

Rother District Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 26 April 2021

Title: Recommendations of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group

Report of: Head of Service Neighbourhood Services

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To summarise the work of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group and outline the Group's Final Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group (OSCPT&FG) continue beyond April 2021 to encompass the Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) review and that the revised Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1 be agreed to reflect the group's wider remit;
- 2) the OSCPT&FG continue its monitoring work under the revised Terms of Reference to both inform the ESCC led review of CPE and to recommend changes to off-street parking to OSC in January 2022;
- 3) the monitoring work of the impact of CPE on off-street parking be continued until October 2021 to allow for further evidence gathering and data analysis over a 12 month period to provide a more accurate reflection on car park usage but will be dependent on the COVID-19 situation in the next six months;
- 4) the installation of improved signage in relevant car parks detailing the availability of Council car parking permits to encourage uptake, be noted;
- 5) a thorough review of the usage and appropriate level of charges for Manor Garden car park be conducted ;

AND

Cabinet and full Council be requested to consider: That:

- 6) Wainwright Road car park, Gibbets Marsh car park and Lower Market Battle car park be designated as 'long stay' car parks. The daily parking charge for Wainwright Road and Gibbets Marsh be reduced from £5 to £2 per day and for Lower Market Battle to £3 per day, for both summer and winter as soon as reasonably practicable to encourage use of these less used 'out of town' car parks. The revenue derived from the three car parks in 2019 was £60,845. Potential loss of revenue if charges are reduced and take up does not increase is estimated to be £18,300;

- 7) the chargeable hours be brought into line across all car parks as soon as reasonably practicable, with charging starting at 8am and finishing at 7pm.
 - 8) signage be installed to promote parking at Gibbets Marsh Rye, Little Common, Lower Market Battle and Wainwright Road car parks to improve visibility of the facility as 'long stay'; and
 - 9) a cash and card payment machine be installed at Manor Gardens car park.
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Introduction

1. This report summarises the work of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group (OSCPT&FG) and pulls together the final recommendations to be approved for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 26 April 2021. The report represents the culmination of the work commenced in October 2020, flowing from evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and car park data from the OSCPT&FG's work over the last six months.

Background

2. In September 2020, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) introduced Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE). CPE introduces a variety of restrictions to parking throughout Rother District including charging to certain on-street parking locations in Bexhill, Rye and Battle, resident parking permits on certain roads, limited parking hours and daily enforcement of double yellow lines.
3. As some Members may recall, a Civil Parking Enforcement Task and Finish Group (CPET&FG) was formed previously to consider the viability of implementing CPE in the district. In 2018, the group recommended that a review be carried out six months after the introduction of CPE (Minute OSC17/51 refers). As CPE was introduced at the end of September 2020, it is therefore proposed to re-establish the CPET&FG in April 2021 and their work will help inform the 12-month ESCC led review expected later this year.
4. The Council operates its designated car parks under the District of Rother (Off Street) Parking Places Order 2020 (PPO). The PPO provides a framework under which the Council can manage its car parks effectively and enforce the regulations contained within the Order, including enforcing the Standard Charge Notice when necessary. The Order makes provision for a daily tariff of car park charges in designated car parks, the revenue from which is used to meet operational, maintenance and enforcement costs.
5. In September 2020, Cabinet agreed to amend the PPO 2020 to introduce charges to certain free car parks that fall directly within those CPE areas where on-street charges have been introduced (Minute CB20/45 refers). It was also agreed that those free car parks that are in close proximity to areas where on-street charges apply should also have charges introduced.
6. Following the changes in paragraphs 2 and 4 above, it was agreed that there is a need to monitor both the impact of CPE on the Council's off-street car parks, alongside the impact of introducing charges to certain car parks.

7. It was therefore agreed that a new separate Task and Finish Group be formed to monitor the impact of on-street CPE restrictions on Council owned car parks and report back to OSC in April 2021 with recommendations for changes to the management of the Council's car parks.

