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**TOWN CENTRE PARKING**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Bill Dixon, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy and Regeneration Portfolio  
Councillor David Lyonette, Transport Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Director Economic Growth Group**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval on actions to support and underpin the Town Centre Economy through the next 18 months, as the Cinema, Leisure complex and multi-storey car park development at Feethams takes place.

**Summary**

2. To enable work to commence on development of the Cinema and Leisure complex the car park on the former bus depot site adjacent to the Town Hall will close permanently to the public at midnight on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September.
3. The Cinema and Leisure development will include a nine screen Vue cinema and an 80-bed Premier Inn hotel as well as chicken restaurant, Nando's, Italian eatery, Prezzo and a Hungry Horse pub.
4. The development is expected to create up to 500 jobs, and bring more people into the town centre, giving a substantial boost to the Town Centre economy.
5. 270 parking spaces will be lost on closure of the car park. There will still be 274 public off-street parking spaces at Feethams located in Beaumont Street East and Beaumont Street West car parks and more than 3,500 off-street spaces will remain, in or close to the Town Centre.
6. The Council has developed plans to construct a new Multi-storey car park accommodating around 650 vehicles, replacing space lost to the development at Feethams plus some additional capacity to meet increased parking demand. This is expected to open around the same time as the new cinema.
7. A number of actions are proposed to support the Town Centre economy during the period of construction works at Feethams, these include:

- (a) Implementation of a communications plan promoting the Town Centre and informing visitors that there is still sufficient parking, and where they can park.
  - (b) Improvements to highway signage including the reinstatement of the electronic signs, located on the main approaches to the Town Centre. Capital cost £15K plus £5K annual running cost.
  - (c) Support for the Sunday market in the form of a £5,000 grant for marketing and events during November and December 2014. This will come from existing budgets.
  - (d) Encouragement to drivers to stay in the Town Centre for longer, introducing an hours free parking in all of the Council's off- street car parks for drivers paying for two or more hours. So for example motorists purchasing two hours parking would get a third hour free. It is proposed that this is introduced in November 2014. Estimated cost £175K per annum.
  - (e) Introducing a lower tariff of 50p per hour in four of the Council's less busy car parks (East Street, Garden Street, Upper Archer Street and Chesnut Street), so that motorists have the option of switching to these car parks and paying less to park. The one hour free parking described in 7(c) would also apply in these car parks. It is proposed that this is introduced from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014. Estimated cost £90K per annum.
  - (f) Standardisation of the parking charges at Abbots Yard car park with charges at the other popular Town centre car parks. That is the standard charge of £1:00 per hour, and if approved introduction of the promotional offer detailed in point 7 (c).
  - (g) Provision of a temporary Saturday Park & Ride car park, located at Darlington College, to operate from mid-October 2014 to early January 2015. This will provide extra parking during the period of peak parking demand in the run up to Christmas. Cost £5K. Consideration will be given to the option of extending a Park & Ride offer should this prove popular.
  - (h) On completion of the construction contract for the Department for Education (DfE) Office, expected to be in January 2015 the temporary re-instatement of parking adjacent to the Town Hall and DfE for the period up until completion of the MSCP. At a cost of £100K, this will provide 110 parking spaces around the Town Hall.
8. It should be noted in November 2013 Council released £500K in 2014/15 to cover the cost of parking contingency measures. £170k of this has already been earmarked for the temporary re-instatement of parking adjacent to the Town Hall, the Park & Ride, plus other elements used for highway signage, marketing and communications. This leaves a balance of £330K in 2014/15.

- (a) In summary the total forecast cost of the parking contingency measures, marketing and promotions are £320K in 2014/15 and £380K in 2015/16. See Table 1, point 22 for a summary of the costs.

## **Recommendations**

9. It is recommended that, subject to approval of funding by Council on 25 September 2014, Members approve:-

- (a) The £5,000 grant to the Sunday market.
- (b) The introduction of the extra hour's free parking for drivers paying for two or more hours, to start in mid-November 2014 and run until spring 2016.
- (c) The introduction of a lower tariff of 50p per hour in four of the Council's less busy car parks (East Street, Garden Street, Upper Archer Street and Chesnut Street), to start on 1<sup>st</sup> October and run until Spring 2016.
- (d) The standardisation of parking charges in Abbots Yard car park with the other popular Town centre car parks.
- (e) The additional parking to be provided through a temporary Park and Ride scheme and through temporarily reinstating some parking spaces adjacent to the Town Hall and DfE.
- (f) Reinstatement of the electronic highway signage showing available parking spaces in Town Centre car parks.

