

Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Petition for the Removal of Parking Charges at the Burdwood Centre car park, Thatcham
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	29 October 2015
Forward Plan Ref:	ID3028

Purpose of Report: To determine the petitioners' request for the removal of parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park, Thatcham

Recommended Action: That the Executive Member for Highways, Transport, Emergency Planning resolves to approve the recommendations set out below:

(a) That the parking charges at the Burdwood Centre be retained;

(b) To inform the organiser of the petition of the actions agreed following consideration of this report; and

(c) That the on-street parking in the Wheelers Green Way area continues to be monitored so that any change to parking behaviour can be addressed as part of a future review.

Reason for decision to be taken: To continue to optimise parking income and to ensure that the users of the Burdwood Centre car park contribute to the running costs of the car park

Other options considered: To accede to the petitioners' request and remove the parking charges

Key background documentation:

(a) Decision at Full Council on 1 March 2012;

(b) The petition submitted opposing the current parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park;

(c) Individual Member Decision (ID 2518) taken on 8 November 2012 by the then Executive Member for Planning, Transport Policy, Property Highways and Transport (Operational);

(d) Decision taken at the Overview, Scrutiny and Management Commission on 11 December 2012.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Garth Simpson - Tel (01635) 40438
E-mail Address:	gsimpson@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	09 September 2015

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Martyn Baker
Job Title:	Parking Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519211
E-mail Address:	mebaker@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

- Policy:** None arising from this report
- Financial:** The income accrued from parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park are a part of the Council's income for 2015/16. When the parking charges were originally implemented in September 2012 it was estimated they would raise some £1,250 of gross income in a full financial year. The actual gross income achieved at this car park has been:
- (a) £1,348 in 2013/14;
- (b) £2,565 in 2014/15; and
- (c) £1,541 (to month 5) in 2015/16 and this extrapolates to some £3,698 of gross income over the full financial year.
- There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- Personnel:** None arising from this report
- Legal/Procurement:** None arising from this report
- Property:** None arising from this report
- Risk Management:** None arising from this report

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at http://intranet/EqIA			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Councillor Gordon Lundie
Councillor Gordon Lundie was consulted by e-mail on 7 October 2015 and replied on 8 October 2015 to advise that he had no comments to make on this report.

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: Councillor Emma Webster
Councillor Emma Webster was consulted by e-mail on 7 October 2015 and requested to submit a reply by 19 October 2015. A reminder e-mail was issued on 15 October 2015. No reply has yet been received, but if a reply is received the reply will be presented before the report is considered for determination.

Ward Members: Councillor Roger Croft
Councillor Roger Croft was consulted by e-mail on 7 October 2015 and requested to submit a reply by 19 October 2015. A reminder e-mail was issued on 15 October 2015. No reply has yet been received, but if a reply is received the reply will be presented before the report is considered for determination.

Councillor Rob Denton-Powell
Councillor Rob Denton-Powell was consulted by e-mail on 7 October 2015 and requested to submit a reply by 19 October 2015. A reminder e-mail was issued on 15 October 2015. No reply has yet been received, but if a reply is received the reply will be presented before the report is considered for determination.

Opposition Spokesperson: Councillor Alan Macro
Councillor Alan Macro was consulted by e-mail on 7 October 2015 and requested to submit a reply by 19 October 2015. A reminder e-mail was issued on 15 October 2015. No reply has yet been received, but if a reply is received the reply will be presented before the report is considered for determination.

Local Stakeholders: Not applicable as stakeholders were consulted when the charges were introduced and no change is proposed

Officers Consulted: John Ashworth; Mark Edwards; Mark Cole; Alex Drysdale

Trade Union: Not consulted as not relevant to this report

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 On 23 April 2015 a petition was submitted to a meeting of the Executive. The petition submitted states:

“The petitioners object to the parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park because of the problems caused to local people and these problems are additional numbers of commuters parked along Wheelers Green Way especially at the junctions with Longbridge Close and Quarrington Close, but also affecting residents in all of the cul-de-sacs along Wheelers Green Way. The petitioners claim that it is more dangerous to drive in the area during the day and more dangerous for pedestrians (especially children) to cross the roads there.”

The petition contained 161 signatures.

