

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 27 March 2023

Title: Car Park Permits and Camber Sands Car Park Summer Tariffs

Report of: Deborah Kenneally, Head of Neighbourhood Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Field

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To set out options for car park permits and Camber Sands car park tariffs

Decision Type: Key

Officer

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

- 1) the Director – Place and Climate Change be granted delegated authority to procure and install a means of introducing more flexible parking permits in appropriate Rother District Council owned car parks;
- 2) once installed, the Director – Place and Climate Change be granted delegated authority to introduce permit prices as set out in paragraph 23 of this report; and
- 3) the proposed Camber Sands summer tariffs as set out in Option 3 be approved and introduced for the 2023 summer season.

Reasons for

Recommendations: To maximise revenue and provide greater flexibility for customers using Rother District Council car parks, whilst considering the medium-term financial stability plan and officer resources to deliver these services effectively and efficiently.

Introduction

1. This report proposes a set of revised fees and charges for Rother District Council car park parking permits and Camber Sands summer season car parking tariffs. The Council regularly reviews and revises its rates for fees and charges to ensure that income is maximised from these important assets to help support the Council's medium-term budget position. The 2023-24 Fees and Charges Report was approved by Cabinet in December 2022 with the exception of parking permit pricing.
2. The current car parking permit durations are restricted to 6 months or 12 months and officers have been asked to explore the feasibility of introducing weekly and monthly parking permits to increase flexibility for customers.

3. Camber Sands car parking tariffs were approved for 2023-24, however, officers have been asked for these to be further reviewed to ensure revenue is maximised.
4. It should be noted that if charges are set too high, revenue levels may drop due to customer resistance and affordability. Usage and uptake of services needs to continue at optimum levels to support funding of increasing service costs, including administration and contract uplifts where applicable. Failure to achieve sufficient revenue and thereby reduce subsidy on non-essential services may compromise the Council's ability to fund statutory services, and savings may need to be made elsewhere in the budget to mitigate a loss of revenue. In relation to both permit and tariff prices, consideration must be given to the balance between maximising revenue whilst continuing to drive economic growth and regeneration throughout the district.

Car Park Parking Permits

5. Rother District Council currently offers the following car park permit types:

| Type | Cost (to end user) | No. of current permits issued | Duration |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Nominated – single car park | £323.00- £350.00 | 260 | 1 year |
| Nominated – all car parks (annual) | £858.00 | 0 | 1 year |
| Nominated – all car parks (6 months) | £525.00 | 0 | 6 months |
| Dedicated bay | £690.00- £1,149.00 | 30 | 1 year |
| Staff | £0.00 | 165 | Ends upon leaving employment or change of role |
| Councillor | £0.00 | 38 | 4 years |
| Concessionary | £0.00 | 714 | Until date of blue badge/PIP renewal |
| Contractors (working on behalf of RDC) | £0.00 | 70 | Various |

6. Neighbourhood Services officers currently spend approximately six hours per week on permit administration tasks – checking eligibility criteria, preparing and issuing permits, updating customer information on an Excel spreadsheet, dealing with queries and lost/damaged permits. In addition, approximately 50% of all nominated permit holders apply for a direct debit (to pay for their permit over six months) which involves colleagues from Revenues and Benefits. Permits are printed internally by our Print Room, hand written, and posted to customers via Royal Mail. The majority of our customers apply for their permit online via our website.
7. Officers have explored the implications regarding the introduction of weekly and monthly parking permits and ascertained that offering a wider array of permit options would significantly increase administration thus making the current delivery model unmanageable, and in the interests of efficiency and costs

alternative delivery models have been explored, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

