

Surrey Heath Borough Council Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee

24 January 2024

Car Parking Strategy

Executive Portfolio Holder	Councillor Helen Whitcroft, Resident & Community Services
Lead Officer:	Nick Steevens, Strategic Director, Environment & Community
Report Author:	Alan Burns, Parking Manager Julia Greenfield, Corporate Enforcement Manager
Key Decision:	Yes
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and Purpose

As part of the Council's Base Budget Review completed in July 2023, Executive agreed increases in parking tariffs to contribute to the delivery of the Council's base budget saving targets.

In September 2023 Executive determined that prior to the introduction of any increase in parking tariffs, a Car Parking Strategy would be developed to set out the Council's aspirations for its car parks and determine where improvements could be made to enhance customer experience. The development of a Parking Strategy is intended to bring about a more strategic and rounded review of the Council's car parks looking at income, tariff structures, levels of usage, future technology, maintenance and required levels of future investment.

Recommendation

The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider and comment upon the content of the strategy and the proposals set out within.

1. Background:

- 1.1 The purpose of postponing any changes to the parking tariffs until a strategic review of off-street parking could be conducted was to ensure that proposals for investment, improvement and tariffs within the Council's car parks, could be considered in the round within an overall strategic framework aligned to the delivery of the Council's priorities.
- 1.2 Following the September Executive, the Portfolio Holder for Resident & Community Services has been working with officers to develop the Parking

Strategy (the Strategy) as set out in Annex 1. The Strategy includes a systematic appraisal of all of the Council's car parks including those which are currently chargeable, non-chargeable and also those that sit within the responsibility of the Recreation & Leisure service.

- 1.3 The Strategy seeks to take a more holistic approach to our car parks, seeking to deliver a balance between economic prosperity, financial sustainability, environmental preservation, social well-being, and inclusive community development. The Strategy is intended to be the key reference document from which detailed policies can be developed to achieve our vision for parking.
- 1.4 Following approval of the strategy, an Action Plan will be created to deliver the following benefits:
 - (i) Investment in car parks through a planned Investment Strategy to ensure they are fit for the future
 - (ii) Employment of enhanced technology and information to improve customer experience
 - (iii) Appropriate management and charging structures to support vitality and economic growth.
- 1.5 The Council's parking service operates 15 off-street car parks across the borough's town and village centres to meet economic and community need. Currently there is a charge for parking in 9 of these car parks, namely:
 - (i) Main Square Car Park
 - (ii) Knoll Road Car Park
 - (iii) Surrey Heath House Car Park
 - (iv) Bagshot Car Park
 - (v) Burrell Road Car Park
 - (vi) Chobham Car Park
 - (vii) Watchetts Car Park
 - (viii) Yorktown Car Park
 - (ix) Wharf Road Car Park
- 1.6 No car parking charges are associated with the use of the following car parks managed by the Council's Parking Services team:
 - (i) Balmoral Drive Car Park
 - (ii) Chobham Place Woods Car Park
 - (iii) Martindale Avenue Car Park
 - (iv) Prior Road Car Park
 - (v) Wilton Road Car Park
 - (vi) Woodend Road Car Park
- 1.7 There are a further six large car parks managed by the Council's Recreation & Leisure service which are linked to open spaces within the Borough and which were assessed as part of the Strategy:
 - (i) Frimley Lodge Park Car Park
 - (ii) Lightwater Country Park Car Park
 - (iii) Frimley Green Recreation Ground Car Park

- (iv) Mytchett Recreation Ground Car Park
- (v) Windlemere Suitable Alternative Green Space (SANG) Car Park
- (vi) Watchetts Recreation Ground Car Park

1.8 The Council is reliant on the income from parking charges to pay for the costs of providing car parks including staffing overheads, business rates, cleaning, equipment, revenue and capital investment in repairs and maintenance, all of which are essential to the enforcement of the parking regulations. A core principle of the strategy is that across the borough as a whole, the portfolio of car parks should be financially sustainable, i.e. self-funding, avoiding the need for Council subsidy.