- 1.2 The Burdwood Centre car park lies in Station Road, Thatcham and there was free parking since it opened in the 1980s. The car parking area is adjoined by a community centre; a doctor’s practice; a Baptist Church; and retail outlets, which include a Co-operative store; a chip shop; a chemist; and a computer repair shop. The Council does not own the whole car park and the plan attached at Appendix A shows how the car park is divided. The parking area immediately adjacent to the Co-operative store, which holds 11 parking spaces (accessed via Wheelers Green Way) is not in the Council’s ownership and there are six parking spaces immediately outside the front of the doctor’s practice that are dedicated to the practice. Of the total of 81 parking spaces in the car park, 64 are within the Council’s ownership. Under an Agreement concluded in January 1988 with the former Newbury District Council the Baptist Church has the right to 15 parking permits to enable those attending services and other functions in the Church to use the car park without charge.
- 1.3 As a part of the 2012/13 revenue budget the meeting of the Full Council on 1 March 2012 approved revised parking charges, including the implementation of parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park. The parking charges for the Burdwood Centre agreed by the Full Council were:

Table 1: Parking Charges Approved by Council for the Burdwood Centre

Monday to Saturday 8.00 am to 6.00 pm	
Up to 1 hour	Free
Up to 2 hours	£0.50
Up to 3 hours	£0.80
Over 3 hours	£2.00

- 1.4 During the statutory advertising process prior to implementing the parking charges in the Burdwood Centre car park a petition was received with 648 signatures opposing the implementation of parking charges and it was resolved to postpone

the implementation of the parking charges until the petition had been considered and determined. Thatcham Town Council then informed the Council that their Finance and General Purposes Committee sought the suspension of the proposed parking charges at the Burdwood Centre to allow proper consultation of the requirements of patients, hall hirers and users of the Baptist Church as well as an assessment of the retail impact in the area.

- 1.5 Both the petition and the resolution of Thatcham Town Council were determined in an Individual Decision report considered in November 2012 by the then Portfolio Member for Planning, Transport, Policy, Property, Highways and Transport (Operational). In that report it was recognised that some patients attending the doctor's practice may need more than a one hour free parking period and consequently it was resolved that the modified parking charges shown in table 2 would be implemented at the Burdwood Centre car park.

Table 2: Proposed Modified Parking Charges for the Burdwood Centre

Monday to Saturday 8.00 am to 6.00 pm	
Up to 2 hours	Free
Up to 3 hours	£0.80
Over 3 hours	£2.00
(1) A Ticket must be displayed for the two hour free parking period	
(2) No return to the car park is permitted for a period of two hours after the free parking period has elapsed	

- 1.6 The Individual Decision report was called in for consideration by the Overview Scrutiny and Management Committee in December 2012, where the resolutions of the Individual Decision report were upheld.
- 1.7 These revised parking charges were implemented in June 2013 and the income from the Burdwood Centre car park has since been:
- (a) 1,350 tickets sold generating £1,348 (including mobile phone sales) in 2013/14;
 - (b) 1,643 tickets sold generating £2,565 (including mobile phone sales) in 2014/15; and
 - (c) 610 tickets sold generating £1,541 (to month 5) in 2015/16 (including mobile phone sales) and this extrapolates to some 1,464 tickets and £3,698 of gross income over the full financial year.

It will be seen from these figures that income has increased year by year and exceeds the original estimate of £1,250. While modest, this income more than meets the annual running costs of the car park and it is an important element in the Council's annual car parks income stream.

2. Factors for Consideration

2.1 The petitioners raise three issues: the adverse impact of the parking charges; traffic flow problems caused by an increased volume of on-street parking; and potential road safety problems for pedestrians. Each of these issues will be addressed below.

(a) The Impact of Parking Charges

2.2 The intention of the parking charges at the Burdwood Centre was to optimise the Council's parking income in times of severe financial stringency and to offset the running costs of the car park by modest parking charges that would not adversely affect those attending routine appointments at the doctor's surgery or patronising the adjoining retail outlets. By providing the two hours of free parking both patients and shoppers could conclude their business within the free parking time. The Council has adopted a view that users of discretionary services, such as car parks, should pay for the service used and it has previously implemented modest parking charges in other car parks (e.g. Goldwell Park in Newbury; and at Gilbert Court, Thatcham) where parking had hitherto been free. It was considered that the implementation of the parking charges would recoup some, if not all of the car park operating costs.

2.3 The Burdwood Centre car park is used by a range of customers including patients attending the Burdwood Surgery; shoppers patronising the retail units; persons attending functions and activities at the Baptist Church; persons attending functions and activities in the Community Centre; and commuters travelling from the nearby Thatcham Station. Figures show that in addition to the tickets sold for parking durations beyond the two hours of free parking the car park is used by a large number of motorists who optimise the two hour free parking period. The free tickets issues have been:

2013/14 = 35,506;

2014/15 = 43,564; and

2015/16 (to month 5) = 18,120, which extrapolates to some 43,488 in a full year.