8. **Option 1: Online Permit Management System** – A neighbouring authority uses a third-party contractor to provide an online car parking permit delivery and management service. Officers have reviewed this system and subsequently met with a representative from the provider. The system allows customers to apply, pay, receive, and manage their parking permits online, whilst enabling staff to view customer details, set limits on permit numbers, manage and obtain live usage data, review any eligibility documentation, and cancel permits where required. Anecdotal feedback suggests this system is effective, well-used and a popular service with most customers. Costs are actively being sought, and indications are that the Council would need to pay for a licence per 1,000 permits issued, plus a cost per permit in the region of £2.
9. A further benefit of an online permit management system is that customers cannot lose or forget to display their permit as the information is accessible to enforcement officers via a mobile phone app.
10. An online permit management system has the ability to automatically limit the number of permits sold – in Bexhill town centre, three of our car parks are at maximum capacity for annual permits. If customers are permitted to buy permits without an upper limit, there is the risk of overcrowding and permit holders being unable to park when they wish, which may lead to an increase in complaints.
11. **Option 2: Pay and display machines issuing weekly/monthly tickets** – The RDC existing contractor Flowbird provides the Council with car parking machines and associated technology to enable customers to ‘pay and display’. The recent removal of “check in/check out” in favour of the simpler ‘pay in advance’ system enables our existing pay and display machines to now issue weekly and monthly parking tickets instead of permits.
12. Flowbird would charge a one-off ‘set up and configuration’ fee and additional key pads would need to be fitted to the machines as they are currently restricted to contactless/chip only limits (£100) which would not support the purchase of more expensive permits.
13. Consideration would need to be given to installing machines into ‘Charged for’ car parks currently without ‘pay and display’ machines, e.g. Wainwright Road. A single ‘pay and display’ machine costs in the region of £6,000 and individual car park revenue would need to be able to justify this level of investment. Credit card transaction fees would also apply for each transaction, as is currently the case for customers paying via credit card for single visits.
14. Over 75% of our current permits could not be issued through our ‘pay and display’ machines (i.e. concessionary permits, staff and councillor permits, dedicated bay permits, and RingGo only car park permits), so, whilst this would be a user friendly option for a small number of customers, staff would still need to issue the majority of permits using another method.
15. **Wainwright Road car park:** This car park does not currently have a ticket machine, therefore purchasing weekly/monthly tickets via Flowbird is not

currently an option. The cost of purchasing a new pay and display machine is approximately £6,000 and the current revenue from this car park does not justify this level of investment plus the added costs for cash collection etc. Therefore, if it was decided to issue weekly and monthly permits for this car park these would have to be issued online. On-street seafront parking in Bexhill (excluding the Marina area) is £2.00 per day so online permit prices would need to be considered with this in mind. If the weekly permit price is set at £10 this would equate to £1.43 per day.

Recommendations:

16. **Officers recommend a combination of Option 1 & 2 above:**
 - a. **online permit system** offering a fully encompassing permit management system whereby all permit types could be managed on a single system with minimal staff intervention.
 - b. **Flowbird machine issued weekly and monthly tickets** in selected car parks such as some Long Stay and less used car parks.
17. Issuing weekly permits via an online system would generate less revenue for the Council as we would need to keep charges low enough to be attractive for visitors, yet we would need to include a £2.00 additional fee to cover the cost of the permit, or else absorb this cost.
18. At present, Blue Badge holders who are in receipt of certain benefits – higher rate mobility component of Personal Independent Payment, those registered blind (the permit will be issued to the registered blind person to be used by carers/family members **only** when the registered person is present), and those in receipt of a war pension can apply for these permits which enable them to park in any Rother District Council car park, and in any bay, without paying a parking fee. Please note, these benefits are not means tested. It is recommended that a small administrative charge of £20 be applied to our concessionary permits (i.e. blue badge holders who can park for free in our car parks) to cover the administrative time checking eligibility and to cover the transaction fee of issuing the permit. These permits are issued for a period of up to three years (the expiry of the Blue Badge or the benefit review date is used as the expiry date). The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide free off-street parking to disabled residents and visitors. Issuing these permits is outside of our statutory responsibilities and it is therefore classed as a discretionary service. These permits account for the largest percentage of permits currently in use. Alternatively, consideration could be given to removing this concession and applying standard charges to disabled visitors to car parks, which would increase income and decrease administration and impact on resources. Should the Council wish to adopt this approach, an equalities impact assessment would need to be completed, to outline the impact on those who currently hold a permit if they had to pay car park charges. This would not impact their statutory right to park free of charge on-street, including on double yellow lines.
19. If weekly and monthly permits are introduced, it is recommended that the ability to pay by direct debit over six months for an annual permit be removed, due to

the greater permit payment options available. Customers taking the direct debit option require a greater proportion of administrative time, setting up direct debits and chasing non-payment. The direct debit does not automatically renew, as payments are taken over the first six months and the direct debit is complete at the end of this period.

