

Rother District Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 24 January 2022

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 Cabinet be requested to consider:
That:

- 1) the formal response to East Sussex County Council regarding the impact of Civil Parking Enforcement across the district and to inform their annual review, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved;
- 2) car park charges be suspended in The Polegrove, Bexhill and Rye Salts for 12 months and then either reinstated or removed according to levels of use;
- 3) on-street directional signage for long stay car parks be reviewed on a continual basis as business as usual; and
- 4) recommendations on changes to car park charges remain within the annual 'fees and charges' report as part of the overall setting of the Council budget;

AND

It be **RESOLVED**: That: the OSCPT&FG be reconvened at a later date to review usage at Manor Gardens car park and ESCC's response to the CPE annual review, and the Terms of Reference be amended accordingly.

Introduction

1. This report summarises the work of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group (OSCPT&FG) in reviewing the impact of the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) on the use of Rother District Council (RDC) car parks during the last six months and pulls together further recommendations to be approved for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 24 January 2022.
2. The report also 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 12 months.

Background

3. In September 2020, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) introduced 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.
4. 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 was therefore proposed to re-establish the CPET&FG in April 2021 and their work would help inform the 12-month ESCC led annual review expected in February 2022.
5. 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.
6. 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 near areas where on-street charges apply should also have charges introduced.
7. Following the changes in paragraphs 3 and 6 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.
8. Subsequently, 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 March 2021 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). The OSCPT&FG reported to the OSC on 26 April 2021, recommending various changes to car park operations for onward recommendation to Cabinet. Cabinet were supportive of the OSC's recommendations which were subsequently actioned (Minute CB21/06 refers).
10. It was also agreed by the OSC in April 2021 (Minute OSC20/57 refers) that the OSCPT&FG should continue its work for a further six months and progress be reviewed by OSC in January 2022, along with a report to ESCC regarding RDC's response to CPE.

Task and Finish Group's last six months' activities

11. Since April 2021, the OSCPT&FG has met on four occasions to receive several presentations from officers advising on monthly car park income data and the current car park usage compared to previous years (data available on request).
12. As the first 'call for evidence' identified from the responses that it was too early in the easing of COVID-19 restrictions to make proper judgements regarding the impact of CPE, a second 'call for evidence' opened on Monday 3 September 2021 and closed on 8 October 2021, a period of six weeks, to give people a further opportunity to make comments. Invitations were issued again to the businesses and organisations previously invited to submit evidence. 17 responses were received, and a full report of the responses is available on request.
13. As well as reviewing the 'call for evidence', discussions of the Group centred on monitoring the use of car parks since the three 'long stay' car parks were in place and since the chargeable hours were brought in line across the district. Further work focused on cost and level of parking permits, impact on sports club parking and Manor Gardens car park.
14. It was noted by Members that a more normal level of car park use was gradually returning since COVID-19 lockdown was lifted in several phases from 8 March 2021, but that car park use was only now returning to near pre-COVID-19 levels.

Summary of last six months' evidence

15. As referred to in paragraph 12 above, the second 'call for evidence' from town and parish councils, local businesses, community groups and sports clubs elicited a total of 17 responses, compared to the 40 responses received from the first 'call for evidence'.
16. Of the 17 responses received, 14 organisations gave a response to one or more of the Task and Finish Group's five questions. Three organisations had no further comments to make but acknowledged the invitation. Most organisations said there was no impact from CPE or did not reply to the questions. There were several reports regarding the operational impact on some organisations ranging from charging in car parks e.g. Manor Gardens, the introduction of CPE in general and 'residents only' zones for on-street parking.
17. The car park data analysis during the last six months are summarised as follows: -
 - Overall, the number of car park tickets sold has now risen to near pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and this is reflected in the revenue collected. It is therefore felt that the evidence collected is a reliable reflection of CPE impact.
 - There is a small but clear increase in trend across the district of cars remaining in the car parks for longer. The majority continue to park for between 0 to 3 hours, but all-day parking has increased over the six-month period.