Off-Street Car Parks Task & Finish Group

8. The OSCPT&FG was established in October 2020 to monitor the impact of CPE on the level of use of Council owned off-street car parks and consider any changes to charges, hours of operation and permits, whilst taking into account the need to generate sufficient revenue to maintain the car parks.
9. The OSCPT&FG met on four occasions during the six months to receive a number of presentations from officers advising on monthly car park income data and the current car park usage compared to previous years (data available on request).
10. Further information was gathered from town and parish councils, local businesses, community groups and sports clubs most likely to be impacted by CPE and the use of car parks, via a written 'call for evidence'. 40 responses were received and a full report of the responses is available on request.
11. Discussions of the group centred around priority users of Council car parks being residents, businesses, sports and community groups, able bodied and those with disabilities, commuters, workers and visitors, parish and town councils.
12. It was noted by Members and many of the responders to the 'call for evidence' that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, use of the car parks would not reflect a 'normal' monthly level.
13. It was also noted that car park usage was likely to be different in the summer months to the winter months; that various car parks started and ended daily charges at different times of the day; that a few 'out of town' car parks were little used.
14. During discussions at the OSC on 19 October 2020, it was suggested that once the OSCPT&FG work has been completed and reported to OSC in April 2021, the OSCPT&FG be renamed and the terms of reference be amended in order to commence work on considering the impact of the CPE scheme in preparation for the first annual review of CPE, led by ESCC, later this year. This will allow the group to monitor and consider the impact of all aspects of recent changes to on-street and off-street parking across 12 months.

Summary of evidence

15. As referred to in paragraph 10 above, the 'call for evidence' from town and parish councils, local businesses, community groups and sports clubs most likely to be impacted by CPE and the use of car parks elicited a total of 40 responses up to the closing date of 12 March 2021. The main findings are as follows:
 - i. Many organisations had difficulty responding because of the pandemic and lockdowns. Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and almost all the town and

parish councils said the timing was not ideal and they felt they could provide better evidence later in the year, assuming COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. Bowling and cricket clubs across Rother had not been able to have games, competitions or social activities. Manor Barn had been closed and the Old Town Preservation Society was unable to carry out its normal events programme.

- ii. Many responses were about Bexhill's Manor Gardens Car Park and the restriction to pay charges by Ringo only. All local respondents, such as the GP surgery, dental surgery, St Peter's Church and Manor Barn had concerns about the impact on their employees, the disabled and elderly and those who could not afford charges, especially who did not own or could not operate a smart phone. There were also comments about adverse impacts on nearby residents who have no private parking facilities, displaced on-street parking, impact on other parking facilities for nearby businesses, safety and security. Mention was made of two other car parks in the same circumstances, but the bulk of comments focussed on Manor Gardens Car Park.
 - iii. Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism suggested maximising the potential of Wainwright Road if it could be made cheaper than on-street charges. Other town centre organisations commented about staff and volunteers not being willing or able to pay for car parks and parking where there are no charges or restrictions. Bexhill Caring Community had volunteers say that they would no longer volunteer due to the cost of long term parking when they start back up their day centre.
 - iv. Several responses from businesses and clubs imply they are not aware of their options around buying car park permits.
16. As referred to in paragraph 9 above, the main findings from the analysis of data regarding car park usage and income are as follows:
 17. The COVID-19 restrictions on peoples' movements and the subsequent third COVID-19 lockdown from December 2020 continues to show a dramatic reduction in car park usage, rendering the data as unreliable evidence on which to make long-term decisions. During the data gathering period (November 2020-February 2021 inclusive), most Rother District Council car parks showed a year on year drop of visitors of between 50% and 75%.
 18. The patterns of usage have remained broadly the same during the monitoring period when compared with previous years and no specific trends can be observed between those car parks adjacent to CPE controlled parking areas and those not adjacent to CPE controlled parking areas.
 19. The longer-term impact of COVID-19 and workforce and visitor habits are unknown at present and we should not assume usage rates will return to levels experienced before COVID-19. The data on new car parks in particular, and those where charges have been introduced, are unlikely to be a reliable barometer for future usage levels, post COVID-19.
 20. The three Camber Sands car parks defied the trend of greatly decreased usage during the monitoring period when compared with previous years, showing an

increase of 7.5% – this could be due to the closure of leisure facilities during lockdown leading more people to visit the beach as an alternative leisure activity, although visitor numbers to Camber are highly weather dependant and can fluctuate greatly year on year i.e. in a wet month visitor numbers can drop significantly.