20. It is recommended that the 'Annual Permit for One Car – All Car Parks' and 'Half Yearly Permit for One Car - All Car Parks' options be removed as none of these permit types have been sold in the past 5 years.
21. It is recommended that annual nominated parking permit prices across the district (excluding long stay car parks) are increased by 43% from £350 per annum to £500 per annum. For Nominated permits at £500 per annum this equates to a charge of £1.37 per day over 365 days; or for someone parking 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year, this equates to a charge of £2.08 per parking session (the daily tariff in these car parks is between £5 and £18). This represents a considerable saving against the daily parking tariffs.
22. From April 2016 to late 2019, nominated permits were charged at £498.50 so a charge of £500 would be equitable with charges. This charge was reduced in late 2019 to £321 in line with the lower nominated permit price charged at Gibbet Marsh car park.
23. It is recommended to increase the annual nominated permit price at the long stay car parks by the rate of inflation at 10%, thereby maintaining a lower annual charge than other RDC car parks to increase the use of these 'further out of town' facilities.
24. It is recommended to increase the dedicated bay permit prices by the rate of inflation at 10%.
25. Proposed changes to current permit prices and proposed introduction of additional permit charges is detailed in the table below, for reference daily tariffs in the long stay car parks (excluding Camber) are £4.50-£7.00 and long stay daily charges are £2.00-£3.00:

| | Charges 2022/2023 | Proposed Charges 2023/2024 | Daily comparison using car park: a. 5 days x 48 weeks per year, and b. 365 days per year) |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| Annual Permit for One Car – All Car Parks | £858.00 | Remove option | |
| Half Yearly Permit for One Car – All Car Parks | £525.00 | Remove option | |
| *Nominated Permit – annual | £350.00 | £500.00 | a. £2.08 b. £1.37 |
| Nominated Permit – 6 months (182 days) | N/A | £350.00 | a. £2.92 b. £1.92 |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|------------------|----------------------|
| Nominated Permit – 3 months (90 days) | N/A | £200.00 | a. £3.33 b. £2.22 |
| Nominated Permit – 1 month (calendar month 28-31 days) | N/A | £75.00 | a. £3.75 b. £2.50 |
| Nominated Permit – 1 week | N/A | £20.00 | a. £4.00 b. £2.85 |
| Long Stay Permit – annual | £323.00 | £350.00 | a. £1.46 b. £0.96 |
| Long Stay Permit – 6 months | N/A | £200.00 | a. £1.67 b. £1.11 |
| Long Stay Permit – 3 months | N/A | £100.00 | a. £1.67 b. £1.11 |
| Long Stay Permit – 1 month Wainwright Road/Gibbets Marsh Lower Market | N/A | £40.00 £50.00 | a. £2.00 b. £1.29 |
| Long Stay Permit – 1 week Wainwright Road/Gibbets Marsh Lower Market | N/A | £10.00 £15.00 | a. £2.00 b. £1.43 |
| Nominated Permit – annual Camber Central | £350.00 | £650.00 | a. £2.71 b. £1.78 |
| Western Road, Bexhill – Annual Permit per Car | £754.00 | £830.00 | a. £3.46 b. £2.27 |
| Gun Gardens, Rye – Annual Permit per Car | £1,149.00 | £1,264.00 | a. £5.27 b. £3.46 |
| The Strand, Rye – Annual Permit per Car | £690.00 | £759.00 | a. £3.16 b. £2.08 |
| Concessionary Permit (eligibility criteria apply) admin fee | N/A | £20.00 | a. £0.08 b. £0.05 |

26. It is recommended that permit charges be set as follows:

*Nominated permit locations – De La Warr, Eversley Road, Galley Hill Top, Galley Hill Bottom, War Memorial, Egerton Park, Manor Barn & Gardens, Mount Street, Bedford Place, Lucknow Place (please note nominated permits not currently offered at Town Hall, Upper Market, The Strand, Cinque Ports Street, Rye Leisure Centre, or Camber Sands Western)

**Long stay permit locations – Wainwright Road, Lower Market, Gibbet Marsh, Little Common

27. The above permit prices and machine operated process will be trialled and kept under review as business as usual whilst usage is ascertained and will subsequently form part of the annual fees and charges review.

28. An overall review of car park tariffs and permit prices will also take place as part of considerations in going “cashless” at a later date, at which time expert advice may be sought on maximising revenue and car park occupancy rates.

29. Consideration has been given to creating a formula to aid permit price setting, however this has proved problematic due to the differences in tariffs between short and long stay car parks, therefore proposed permit prices have been determined and extrapolated from current tariffs and permit prices.