With 64 spaces available for public parking over 305 days per annum (Sundays and Bank Holidays are not included) it shows that on average each space is used at least twice per day (or a maximum of 4 hours) for free parking actions, in addition to the parking time purchased. These figures reflect a busy car park and it would seem that the implementation of parking charges has not had an adverse impact on overall usage with a substantial displacement of vehicles to the adjoining roads.

2.4 At any location where parking charges operate there will always be a core of motorists who will prefer to find an adjacent location with free parking. In previous locations where parking was hitherto free of charge and where parking charges have been implemented, the Council has found that there is an immediate decline in the number of users followed by a steady but consistent increase in usage as motorists adjust to the parking charges. At the Burdwood Centre car park this is evidenced by the pattern of ticket vends and the income figures shown 1.7 and 2.3 above.

(b) Traffic flow issues

- 2.5 Observations of the on-street parking following the implementation of the parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park show that the preponderance of the parking is on the Burdwood Centre side of the road, indicating that the motorists probably have business within the Burdwood Centre. It is possible that the on-street parking to which the petitioners refer may emanate from motorists who need parking for more than two hours and do not wish to pay and this would potentially embrace staff from the Burdwood Surgery; staff from the retail units; staff from the Community Centre; visitors to the church; and rail commuters who seek to avoid parking charges.
- 2.6 There are parking restrictions in Wheelers Green Way with double yellow lines in Station Road either side of the junction with Wheelers Green Way. These yellow lines extend down Wheelers Green Way itself for 10 metres beyond the junction with Quarrington Close on the south side and for 22 metres beyond the entrance to Burdwood car park on the north side. Double yellow lines are also in place at the junction with Longbridge Road and at Betteridge Road to provide junction protection and offer motorists seeking access and egress from both roads a view of the traffic along Wheelers Green Way.
- 2.7 Wheelers Green Way has good forward visibility and is approximately 6.8 metres in width. This is sufficient width to allow on-street parking to take place whilst still enabling two-way traffic, other than the largest of vehicles, to pass with care. Due to the presence of the lay-by on the north side fronting the Thatcham Baptist Church and the double yellow lines which protect the car park entrance and the junction with Betteridge Road, there are two locations for on-street parking on that side, one of 50 metres and one of 30 metres. When vehicles are parked within these lengths it should not significantly impede traffic flow or prevent drivers from being able to check for opposing traffic and allow these vehicles to be passed.
- 2.8 Goods vehicles, buses and the refuse collection vehicles do not have a problem negotiating the section of Wheelers Green Way adjacent to the Burdwood Centre, where the parking occurs.

(c) Pedestrian road safety concerns

- 2.9 On-street parking is to be expected in roads adjoining a busy community hub such as the Burdwood Centre but this in itself should not constitute a significant road safety hazard for pedestrians wishing to cross the road, provided that standard rules on observation are adhered to by pedestrians. The dropped kerb facility on the north side adjacent to the lay-by fronting the Baptist Church provides a site which is suitable for pedestrians, parents with buggies and the mobility impaired to cross the road. This location is kept clear of parked vehicles by the presence of an access protection road marking and provides a clear area to allow approaching traffic to be observed. Introducing additional restrictions to clear the area of all parked vehicles may provide improved visibility for pedestrians but it is likely that traffic speeds would increase as a result, as on-street parking can have a positive traffic calming influence on traffic.
- 2.10 Additional parking restrictions would also very likely result in vehicles displacing further into the adjacent residential roads which would inconvenience local

residents and may introduce daytime obstruction problems for large vehicles requiring access, such as the refuse vehicle or delivery vehicles.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

3.1 It is considered that the implementation of parking charges has not deterred any of the equalities groups from their continuing use of the Burdwood Centre car park as:

(a) The car park, together with all of the Council's other car parks, will be available for unimpeded use by all;

(b) By providing the first two hours parking free of charge it has enabled those attending appointments at the doctor's practice to park without charge and this has particularly benefitted older persons; pregnant women; and parents and carers with young children;

(c) The Council has installed two disabled persons parking bays outside the practice for use by Blue Badge holders; and

(d) The pay by mobile phone service enables customers to obtain the free parking time or pay remotely for their parking time, negating the need to walk to the machine. This benefits those with mobility problems who are not Blue Badge holders and those disabled persons who are Blue Badge holders and cannot find parking in the disabled persons parking spaces.

3.2 It should also be noted that since the recommendation is to retain the current regime in the car park, there is no change to the equalities groups.

4. Conclusions

(a) The Impact of Parking Charges

4.1 Parking charges have been operating in the Burdwood Centre car park since June 2013 and the income from the car park is increasing year by year. The Council entails annual costs in the provision of this car park and it is reasonable that service users should make a contribution to those running costs.