- The effect of 'staycation' on car park use during the summer was seen mostly in Camber car parks; to a slightly lesser extent in Rye and Bexhill; and there is no such evidence in Battle.
- There has been a small increase in the numbers of permits in use since new signage promoting their availability was installed in relevant car parks. Maximum take up has been achieved in Eversley Road and Manor Gardens car parks (Bexhill). The number of available Manor Gardens permits will be reviewed once the cash payment machine is in place. De La Warr car park is close to its maximum number.
- 'Long stay' car parks have seen an increase in use overall. Wainwright Road car park (Bexhill) use has increased to the extent that the increase has covered the loss brought about by the recent reduction in charges; as yet this is not the case for Gibbets Marsh (Rye) and Lower Market (Battle) car parks, but the revenue is trending upwards and is expected to cover losses in the near future.
- Although evidence does not exist for the level of use of Manor Gardens car park prior to the introduction of charges, anecdotally the car park does not appear to be used any more than previously, however the ticket sales generated does indicate a good level of use and it remains to be seen if levels of use increase once a cash payment machine is installed in November 2021.
- Previously free car parks adjacent to 'on-street' parking where charges were introduced in October 2020 have generally not seen a large increase in use e.g. Galley Hill Top and Galley Hill Bottom (Bexhill).

Results of last 12 months' activity

18. There are continuing signs that more people are returning to the car parks following the reduction in usage seen during 2020, as there were 52,838 visitors to car parks in September 2019 versus 50,307 in September 2021 (excluding Camber Western as no data was available in 2019). Whilst this is still a reduction in usage, the figures are much closer than comparisons of the earlier months of the year and in line with the patterns seen in the July-August data.
19. The number of visitors choosing the mobile phone App RingGo as a payment option continues to rise year on year. In particular an increase in the rate was witnessed after the first lockdown as RingGo provides customers with a totally contactless option.
20. The Council has seen an increase in visitors staying "all day" in many of its car parks since the introduction of CPE; however, most visitors' duration of stay remains between 0 to 3 hours. There has been no evidence to suggest a particular car park is being overwhelmed with longer-stay users since CPE was introduced.
21. The introduction of the three long-stay car parks has resulted in a small increase of usage in all three, and Lower Market and Gibbet Marsh car parks continue to show an upward trend in visitor numbers and revenue month on month.
22. CPE has had a positive impact on the three town centres in terms of congestion and turnover of 'on-street' parking bays, but has had some adverse impact on certain streets adjacent to the restricted zones and which residents and business have fed back to ESCC for considering future mitigations.

23. The chargeable hours for Council owned car parks have been made uniform across the district, making easier access for residents.
24. Comments regarding Manor Gardens have been considered and a cash payment machine was installed in November 2021, and in common with a few similar locations, a moratorium is in place for school 'drop offs' and 'pick ups' and local Doctors' surgery flu clinics. The number of permits available will be reviewed once the payment machine has been in place for a few months.
25. A distinction in the annual charge has been made for 'nominated permits' whereby the cost for a 'long stay' car park permit is now cheaper to encourage use.
26. Signs have been erected in relevant car parks to show the availability of permits; the number of permits in a car park has been reviewed to ensure fair access for all users.
27. Discussions were had regarding the use of car parks adjacent to sports clubs and it was agreed that a recommendation be put forward to suspend charges at the Polegrove (Bexhill) and Rye Salts car parks temporarily and to monitor the level of parking over a period of 12 months. The risk to free parking in these car parks is that they may become overwhelmed by non-sports users.