Camber Sands Car Park Tariffs

30. We have observed a significant increase in the costs of managing Camber Sands car parks, and in particular Western car park. In addition to recent and further improvements to the car park surface, general signage and payment machines, we increased the security at the car parks to address increased levels of anti-social behaviour during peak season and we expect this requirement to continue into the future.
31. Camber Sands Central car park provides direct access to the beach and is thus the prime destination car park for most visitors. On busy summer days, Central car park can fill within minutes of opening and staff then divert queuing traffic attempting to access the car park to other car parks. This can lead to anti-social behaviour, visitors parking in inappropriate locations throughout the village, and the resulting road traffic congestion can severely impact access and egress for emergency services. Encouraging visitors to park at Camber Western car park, on the outskirts of the village, as their first choice, is a key element of local traffic management and Rother District Council has been working with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to improve signage and encourage considerate parking.
32. On street parking fines issued by ESCC Civil Enforcement Officers are £70, reduced to £35 if paid within 14 days. If car park charges are set too high, there is an increased risk that visitors will choose on-street parking or illegal parking and risk paying a £35 fine, especially if it means they can park closer to the beach. This may then increase anti-social behaviour requiring Council intervention, place an additional burden on RDC staff, and add to health and safety issues through further restricting emergency services' access into the village.
33. The current agreed summer 2023/2024 tariffs for both Camber Sands Central and Camber Sands Western car parks are as follows:

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Up to 1 hour | £3 |
| 1-3 hours | £7 |
| 3-6 hours | £14 |
| 6+ hours | £18 |

34. **Option 1: Camber Sands Western car park tariffs be set lower than Camber Sands Central tariffs** – evidence indicates visitors prefer to park at Camber Sands Central car park due to the facilities it offers and the direct access onto the beach; RDC would like to encourage more visitors to choose Western car park to avoid driving through the village and adding to congestion. The introduction of differential charging could help achieve this whilst still mitigating potential issues outlined in paragraph 32 above. For example:

| Duration | Central | Western |
|--------------|---------|---------|
| Up to 1 hour | £5 | £4 |
| 1-3 hours | £12 | £8 |
| 3-6 hours | £20 | £16 |

| | | |
|----------|-----|-----|
| 6+ hours | £30 | £20 |
|----------|-----|-----|

To support visitors in making the best choice, signage setting out tariffs in both car parks would need to be erected well before visitors arrive at the entrance of Western car park.

35. **Option 2: Flat daily rate in Camber Sands Central car park** - A similar beach location on the South Coast offers a flat fee in their car parks, with a reduced fee for those arriving after 3pm. Benefits include no overstaying, easier understanding for beach goers, potentially fewer complaints or staff interventions required to assist visitors with parking payment machines. For example:

| Arrival Time | Central | Western |
|--------------|---------|---------|
| Up to 3pm | £30 | £20 |
| After 3pm | £15 | £10 |

36. To support visitors in making the best choice, signage promoting costs in both car parks would need to be erected well before visitors arrive at the entrance of Western car park.
37. **Option 3: Combination of Option 1 & 2** - combining the above options with a flat fee at Camber Central and differential tariffs at Camber Western may allow the Council to maximise income whilst encouraging those staying for shorter periods to park at Camber Western, thereby not adding to congestion in Camber Village.
38. **Officer Recommendation: Option 3** - A flat fee is charged at Camber Central car park as set out in Option 2 and the tariffs shown in option 1 are applied to Camber Western car park. Option 3 to be applied as soon as practicable for the 2023 summer season. It is estimated that applying a flat fee to Camber Central charges could generate in the region of an extra £180,000 in revenue (based on the number of visitors using the car park during the 2022 summer season). Increasing the charges at Western car park could generate an additional £20,000 revenue, based on the 2022 visitor numbers.

Conclusion

39. Members are requested to consider the proposals and determine the range of charges to be applied for 2023/24.

Financial Implications

40. The financial implications have been discussed with the Section 151 officer and accounts department and detailed within the report. For Camber car park tariffs, should option 3 be taken forward, the potential additional revenue generated is estimated at approximately £200,000.

Sustainability Implications

41. It is crucial that the Council's fees and charges are increased to ensure that revenue is maximised from these important assets to help support the Council's medium-term budget position.

Environment

42. It is important to note the potential impact on the environment if charges for Camber car parks can mitigate against congestion in the village and thereby reduce the environmental impact of traffic pollution.

Risk Management Implications

43. As highlighted within this report, if the increases in charges are too high, income levels may drop due to customer resistance and affordability for the customer. Failure to achieve sufficient income and to reduce subsidy on non-essential services may compromise the Council's ability to fund statutory services in the future.
44. There is a risk of purchasing a weekly or monthly ticket and not being able to park as the car park is full.

| 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 | Yes | Exempt from publication | No |
| Risk Management | Yes | | |

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| Appendices: | None |
| Relevant Previous Minutes: | CB22/52 |
| Background Papers: | Fees and Charges Report to Cabinet 2023-24 |
| Reference Documents: | None |