



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

Date: 12th February 2019

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF CHARGES AT TOURISM AND RAILWAY STATION CAR PARKS - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Report of the Executive Director of Place, Paul Johnston
Cabinet Member: Councillor Glen Sanderson, Environment and Local Services

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the outcome of the consultation exercise regarding the proposed increase to some existing car parking charges and introduction of parking charges at selected tourism/coastal, railway station car parks and at Tyne Riverside Country Park car park in Prudhoe. The report summarises the main issues raised during the consultation exercise and the Council's response to these issues and makes recommendations for refinements to the proposals in light of the consultation feedback.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes the main issues raised from the consultation exercise.
2. Approves the amended proposals as detailed in Appendix A that:-
 - a. withdraw the proposals to introduce charges at Haltwhistle Rail Station, Prudhoe Rail Station, Tyne Riverside Country Park, Cresswell, Blyth and Seaton Sluice car parks, and;
 - b. amend some of the tariff structures at the remaining car parks where new charges will still be implemented, in order to take into account feedback received during the consultation exercise.
3. Approves the allocation of £27,000 capital funding from the 'Invest to Save' reserve, which is required to implement the proposals.
4. Approves the following policy statement on car parking, namely that *'The County Council will maintain its policy of free parking in main town centres to support the local economy. However, the County Council will*

introduce car parking charges at tourism/visitor coastal car parks and at railway station car parks where appropriate to do so, in order to help manage the high demand in these locations, make the management and maintenance of these facilities more financially sustainable and to generate income that will assist in financing future investment in parking services. Where significant capital investment is required to support the provision of additional car parking capacity, the Council will also consider whether or not there is a need for car parking charges in the project business case, as part of the decision making process for its capital investment.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the following key themes in the draft Corporate Plan for 2017-2021:-

- 'Enjoying' - We want you to love where you live
- 'Connecting' - We want you to have access to the things you need
- 'Thriving' - We want to attract more and better jobs

Key Issues

The County Council currently owns/manages a range of car parks along the Northumberland coast which are used by local residents for recreation and leisure activity and by day trippers and tourists. It also owns and operates several railway station car parks across the county.

A public consultation exercise has been undertaken to seek feedback on proposals to:-

- increase charges at 6 out of the 7 car parks where charging is already in place;
- introduce charges at 7 coastal / tourist car parks, 4 railway station car parks and at Tyne Riverside (Prudhoe) Country Park.

The closing date for comments in response to the consultation was 7 January 2019. A total of 157 responses were received of which 151 were in opposition to the proposals and 6 were in support. Included within the 157 responses were two petitions, one relating to the proposals at the beach car parks in Blyth and the other relating to the parking charges at Prudhoe Railway Station and Tyne Riverside Country Park.

The main issues of concern to opponents included desire to retain free parking & cost/affordability, potential displacement of parking into surrounding areas, impact on the health & well being of local residents that are frequent users of the facilities for walking and recreation, impact on rail commuters/rail services and potential for increased reliance on car journeys, impact on local businesses/tourism economy and impact on volunteer groups, clubs and other organisations that use these parking facilities.

In light of the feedback received it is recommended that the proposed charges at Haltwhistle and Prudhoe Rail Stations are withdrawn, along with the proposed charges at Tyne Riverside Country Park, Cresswell, Blyth Beach and Seaton Sluice car parks.

It is also recommended that refinements are made to the proposed tariffs at the coastal car parks where existing charges are to be increased or new charges introduced, to help further mitigate the impact of these charges on local residents. The details of the revised tariffs are set out in Appendix A.

In response to both consultation feedback and the recent announcement of increased rail fares, it is also recommended that the proposed increase in the charge for the annual car park pass be phased in over two years, with the charge being £195 in 2019/20 and £225 in 2020/21.

The Council has been able to successfully negotiate heads of terms for the renewal of its lease for the Chare Ends car park at Holy Island.

It is considered that the implementation of the revised charges will help to manage demand in busy car parks, make the maintenance and management of parking services more financially sustainable and generate income that will assist in financing future investment in parking services whilst helping to safeguard key front-line services that ensure the county remains an attractive place to live, work in or visit.

It is estimated that the revised proposals will deliver additional income of £384,000 in a full year. The need for other compensatory savings to meet the anticipated £20,000 shortfall in income when compared to the £404,000 savings target included in the MTFP will be reviewed after implementation when actual income levels are known. The implementation of the arrangements will require capital investment of £27,000 and, taking into account lead in times for equipment supply and Traffic Regulation Orders, it is envisaged that they could be implemented by July 2019.

A new Council policy statement on car parking charges is detailed in the recommendations to this report.