Civil Parking Enforcement overview and response to East Sussex County Council

28. With reference to paragraph 3 above and following the OSC meeting in April 2021, the OSCPT&FG's Terms of Reference were amended in order to commence work on considering the impact of the CPE scheme across Rother District in preparation for the first annual review of CPE led by ESCC, which closed on 30 September 2021.
29. During the period October 2020 and September 2021, ESCC reports: -
 - a total of 2,219 valid resident on-street parking permits were issued across Rother District;
 - 7,028 Penalty Charge Notices were issued;
 - 854 warning notices were issued; and
 - that there are nine full time Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) on the enforcement team; up to six CEOs working throughout any one day; CEOs work both weekends and evenings, and flexible hours according to local needs and special event days.
30. Councillors were asked to encourage residents to give their feedback directly to the ESCC CPE review website, and officers used social media and MyAlerts to remind residents to respond before the deadline. This proved successful as ESCC confirmed they received almost 1,000 responses to their annual review, a response far in excess of the usual response expected of 300. Residents' requests ranged from new permit restrictions to new pay and display areas and additional yellow lines.

31. ESCC reported that it will take time to collate and assess this number of responses and that as a result it will take longer than the normal 14 months for any changes to be implemented, depending on process and legislation required.
32. Members of the parking team have carried out compliance checks and usage surveys across Rother since the start of the scheme; this information will also be used in the first review of restrictions.
33. Points noted to be included in Rother's formal response to ESCC to be considered as part of their annual review are:
 - Overall, CPE has been well received in the town centres and feedback from the Police is positive.
 - It was noted that reduced levels of town centre congestion and parking issues are evident anecdotally, with improved availability of short-term parking on central urban streets due to restricted waiting times.
 - On-street tariffs are felt to be fair and reasonable.
 - Consideration be given to increasing the number of enforcement officers on peak visitor days, particularly in Camber.
 - Hours of enforcement be flexible to cover special events later into the evenings.
 - Seasonal enforcement be considered for Herbrand Walk Bexhill, Camber and Military Road Rye.
 - Streets with time-limited bays were inefficient and costly to enforce, as officers must note time of parking and return to monitor. Therefore, consideration be given to extending the number of resident permit bays and decreasing number of time limited bays.
 - Consideration be given to resolving inappropriate and displacement parking both within and outside the restricted zones in particular Brockley Road; Wickham Avenue, Millfield Rise, Belle Hill, Amherst Road, Cantelupe Road and Woodville Road, Bexhill; Military Road, Rye.
 - Make 'time limited' free parking bays all two hours across the district.
 - Consideration be given to roads surrounding Egerton Park, Bexhill being given restricted parking, and a coach drop-off point and disabled parking near to the drop kerb area outside Bexhill museum.
 - Ticehurst Village and Hurst Green be considered for future extension to the CPE scheme.
 - Enforcement of inappropriate parking on 'yellow lines' be increased in villages, in particular Etchingham and Burwash where commuter parking at railway stations causes frequent congestion.

Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

34. It is recommended that:
 - i. Cabinet be requested to approve the formal response to East Sussex County Council regarding the impact of Civil Parking Enforcement across the district and to inform their annual review, attached at Appendix A to the report;

- ii. car park charges be suspended in The Polegrove, Bexhill and Rye Salts for 12 months and then either reinstated or removed according to levels of use;
- iii. on-street directional signage for long stay car parks is reviewed on a continual basis as business as usual;
- iv. the OSCPT&FG be reconvened at a later date to review usage at Manor Gardens car park and ESCC's response to the CPE annual review, and the Terms of Reference be amended accordingly; and
- v. recommendations on changes to car park charges remain within the annual 'fees and charges' report as part of the overall setting of the Council budget.

Financial Implications

35. Loss of revenue from the suspension of charges at The Polegrove - approximately £850 per annum and Rye Salts approximately £850 per annum

Legal Implications

36. There is no impact on Rother District Council (Off -Street) Parking Places Order 2020 (PPO) but the proposed name change of Manor Barn Gardens car park to Manor Gardens car park will need to form part of a future variation to the PPO.

Environment

37. Local congestion is reduced, and the environment improved by a reduction in noise and air pollution in urban areas.

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 A – Letter to ESCC Appendix B – Amended Terms of Reference
Relevant previous Minutes:	OSC17/51 CB20/45 CB21/06 OSC20/57
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A