
TOWN CENTRE PARKING – SEASONAL OFFERS & FEETHAMS DEVELOPMENT

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis,
Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval on proposals for seasonal parking offers in the town centre to support trading and update Members on the Feethams Development.

Summary

2. In recent previous years the Council has offered a “free after 3pm” parking offer in each of the four Thursdays leading up to Christmas, and on Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. This has supported town centre traders and the seasonal markets.
3. This year Distinct Darlington has requested that this offer be repeated and that in addition, throughout September to December 2016, on a pilot basis, no charges be applied on Thursdays from 5pm. In connection with this proposal Distinct Darlington are encouraging traders to open later, at least until 6pm, and have gained commitments from a number of traders to do so.
4. As part of the overall strategy for the Feethams area a green park environment is planned for the area along the side of Skerne in front of the Department for Education building. This is to complement the significant development that has taken place. A planning application is currently progressing and if approved would allow construction to commence in late October/ November. If the planning application is approved it is proposed to delay commencement of the works until January 2017 to provide the maximum amount of parking space in this area with seasonal offers and to minimise disruption to pedestrians.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that :-

- (a) A “Free after 3pm” parking offer is implemented on the four Thursdays prior to Christmas 2016 in the Council’s off-street car parks and on-street bays. Those dates being 1, 8, 15 and 22 December 2016.
- (b) No charges apply on 25, 26 December 2016 and 1 January 2017.
- (c) From 1 October and through to 30 November 2016, no charges be applied on Thursdays in the Council’s off-street car parks and on-street bays from 5pm.
- (d) Members note the progress on the Feethams Development and agree to the delay in commencement of the Riverside Park Project to January 2017, subject to planning approval being granted.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To support evening retail trade in the town centre.
- (b) To support Christmas evening trading and the seasonal markets.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Bill Westland : Extension 6306

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no implications.
Carbon Impact	There are no implications.
Diversity	There are no implications.
Wards Affected	The proposals affect Central Ward.
Groups Affected	Town centre businesses and town centre visitors arriving by car.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council’s budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision due to the effect that it could have on those who use the town centre.
Urgent Decision	This is an urgent decision as Distinct Darlington’s request includes a parking offer in place from September.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The recommendations support retail traders in the town centre.
Efficiency	Supporting evening shopping may spread the number of vehicle movements across a larger number of hours and have a modest and positive impact on traffic congestion.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Car Parking Charging Proposals

7. Car parking charges in Darlington on-street and off-street parking facilities generally apply seven days a week including bank holidays (with a lower daily rate applying on Sundays).
8. There are exceptions and these are the four Thursdays before Christmas from 3:30pm, 25 and 26 December 2016 and 1 January 2017. The Thursday offer was agreed by Cabinet in November 2006, and the second offer in November 2009.
9. With respect to the Thursday offer, this year Distinct Darlington has asked that the offer be from 3:00pm. This was granted last year and promoted as “Free after 3”. This promotion would support the seasonal (Christingle) markets and evening shopping.
10. In addition, this year Distinct Darlington has asked that throughout October to December, on a pilot basis, no charges be applied on Thursdays from 5pm (the December “Free after 3” offer, if granted, would then take over). In connection with this proposal Distinct Darlington are encouraging traders to open later, at least until 6pm. Signed commitments have been received and deposited with the Council from in excess of 80 traders who confirmed they will be open for business until at least 6pm throughout December 2016. These include the Arts Shop, Peacocks, Iceland, Cornmill Complex, Waterhouse, Subway, Holland and Barratt.

Feethams Development

11. As part of the ongoing Town Centre strategy, the Feethams area has seen massive transformation. The Department for Education has relocated into the Town Centre, the Feethams Leisure complex has opened and the multi-storey car park has opened to serve both the town centre and new developments.
12. As confirmed in earlier Cabinet reports and as part of the overall Town Centre strategy for the area a green park environment is planned for the area along the side of Skerne in front of the Department for Education building.
13. This will create a much improved environment with new walkways, seating and landscaping to improve the town centre environment. This will improve the link from the railway station to the town centre and link into the walkways already provided as part of Feethams Leisure development.
14. The proposals have been subject to a consultation exercise as part of the development of the Town Centre Strategy and the response supported the project moving into the detailed development stages. The Council is now seeking Planning approval. The planning decision, if granted, would allow the work to commence in late October/November, but this would mean the loss of the car park and disruption

to access routes around the new development in the approach to Xmas.

15. The new Multi-Storey Car Park has been designed to accommodate the parking requirements of the town at peak times and assumed the loss of the parking spaces in this area to create the park area. However, it is recommended that subject to planning approval being granted the commencement of the work is delayed until January 2017 to provide the maximum amount of parking space in this area with seasonal offers and to minimise disruption to pedestrians, at what is a quieter period of the year.
16. Funding for the capital cost of the scheme comes directly from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) as a result of money it received from the Feethams development and from Government. The HCA has said that this money can only be spent on the riverside parkland scheme. There are also some contributions from other organisations to enhance the scheme.

Consultation

17. Distinct Darlington have consulted with numerous traders and have provided copies of responses to the Council. Not surprisingly there is a general desire for both of these offers to be applied and promoted. Businesses believe generally that this approach will attract more shoppers to Darlington and to stay longer. The intention is also that a number of businesses will open later on a regular basis if the free after 5pm offer goes ahead.

Legal Implications

18. There are no legal issues which need to be brought to Members attention.

Financial Implications

19. The estimated costs for the options are:-
 - (a) For option 1 – to operate the “Free After 3” proposal £9,800.
 - (b) For option 2 – to operate “Free After 5” on Thursdays between October and December £6,000.
 - (c) For options 1 and 2 combined £13,800.
20. The proposals will be funded within the overall resource allocation of Economic Growth.