1. Background

A public consultation exercise has been undertaken to seek feedback on proposals that involved increasing charges at 6 out of the 7 car parks where charging is already in place; introducing charges at 7 coastal / tourist car parks, 4 railway station car parks and at Tyne Riverside (Prudhoe) Country Park and increasing the charge for the annual car park pass.

There has been a good response to the consultation exercise with 157 submissions being made, including 2 petitions. The petitions were both in opposition to the charges and related to Prudhoe Railway Station and Tyne

Riverside Country Park (1543 signatures) and the beach car parks at Blyth (2306 signatures). Of the 157 responses only 6 were in favour of the proposals. The NALC County Committee has also responded on behalf of its members in opposition to the charges, and requesting that if charges are brought in then some of the income should be shared with the affected Town/Parish Councils.

The main issues and key themes raised are summarised as follows:-

- Desire to retain free parking and impact on those with low incomes (rail commuters and those parking up for recreation/leisure purposes)
- Displacement of parking into the surrounding area will create problems (including residential estates such as South Shore & South Beach in Blyth).
- Impact on health & well being of local residents that are regular visitors to the beach and country park for walking and recreation.
- Impact on volunteer groups, clubs and other organisations that are based at the beach/country park ie Tyne Valley Canoe Club (Prudhoe), Blyth Battery, Blyth Lifeguards.
- Impact on Active Northumberland (Blyth Beach Huts rental income)
- Impact on local businesses located close to the car parks through reduced visitor numbers (cafes/restaurants)
- Potential reduction in rail travel and increased reliance on car journeys
- Potential reduction in rail services if passenger numbers decline
- Request that the proposed charge of £225 for the annual parking pass be reduced or phased in (current charge is £130)
- Inequality/inconsistency with other areas (especially along the Tyne Valley as no charges at Hexham Tyne Green Country Park, or any other rail car parks on this line other than at Hexham)
- Perception that income generated from Prudhoe & the SE is being used to fund increased parking capacity in Hexham and other market towns which remains free.

2. Discussion

The proposed car parking charges in the consultation exercise relate to increases to existing parking charges, introduction of charges at railway station car parks and Tyne Riverside Country park which are currently free and introduction of charges at the busier coastal/visitor car parks where parking is currently free. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

2.1 Charging Proposals for Railway Station Car Parks and Tyne Riverside Country Park

There have been strong representations from Town and Parish Councils, residents, rail users and rail user groups and other stakeholders along the Tyne Valley in opposition to the proposed charges at Haltwhistle and Prudhoe Rail Stations. Currently the only rail station on the Tyne Valley line where parking charges are in place is the Northern Rail car park at Hexham

(£2/day). Northern Rail had introduced charges at Wylam station previously but withdrew the charges as a result of rail users simply choosing to park in other locations in/around the station. Concerns have therefore been raised regarding the financial impact of charges at Haltwhistle and Prudhoe rail stations on rail users, the desire to safeguard existing and secure increased services at key 'interchange' stations such as Prudhoe, the inequality of having free parking at other stations along this rail line and that in the absence of a consistent approach to car parking charges at stations along this line commuters would simply drive to the nearest free station car park resulting in unnecessary car travel and displacement issues.

In light of the comments received and taking into account the recent announcements over increased rail fares, it is recommended that the proposed car parking charges at the Haltwhistle and Prudhoe rail stations are withdrawn.

The close proximity of Prudhoe Railway Station car park to Tyne Riverside Country Park also means that charges at both sites should be aligned in order to prevent displacement issues. It is therefore recommended that if the Prudhoe Railway Station car park charging proposal is withdrawn, then the proposed introduction of parking charges at the Country Park should also be withdrawn. The Country Park cafe has also only just recently re-opened following the damage caused by the Storm Desmond Flood, and withdrawing the charging proposal would demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting this new community venture as part of the on-going recovery of the Country Park.

The principle of introducing car parking charges at Morpeth rail station to help finance improvements to car parking provision has been supported by Morpeth Town Council and the rail user group SENRUG. However, concerns have been raised over the need for the provision of significant additional car parking capacity to meet increasing demand and to help secure additional services from the station, improve overall bus interchange connectivity, provide seamless and reciprocal season ticket charging arrangements with adjoining car parks operated by Northern Rail, the timing of introducing charges and the need to mitigate the financial impact on regular commuters by phasing in the increased charge for the annual car park pass.