4.2 The implementation of new parking charges is never welcome, but the Council is operating in an era of severe financial restraint and it is reasonable to identify and implement legitimate income sources, particularly where there are recurring annual costs and when some services have hitherto been provided free of charge, with those service costs being absorbed by others. Free parking has been removed in other Council car parks and replaced with modest parking charges e.g. Gilbert Court at Thatcham and the Goldwell Park car park in Newbury. Based upon the figures provided within this report it would appear that there has not been any adverse impact from the parking charges on the preponderance of car park customers and the data shows a busy car park where most motorists continue to enjoy free parking.

4.3 Even if the parking charges were removed there is no guarantee that the on-street parking in Wheelers Green Way would cease. Rather, it is likely that rail commuters and others seeking all-day free of charge parking would be attracted to the car park and this would be to the detriment of the existing users who would then find parking spaces limited and would perhaps park on-street whereas they now use the car

park. To provide a turnover of parking spaces to facilitate the needs of the existing users it is likely that parking in the Burdwood Centre car park would need to be time-limited, perhaps to the existing free parking limit of two hours. Such a limit would immediately see the all-day parkers back on Wheelers Green Way, while the Council would entail the costs of running the car park and providing parking enforcement to ensure there was no abuse of the free parking limits, but without any income from the car park to defray the expenditure. Even if there was no time limit to the parking, the Council would need to undertake enforcement to ensure that the disabled motorists' bays were not abused and motorists did not park in unauthorised areas of the car park and perhaps cause an obstruction. This would involve expenditure without any compensating income to defray the costs.

(b) Traffic flow issues

- 4.4 Daytime on-street parking takes place on Wheelers Green Way during the week and also during weekend church services for the Baptist Church. This does not prevent two-way traffic from passing with care as the road width is sufficient. The presence of the lay-by fronting the Baptist Church provides a 15 metre break between the two lengths of on-street parking and would allow drivers to pull in if they had a concern or were not confident about allowing any opposing traffic to pass.
- 4.5 Parking restrictions are already in place to prevent vehicles parking close to junctions and on the approach to the roundabout on Station Road. These restrictions together with good forward visibility ensure that drivers can anticipate and react to opposing traffic despite any on-street parking that takes place.
- 4.6 Observations conducted by Council Officers have shown that the parking does not in their opinion constitute a problem that severely impedes traffic movements in Wheelers Green Way.

(c) Pedestrian road safety concerns

- 4.7 On-street parking is to be expected at a community hub like the Burdwood Centre but this in itself should not constitute a significant road safety hazard for pedestrians wishing to cross the road, provided that standard rules on observation are adhered to.
- 4.8 The dropped kerb facility fronting the Baptist Church provides a suitable location for crossing the road which is kept clear of vehicles and provides adequate visibility splays to check the road for approaching traffic.
- 4.9 On-street parking has a positive traffic calming influence on vehicles and if additional restrictions were to be proposed it is likely that traffic speeds would increase, which would likely continue to concern those pedestrians who have already raise concerns with the parked vehicles. Additional parking restrictions are likely to displace parked vehicles into adjacent residential streets which may introduce obstruction problems in these roads.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The Council has to meet the operating costs of the car park, including cleaning and repairs and maintenance. These costs would continue even if parking charges were removed.

5.2 When the Full Council on 1 March 2012 agreed to implement parking charges at the Burdwood Centre car park it was estimated that the charges would generate some £1,250 of income in a full year financial year. The actual income since parking charges were implemented in June 2013 is:

- (a) 1,350 tickets sold generating £1,348 (including mobile phone sales) in 2013/14;
- (b) 1,643 tickets sold generating £2,565 (including mobile phone sales) in 2014/15; and
- (c) 610 tickets sold generating £1,541 (to month 5) in 2015/16 (including mobile phone sales) and this extrapolates to some 1,464 tickets and £3,698 of income over the full financial year.

It will be seen from these figures that income has increased year by year and exceeds the original estimate of £1,250. While modest, this income more than meets the annual running costs of the car park and it is an important element in the Council's annual car parks income stream.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That the Executive Member for Highways, Transport, Emergency Planning resolves to approve the recommendations set out below:

- (a) That the parking charges at the Burdwood Centre be retained;
- (b) The organiser of the petition be informed of the action agreed following consideration of this report; and
- (c) That the on-street parking in the Wheelers Green Way area continues to be monitored so that any change to parking behaviour can be addressed as part of a future review.

Appendices

Appendix A – Map of the Burdwood Centre car park