2. Detailed Proposals:

- 2.1 The Strategy sets out the Council's four key aspirations for the future provision of parking services at Surrey Heath, this includes:
- (i) Protecting the Environment
Meeting the Council's climate change objectives through green infrastructure, energy efficient lighting, solar-powered pay stations and the promotion of EV charging
 - (ii) Delivering Good Service
Improving customer service including the use of technology to make parking easier and more accessible
 - (iii) Providing Social & Financial Value
Assisting economic growth through cost-effective, quality parking solutions
 - (iv) Supporting Wellbeing & Social Inclusion
Measures to enhance our parking facilities through the creation of safe and inviting spaces which are accessible to all.
- 2.2 By adopting a safer parking scheme, such as the Park Mark accreditation scheme, we not only benchmark our parking facilities but also demonstrate to our residents our commitment to creating a safer and more inclusive environment for our customers.
- 2.3 A full review of all Council-owned parking provision was conducted to help inform the Strategy. This included an assessment of condition and any urgent or planned preventative maintenance required; revenue and capital expenditure, footfall and where present, existing parking tariffs.
- 2.4 The Strategy identifies multiple areas for improvement within the car parks, which include:
- (i) Upgrading of critical systems such as fire, electrical, CCTV and Automatic Numberplate Recognition (ANPR)
 - (ii) Improving our payment systems to improve customer experience
 - (iii) Improving the standard of surfacing and line marking
 - (iv) Undertaking structural surveys in accordance with government guidance
 - (v) Improving cleaning, addressing anti-social behaviour, graffiti management and reactive repairs following vandalism

- (vi) Adoption of the Safer Parking Scheme
- (vii) Improving lighting, visibility to increase safety & security
- (viii) Reducing the carbon footprint of the parking service
- (ix) Improving landscaping and signage
- (x) Considering other options for income generation through parking tariffs or the release of under-utilised areas of car park
- (xi) Taking action to reduce undesirable long-term parking and increase churn to increase the number of available spaces for customers
- (xii) Introducing planned, preventative maintenance in all of our assets

2.5 Currently only 9 of car parks managed by Surrey Heath are chargeable. The Strategy also considered the feasibility of locations where new parking tariffs could be applied in order to cover maintenance and management costs. One additional car park (Wilton Road) is proposed for the introduction of parking tariffs with a recommendation to Executive that charges will commence in the summer of 2024 to allow time for the statutory 28-day consultation and installation of payment machines and signage.

2.6 Additional car parks which will require further assessment and the development of a detailed business case are Frimley Lodge and Lightwater Country Park car parks. This is due to the substantial cost associated with repairing the car park surfaces, for which there is an increasing need to avoid future safety concerns arising from their deteriorating condition. A detailed financial analysis of the costs associated with maintenance of these locations is being conducted.

2.7 As part of the review of parking provision, multiple car parks were discounted from the introduction of tariffs either due to the potential impact on local businesses, recreational activities and organised sports, or due to them being solely used as a car park for a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) intended to attract the public away from sensitive habitats which are afforded special protection. The car parks associated solely to SANGs were discounted for charges as they are an intrinsic requirement for an open space to be determined as a functional, strategic SANG. With specific reference to Bisley and Prior Road, these facilities experience very little use, and as a result, it was not considered commercially viable to invest in the necessary infrastructure for charges to be implemented.

2.8 The Strategy sets out key proposals to the parking tariffs within the Council car parks including:

- (i) The simplification of tariffs, including the shift to a standard hourly rate and removing Sunday tariffs
- (ii) The retention of free evening parking in pay-on-foot (POF) car parks
- (iii) A reduction in the free period in POF car parks from 1 hour to 30 minutes, with the exception of Chobham where the location of the SANG would preclude such a limited free period
- (iv) The shift from evening to hourly tariffs for the multi-storey car parks
- (v) A commonalisation of tariffs across POF car parks

- (vi) An increase in the tariffs, including season tickets, for all chargeable car parks to reflect the increasing costs associated with their management and upkeep
- (vii) The inclusion of Wilton Road car park as a chargeable POF car park
- (viii) The introduction of a 12-hour maximum stay in free parking services car parks to encourage churn and increase the number of available parking spaces