The Council is already developing plans to increase parking capacity by approximately 30 spaces at Morpeth Station and will be submitting a planning application shortly. More significant expansion of car parking capacity would entail the use of land that is currently owned by Network Rail. The Council has already had dialogue with both Network Rail and Northern Rail regarding parking provision at Morpeth rail station. Further dialogue will be undertaken to try and secure agreement to additional parking provision and reciprocity for annual tickets between the Council and Northern Rail car parks, so that a more seamless service is offered to rail users. Given that the Northern Rail car park already has a £3/day charge the Council considers it appropriate to

introduce a £3/day charge on its car parks for consistency. The Council has recently introduced a 72 hour maximum stay provision within its railway station car parks to help tackle 'garaging' issues and also to help prioritise spaces for use by daily commuters. In order to mitigate the financial impact on regular rail users it is recommended that the Council phases in the increased charge for its annual car park pass, and also to continue offering 3 and 6 month passes. It is proposed that the charges for the 2019/20 financial year would be £64 for 3 months, £108 for 6 months and £195 for 12 months. The charges for 2020/21 would be £72 for 3 months, £123 for 6 months and £225 for 12 months.

Charges have already been introduced at Alnmouth railway station car park as part of a separate exercise. However, further dialogue will be undertaken with Network Rail, Northern Rail and local landowners regarding the potential provision of significant additional parking capacity at Alnmouth and reciprocity between Council and Northern Rail car parks at the site.

2.2 Charging Proposals at Coastal/Tourism Car Parks that are Currently Free

There has been a significant level of opposition to the proposed introduction of charges at the coastal car parks in SE Northumberland. This includes the Town and Parish Councils in whose areas the car parks are located, namely Bamburgh, Cresswell, Seaton Valley and Blyth Town Council, which have all expressed their opposition to the proposed charges. East Chevington, Longframlington and Newton-on-the-Moor & Swarland Parish Council have also responded expressing their opposition to the charges. A 2,306 signature petition opposing the charges at Blyth has also been received.

The majority of local residents responding to the consultation have also expressed opposition to the charges. The main grounds for opposition and concerns raised relate to the desire to retain free parking and financial impact of charges, the impact on those residents who currently enjoy regular access for recreation/leisure and the associated health benefits, concern over displacement of parking into nearby residential estates, impact on several volunteer groups / organisations that regularly visit the beach car parks or are based there (such as Blyth Battery and Blyth Lifeguards), impact on tourism (including users of beach huts at Blyth) and on employment/local businesses that rely on visitors, such as the Drift Cafe at Cresswell. Blyth Town Council also raised specific concerns about the use of the car parks during large free public events which they organise including fireworks displays and music festivals.

In light of the feedback received, consideration has been given to reducing the tariffs and refining the tariff structure for the more urban coastal car parks at Blyth and Seaton Sluice to help mitigate the issues being raised, as this would give greater flexibility/access for free visits, improve overall affordability for shorter visits and reduce the potential for displacement issues. However, it is

recognised that the visitor / tourism economy in SE Northumberland is less well established than in the north of the county and this is an area that the Council is keen to develop further into order to support the economic regeneration & employment growth in the area. It is therefore considered that at this stage the charging proposals for the coastal car parks at Cresswell, Blyth and Seaton Sluice should be withdrawn.

Beadnell Parish Council are supportive of the car parking charges and consider them to be affordable and unlikely to deter visitors from the area. However, in order to mitigate any adverse impact on local residents who rely on the car park in order to access the beach for short walks as there aren't any other alternative parking places available, they have requested provision of a 1 hour free period. It is recommended that a 1 hour free period be included for the first year and this be reviewed after 12 months in light of ticket and enforcement data.

Bamburgh Parish Council has expressed its opposition to the charges which it considers are unfair and divisive, are likely to cause displacement parking issues in the village and wider area requiring signage and other clutter within the AONB, that all of the coastal car parks should have an hours free provision to benefit local residents not just those in the SE and that any income generated in Bamburgh should be ring fenced for use in their area. They have also queried whether there is any empirical evidence that car parking charges harm town centre trade, that the proposals should be put on hold and that introducing charges in the town centres would generate more significant levels of income to support investment in parking services.

The proposed charges at Links Road car park in Bamburgh are consistent with the other 'premium' tourism car parks at Holy Island and Seahouses. It is considered that the Links Road car park is primarily used by visitors/tourists, particularly those visiting Bamburgh Castle. Residents are able to access free on-street parking in the village centre on Front Street, with free parking also being available at two car parks off the Wynding for those wishing to access the beach. A yellow lining scheme to improve parking controls in Bamburgh village centre has also already been agreed with the Parish Council and will be implemented in Jan/Feb this year. This will mitigate the potential for any displacement issues. It is not therefore considered appropriate to amend the proposals for Links Road Car Park.