21. Most car parks' average stay is 0-3 hours, with very few visitors parking "all day", with the exceptions of Gibbet Marsh and Lower Market which both have favourable longer stay tariffs, and Eversley Road which is heavily used by workers in Bexhill. Wainwright Road car park has also seen an increase in the number of all-day visitors towards the end of the monitoring period.
22. Usage of pay by mobile application / pay by phone has increased year on year, and has particularly gained traction during the pandemic, as it provides a completely contactless, 'COVID-19 safe' option for payment of car park charges. It is expected that this trend will continue after COVID-19.
23. It was agreed by Members that the 'call for evidence' and car park data would not provide an accurate base on which to make decisions due to the third COVID-19 lockdown being in place from December 2020 to April 2021 severely restricting peoples' movements, and therefore the level of use of car parks. It was therefore suggested that the monitoring of car park use should continue throughout the summer until October 2021.
24. It was felt that some immediate benefit may be derived from designating some less used 'out of town' car parks for 'long stay' and encouraging all day workers to use them by improving signage and bringing the parking charges more in line with nearby on-road charges. Car parks for consideration were Wainwright Road, Bexhill, Gibbets Marsh, Rye and Lower Market, Battle, the former two car parks being progressed, and the latter rejected due to its close proximity to Upper Market car park and the town centre.
25. Users of Manor Gardens car park in Bexhill can only pay for parking using RingGo. Despite introducing payment facilities into a nearby shop, evidence collected to date shows strong demand for the ability to pay by cash or card using a payment machine in this car park. The cost of purchasing and installing a pay and display terminal in a car park is approximately £6,000.

Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on peoples' movements during the last 6 months, it is not possible to form a clear understanding of the impact of on-street parking restrictions on the use of Council owned car parks. Although there are some actions as mentioned previously that would be of benefit to users now, further review should be based on evidence collected over a longer period of time. It is therefore recommended that:
 - i. the OSCPT&FG continue beyond April 2021 to encompass the Civil Parking Enforcement review and that the Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1 be agreed to reflect the group's wider remit;

- ii. the OSCPT&FG continue its monitoring work under the revised Terms of Reference to both inform the ESCC led review of CPE and to recommend changes to off-street parking to OSC in January 2022;
- iii. that the monitoring work of the impact of CPE on off-street parking be continued until October 2021 to allow for further evidence gathering and data analysis over a 12 month period. This will provide a more accurate reflection on car park usage but will be dependent on the COVID-19 situation in the next six months;
- iv. Wainwright Road car park, Gibbets Marsh car park and Lower Market Battle car park be designated as 'long stay' car parks. The daily parking charge for Wainwright Road and Gibbets Marsh be reduced from £5 to £2 per day and for Lower Market Battle to £3 per day for both summer and winter as soon as reasonably practicable. This will encourage use of these less used 'out of town' car parks. The revenue derived from the three car parks in 2019 was £60,845. Potential loss of revenue if charges are reduced and take up does not increase is estimated to be at £18,300;
- v. that the chargeable hours be brought into line across all car parks as soon as reasonably practicable, with charging starting at 8am and finishing at 7pm. This will simplify the charging structure and support adequate availability for people wishing to park in the evening for leisure and entertainment activities. Bexhill Marina (part of zone C) on-street charges are applicable daily from 8am-8pm, all other on-street charges, including the town centre are applicable daily from 8am-6pm, restricted 2 hour or residents permit parking is from 8am to 6pm;
- vi. that signage be installed to promote parking at Gibbets Marsh Rye, Lower Market Battle and Wainwright Road car parks to improve visibility of the facility as 'long stay';
- vii. that the installation of improved signage detailing the availability of Council car parking permits to the public in relevant car parks to encourage uptake, be noted;
- viii. that a cash and card payment machine be installed at Manor Gardens car park; and
- ix. a thorough review of the usage of Manor Garden car park be conducted and consideration be given to the appropriate level of charges.

Conclusion

- 27. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on peoples' movements during the last six months, it is not possible to form a clear understanding of the impact of on-street parking restrictions on the use of Council owned car parks. Although there are some actions as mentioned previously that would be of benefit to users now, further review should be based on evidence collected over a longer period of time.

Financial Implications

28. Cost of installing payment machine into Manor Gardens - £6,000 capital cost plus cash collections and maintenance. Cost of signage approximately £1,000 capital cost. Possible reduction in revenue due to decrease in car parks charges for Wainwright Road, Gibbets Marsh and Lower Market Battle of £18,300 per annum. It is anticipated this loss will be offset by an increase in car park use.

Legal Implications

29. There is no impact on Rother District Council (Off -Street) Parking Places Order 2020 but may need to vary The Second Schedule to the Order if the charged parking hours are changed.

| Other Implications | Applies? | Other Implications | Applies? |
|--------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| Human Rights | No | Equalities and Diversity | No |
| Crime and Disorder | No | Consultation | No |
| Environmental | No | Access to Information | No |
| Sustainability | No | Exempt from publication | No |
| Risk Management | No | | |

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| Appendices: | Appendix 1 Revised Terms of Reference |
| Relevant previous Minutes: | OSC17/51 CB20/45 |
| Background Papers: Reference Documents: | N/A N/A |