- 2.9 As part of the development of this strategy, tariffs were compared with other nearby locations to ensure competitiveness and alignment with industry standards. These figures are shown in Annex 4, however, it must be noted that at the time of this report being collated, only 2023 tariffs were available, with other areas still in consultation regarding potential uplifts. This information underscores the dynamic nature of tariff considerations and emphasises the need for ongoing monitoring and adjustment to reflect the evolving market conditions.
- 2.10 The costs associated with the running of the car parks managed by Parking Services are set out in the Confidential Annex 2 and Annex 3, and identify the capital and revenue expenditure alongside the income generated by parking tariffs. These financials do not show the running costs for recreation & leisure car parks. Whilst these car parks should be accounted for as part of the financial analysis, the nature of the recreation & leisure service budgets means that further work is required to separate out these costs from the wider settings they serve.
- 2.11 The comparison of income against parking services revenue and capital expenditure for the current financial year shows that these costs exceed parking income by approximately £128,000. Taking into account the need for essential maintenance and improvements in the condition of these car parks, the proposed increases in parking tariffs for 2024/25 are only projected to generate a contribution to the Council's tax account of £13,000. The current capital expenditure projected for 2024/25 does not take account of any additional works identified during structural surveys, nor does it account for any works required to leisure & recreation car parks. Additionally, substantial future works such as improvements/replacements to lifts in the multi-storey car parks are currently uncoded and will need to be considered in subsequent years.
- 2.12 If adopted at the February Executive the proposed changes to parking tariffs in existing chargeable car parks will take effect from April 2024. Charges in Wilton Road car park will be implemented in the summer with improvements sought to the access road to resolve unsafe and anti-social parking leading up to the implementation date.
- 2.13 A detailed action plan is being developed to set out the physical, procedural and technological improvements that will take place following adoption of the Strategy. Updates on progress against the action plan will be monitored as

part of the annual plan performance monitoring.

3. Potential impact of change

- 3.1 If agreed by Executive the increase in parking charges is projected to deliver an estimated £410,000 of additional income as shown in Annex 3. This income is required to undertake essential maintenance and much-needed improvements in the Council's car parks. Without an increase in parking tariffs the council would need to cover the projected budget deficit of close to £400,000.
- 3.2 A customer consultation commenced on the 21st December to gather customer perception and obtain views on how and where we can make improvements in our facilities. The consultation closed on the 16th January and at the time of writing close to 1,000 responses have been received. These responses will be analysed and used to inform the further development of the Strategy and will be provided to Executive in February 2024. Separate to the consultation, customers complaints received by Parking Services encompass a wide range of concerns, including issues with space sizes, poor lighting creating concerns of personal safety, potholes, inadequate line marking, and insufficient wayfinder signage around our Pay on Foot facilities. Additionally, customers have expressed dissatisfaction with the antisocial activities and the subsequent housekeeping issues in Main Square Car Park.
- 3.3 Due to the proposal to include an additional chargeable car parks and new maximum stay restrictions in our free car parks, a review of staffing capacity within the parking service will be conducted to ensure there are sufficient Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to patrol the car parks to resolve inappropriate parking. It is anticipated that the introduction of an additional full-time equivalent CEO position could be self-funding and would not incur any additional revenue costs. The introduction of the additional post will also provide an opportunity to increase the breadth of operational resource throughout the working week, increasing the frequency of patrols.
- 3.4 Whilst the introduction of new parking charges and increasing existing tariffs is not popular, the increase in income is necessary to cover the costs of providing off-street parking, including essential repairs and improvements to the Council's car parks. These include, lighting, CCTV, safe walking routes, improved cleaning, general maintenance and a more inclusive safer environment, whilst aiming to be financially sustainable overall.
- 3.5 The introduction of charges in the Wilton Road car park could cause overspill into adjacent residential roads. The Council has engaged with Surrey County Council as the highways authority to outline the proposals within the Strategy and seek to resolve the antisocial parking on the roadway outside of the location in order to combat this.

4. Proposal and Alternative Options:

- 4.1 The Strategy brings about much needed improvements to the Council car parks. Failure to adopt the Strategy will restrict the opportunity to improve the Council car parks for the benefit of residents and other service users.
- 4.2 It could be determined that no change is made to the current tariffs or to the number of chargeable car parks. In this instance it would be necessary to cover the increasing cost of managing these assets through the use of the Council's reserves or through the cessation of other services provided by the Council.
- 4.3 Parking is a discretionary service and the Council could consider closing some or all of its car parks, particularly those requiring significant investment. This would have substantial impacts linked to the viability of town and village centres and would have the knock-on impact of causing anti-social parking on highways and other public spaces.