Proposed Increase to Existing Parking Charges

There has been a limited response to the consultation exercise with regards to increased charges at those coastal car parks in North Northumberland where parking charges are already in place. Embleton, Newton-by-the-Sea, Bamburgh and North Sunderland & Seahouses parish councils have all raised objections/concerns.

Embleton Parish Council have expressed concerns regarding risk of potential displacement issues from Craster and Newton affecting on-street parking areas around the wider area during peak summer periods, such as at Dunston Steads.

It is considered that the proposed increase in tariffs are not sufficient to cause such displacement issues, but this will be monitored and the need for additional on/off-street parking provision in the busier tourism areas kept under review.

Newton-by-the-Sea parish council has also requested that an hour free tariff should be introduced at Newton Steads and Low Newton car parks, both of which currently have a charge of £0.50 for 1 hour. However, as there is already a free car park in High Newton which helps support the local businesses and alleviate parking issues in the village and is less than 1 mile from both Low Newton and High Newton, it is recommended that a free hour isn't introduced for these two busy tourist car parks.

The car park at Craster is currently being extended to provide additional parking spaces and as part of the business case it was agreed that charges would be increased to help finance this significant investment. Craster Parish Council has previously expressed its support for the expansion plans and has not formally responded to this latest consultation exercise. However, the local County Councillor Wendy Pattinson has advised that some concerns have been raised informally within the community over the proposed new simplified tariff structure (3 hour or all day) due to the lack of provision for short stay visits. In order to allay these concerns it is therefore proposed to retain provision for one and two hours stay tariffs.

North Sunderland Parish Council has objected to the proposed increase in car parking charges due to concerns over displacement, that the same level of charges should be applied to all of the coastal/tourism car parks and that parking should remain free in town centres.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the Seahouses car park is within the centre of the village, it serves primarily as a visitor car park, particularly for those taking boat trips to the Farne Islands. The car park is not owned by the Council and therefore the Council incurs a cost for leasing the site which needs to be offset by income from parking charges. The Council has also just made a significant investment to improve the overflow area within the car park and would not have done so if there was no income being generated from the car park. However, the concerns of the parish council are acknowledged and whilst it was proposed to simplify the tariff structure to have 1 hour free and then 3 hours for £3.50, it is recommended that a 2 hours tariff be included (2 hours for £2.40).

The County Council has been able to successfully negotiate new heads of terms for the renewal of its lease for the management and operation of the car

park at Chare Ends, Holy Island. It is therefore now possible to include the income from this car park when estimating the overall income generated from the changes to car parking charges.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The County Council has listened to the feedback received from the consultation exercise and has made changes and refinements to the proposals, where it is considered appropriate to do so. The full details of the revised proposals which are now recommended for approval are given in Appendix A and a clear statement setting out the County Council's new parking policy is included within the recommendations to this report.

It is estimated that the overall income generated from these proposals would be £384,000 in a full year. This is £20,000 lower than the target saving of £404,000 which is included in the Council's MTFP revenue budget proposals. The need for other compensatory savings will be reviewed after the charging proposals have been implemented and data is available on the actual ticket income being achieved. The capital cost of implementing the charging proposals is £27,000 and it is recommended that this is met from the 'Invest to Save' reserve capital allocation within the MTFP.

In order to implement the proposals it will be necessary to design and erect new signage at the car parks and to purchase and install ticket machines. Where possible it is proposed to install ticket machines that can take card payments, as well as pay by phone and cash - as this not only offers greater choice for users but helps to reduce the frequency of cash collections and associated security issues with the machines and the cash collection activity. Card payment machines require a mains power supply and good connectivity to mobile phone networks and therefore are not a viable option in all car parks in the county. The lead-in time for supply and installation of ticket machines can be significant with recent experience indicating up to 16 weeks. It will also be necessary to publish Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) to detail which car parks will be affected and the range of tariffs to be used. It takes 12 weeks to go through the process of changing the orders before they are enforceable.

Taking into account timescales for TRO's and lead -in times for machines and signage it is anticipated that the full implementation of the proposed car park charges is likely to take around 5 months with implementation by July 2019.

