Queens Road (lower) (100 spaces)
(iii) Waltham Abbey	Cornmill (197 spaces), Darby Drive (66 spaces) and Quaker Lane (24 spaces)
(iv) Epping	Bakers Lane (145 spaces)
(v) Ongar	The Pleasance (81 spaces)
(vi) The Broadway	To be decided as part of TCE arrangements (see later report)

This regime would provide a significant amount of free parking at an approximate cost of £71,150 per annum, compared to £215,500 if free parking were to be provided all day in all of the Council's car parks and on street locations. There will be additional costs associated with new signage and amendments to TROs estimated at not more than £10,000

Statement In Support Of Recommended Action:

12. The recommended regime provides more than 800 free parking spaces in the town centres. This should facilitate local shopping and support the town centre economies. It also limits the loss of revenue to the Council's general fund budget although no account has been taken of the 'knock-on' effects of the reduced use of the short stay car parks and on-street pay and display bays where the standard short stay tariffs would remain.

Other Options For Action:

13. The other options are essentially those set out the report, each of which provides additional degrees of free parking but also with an increased revenue loss to the Council.

Consultation Undertaken:

14. None.

Resource implications:

Budget Provision: £10,000 (DDF) for amendments to the traffic order and new signage.

£71,500 (CSB) loss of income to the general fund.

Personnel: Nil.

Land: Nil.

Community Plan/BVPP Reference: Supporting the local economy.

Relevant Statutory Powers: Road Traffic Acts and associated regulations.

Background Papers: N/A.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision Reference (if required): N/A.