5. Contribution to the Council's Short Term Plan / Five Year Strategy

- 5.1 **Environment:** This holistic approach to parking will assist in delivering a more environmentally sustainable means of providing car parking for our service users through improvements to infrastructure that support reduction in carbon and climate change.
- 5.2 **Health & Quality of Life:** supporting the local community by ensuring that quality, convenient and safe parking is provided in our towns and villages. Providing parking facilities in our parks & open spaces encourages physical activity to improve physical & mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.3 **Economy:** supporting the local economy by ensuring customers have access to quality facilities across the borough and paying customers have access to a car parking space when and where they need it.
- 5.4 **Effective & Responsive Council:** Parking Services consulted with the public to seek their views on how to improve our parking provision on the 21st December with the consultation closing on the 16th January.

6. Resource Implications:

- 6.1 If agreed, the Strategy will increase parking revenue which will be reinvested in the Council's car parks. For major works funding will be sought from the most appropriate means to avoid additional financial pressure on the Council.
- 6.2 The delivery of the Parking Strategy and development of the action plan will be met from within existing staff resources. An additional CEO will be appointed on a trial basis to determine whether this can be continued on a cost-recovery basis.

7. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 7.1 The anticipated increase in income has been factored into the budget proposal considered elsewhere on this agenda. It is important that the income from car parking is sufficient to cover the direct and indirect costs of the service and also to support the capital investment that is required on an ongoing basis to maintain the fabric of all the car parks.
- 7.2 Future major capital works within the car parks will be subject to a full business case and are expected to be self-financing from an increase in income for the car parks.
- 7.3 Future rises in parking fees are expected to be in line with the prevailing rate of inflation.

8. Legal and Governance Issues:

- 8.1 The Committee should be aware that the Council has power to provide and to regulate off-street car parks under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 set out the procedures to be followed before and after making any order regulating the use of car parks. Public consultation would be required for any increase in charges.
- 8.2 The setting of off street car parking charges is an Executive function.

9. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 9.1 No matters arising

10. Other Considerations and Impacts:

Environment and Climate Change

- 10.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency which seeks carbon neutrality across its own estate by 2030 and to support net zero across the borough by 2050. Transport is estimated to cause 46% of emissions in Surrey with a switch to more sustainable travel playing a key role in achieving net zero. With 17% of vehicles sold in the UK in 2022 being Electric, increasing revenue to cover maintenance and improvements in SHBC's car parks is intrinsic to the decarbonisation of the borough.
- 10.2 Whilst the shift to electric vehicles and more sustainable means of transport is advancing, internal combustion vehicles will continue to be used by many for years to come. Well managed car parks can help to tackle climate change by ensuring parking spaces are available when needed to help avoid queuing, avoidable journeys and associated congestion. Our car parks can also be an important link between essential private vehicle travel and key public transport centres, such as train stations. The Council's Parking Service will be investigating further options to encourage and incentivise the take-up and use

of zero emission vehicles as part of its climate change commitments.

Equalities and Human Rights

- 10.4 Providing safe, accessible and financially sustainable car parks, including dedicated spaces for Disabled Drivers, is key to ensuring that everyone in the community who needs to park their car is able to do so. Well managed car parks can increase accessibility by having dedicated, easily accessible spaces for the disabled and young parents. Additionally, imposing restrictions on parking duration ensures parking spaces are freed up more quickly, increasing available spaces and ease of access.

Risk Management

- 10.5 The Council's Parking Strategy seeks to balance a number of risks including ensuring that our car parks remain competitive. The Council also faces risks associated with the further deterioration of its assets if essential maintenance and improvements are not carried out. Like with many other areas of the Council's business, inflationary pressures associated with the operating our car parks are increasing and these costs need to be passed on to the customer.

Community Engagement:

- 10.6 As stated above, a customer consultation was undertaken from the 21st December 2023 to the 16th January 2024.

Annexes:

- Annex 1 – Parking Strategy
- Annex 2 – Confidential Financial Annex
- Annex 3 – Financial Annex
- Annex 4 - Parking Tariff Comparison Table