Implications Arising out of the Report

Policy	A new policy statement on car parking is included within the recommendations to the report.
Finance and value for money	The cost of implementing the charges is estimated to be £27k and it is proposed that this would be met from the 'invest to save' capital reserve that the Council has created to support the revenue budget over the medium term. The estimated income from the proposals is £384,000 against a savings target in the MTFP of £404,000. The need for other compensatory savings to address this potential shortfall will be reviewed once the proposals have been implemented and actual data on income levels is available.
Legal	Statutory processes for the making of Traffic Regulation Orders will be followed to ensure they are enforceable.
Procurement	Procurement procedures will be followed for any equipment, services or specialist advice required to implement the action plans.
Human Resources	Enforcement activity will be undertaken within existing staffing resources.
Property	The Council has now agreed Heads of Terms for a new lease for Chare Ends, Holy Island following prolonged and difficult negotiations.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes No X N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and will be kept under review following implementation.
Risk Assessment	The proposals have been refined where appropriate to address and mitigate the concerns raised during the consultation exercise. Any parking displacement issues will be monitored and further consideration given to mitigations measures where appropriate.
Crime & Disorder	All of the parking charges will be enforceable. The remote location of some of the ticket machines is a security concern, this will be mitigated where possible through use of machines that offer the option of card payment/phone payment and regular emptying of cash.
Customer Consideration	The proposed fees are considered to be reasonable and are similar to parking charges at other tourism destinations and railway car parks in the region.

	Any displacement of parking into adjoining areas will be monitored and if causing issues for local residents will be addressed through introduction of parking restrictions (single yellow lines/permit schemes etc).
Carbon reduction	Introduction of charges encourages use of more sustainable forms of transport. The introduction of charges at railway stations will assist the Council to invest in additional parking capacity to help support increased rail use and the availability of an annual parking pass helps reduce any financial burden.
Wards	All

Background papers:

Cabinet Report titled 'Improvements and Investment in Parking Provision,' dated 13th November 2018.

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that relevant officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	initials
Finance Officer	AM
Monitoring Officer/Legal	n/a
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
I.T.	n/a
Director	PJ
Portfolio Holder(s)	GS

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Appendix A (NOTE: Changes following consultation shown in highlight)

Table 1 - Summary of Current and Proposed Parking Charges

Parking Place	Current tariff	New Tariff
Chare Ends, Holy Island	3 hours - £2.40 All Day - £4.40	3 hours - £3.50 All Day - £5.50
Green Lane, Holy Island	4 hours - £4.00 (coaches) All Day - £6.00 (coaches)	4 hours - £6.00 (coaches) All Day - £8.00 (coaches)
Station Yard, Seahouses	1 hour - Free 2 hours - £1.80 3 hours - £2.40 4 hours - £3.00 All Day - £3.50 4 hours - £4.00 (coaches) All Day - £6.00 (coaches)	1 hour - Free 2 hours - £2.40 3 hours - £3.50 All Day - £5.50 4 hours - £6.00 (coaches) All Day - £8.00 (coaches)
Craster	1 hour - £0.50 2 hours - £1.00 3 hours - £1.50 All Day - £2.00	1 hour - £1.00 2 hours - £2.00 3 hours - £3.00 All Day - £4.00
Newton Steads, Newton by the Sea	1 hour - £0.50 2 hours - £1.00 3 hours - £1.50 All Day - £2.00	1 hour - £1.00 2 hours - £2.00 3 hours - £3.00 All Day - £4.00
Low Newton, Newton by the Sea	1 hour - £0.50 2 hours - £1.00 3 hours - £1.50 All Day - £2.00	1 hour - £1.00 2 hours - £2.00 3 hours - £3.00 All Day - £4.00
Berwick Rail Station	All day £3.50	No change
Car Park Permit	£48 for 3 month £70 for 6 months £130 for 12 months	2019/20 £64 for 3 months £108 for 6 months £195 for 12 months

		<p>2020/21</p> <p>£72 for 3 months</p> <p>£123 for 6 months</p> <p>£225 for 12 months</p>
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Table 2 - Proposed new tariffs at car parks which are currently free

Parking Place	New Tariff
Links Road, Bamburgh	<p>3 hours - £3.50</p> <p>All day - £5.50</p> <p>4 hours - £6.00 (coaches)</p> <p>All day - £8.00 (coaches)</p>
Beadnell (including Overflow)	<p>1 hour - Free</p> <p>3 hours - £1.50</p> <p>All Day - £3.00</p>
Beachway, Blyth	Proposal withdrawn
Mermaid, Blyth	Proposal withdrawn
The Ranch, Blyth	Proposal withdrawn
Fountain Head, Seaton Sluice	Proposal withdrawn
Cresswell	Proposal withdrawn

Table 3 - Railway and Country Park Car Parks

Parking Place	Proposed Tariff
Alnmouth Railway Station (Northbound)	£1.50/day
Morpeth Railway Station (South)	£3/day
Haltwhistle Railway Station	Proposal withdrawn
Prudhoe Railway Station	Proposal withdrawn
Prudhoe Country Park	Proposal withdrawn