## **Reasons**

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

- (a) To encourage Town Centre visitors parking in Council car parks to stay in the Town Centre for longer.
- (b) To support the Town Centre businesses including the Markets through the next 18 months, so that they are well placed to maximise the benefits to Town Centre Economy arising from the Feethams developments.
- (c) To help reduce pressure on popular car parks by more evenly distributing parking across all of the Town Centre car parks.

**Ian Williams, Director Economic Growth Group**

OJW: Extension 6035

S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact
Health and Well Being	No impact
Carbon Impact	This decision may result in more people choosing to drive to the Town Centre, in place of walking, cycling or using public transport. Though this impact is expected to be minimal.
Diversity	No impact
Wards Affected	Central Ward
Groups Affected	Town centre businesses. All Town Centre visitors arriving by car.
Budget and Policy Framework	This is an amendment to the budget framework. A report will go to Council requesting approval for changes to the parking charges on 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2014.
Key Decision	This is a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	Yes The start date for works on the Cinema and leisure complex was finalised in early September. An urgent decision allows changes to the parking tariffs (50p charge in four car parks) to be introduced on 1 <sup>st</sup> October.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Actions outlined in this report help support the Town Centre Economy.
Efficiency	No significant impact.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

11. To enable work to commence on development of the Cinema and Leisure complex the car park on the former bus depot site adjacent to the Town Hall will close permanently to the public at midnight on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September.
12. 270 parking spaces will be lost on closure of the car park. There will still be 274 public off-street parking spaces at Feethams located in Beaumont Street East and Beaumont Street West car parks.
13. The Council has developed plans to construct a new Multi-storey car park accommodating around 650 vehicles, replacing space lost to the development at Feethams plus some additional capacity to meet increased parking demand. This is expected to open around the same time as the new cinema.
14. In order to address the shortage parking in advance of the MSCP being delivered, short term 'contingency parking' measures are required. Parking contingency can be delivered through the following means, or a combination:
  - (a) Encourage drivers to relocate to alternative Town Centre car parks where there is spare capacity, this is particularly the case at East Street, the Cornmill and Park Place car parks. There is also capacity in the car parks north of the Town Centre, for example Archer Street and Garden Street.
  - (b) Provide additional alternative parking.
  - (c) Encourage visitors to use the bus, walk or cycle to Town.
15. Measures to address the issues arising from the loss of car parking in the Feethams are:
  - (a) Measure 1: Communication

A Communication Strategy has been devised which includes:

    - (i) Publication of information on where to park.
    - (ii) Implementation of a highway signing scheme within car parks and on the approaches to the Town Centre, this includes the reinstatement of the electronic parking signs located on the main approaches to the Town Centre.
    - (iii) Distribution of information to motorists using the Feethams car parks in the week before closure.
    - (iv) Communication via the media, social media and Darlington Together
    - (v) Partnership working with Distinct Darlington and Town centre businesses to communicate the message Darlington is open for business.

- (vi) The communications campaign will include information on alternatives to using the car for visiting the Town Centre.

It is proposed that Communication is timed to happen over a number of 'waves', starting with closure of the car park, then the promotion of reduced tariffs in a number of car parks and during the run up to Christmas. The message being Darlington is very much open for business. We will also be promoting the Saturday Park and Ride.

The communications plan will be reviewed weekly during the initial period of change.

(b) Measure 2: Parking tariffs

Darlington's Town Centre car parks range in popularity, a number are extremely busy and often full at peak times, for example Abbott's Yard, Commercial Street East and West and the Beaumont Street car parks, whereas a number of other car parks are less busy, and usually have some spare capacity, even on busy shopping days.

Reducing the short stay tariff as a short term measure in less busy car parks during the period of construction works at Feetham's would be a mechanism for encouraging drivers, to transfer from the car park they usually use. This would also offer encouragement for drivers to still travel to Darlington Town Centre, rather than go elsewhere.

Council operated car parks in or close to the Town Centre, where there is usually spare capacity are East Street, Garden Street, Chesnut Street and Upper Archer Street.

It is proposed that from 1<sup>st</sup> October the tariff in each of these car parks will be reduced from £1:00 to 50 pence per hour.

As an additional incentive to encourage motorists to stay longer in Darlington Town centre, from mid-November it is proposed that the Council introduces an hours free parking in all of the Councils off- street car parks for drivers paying for two or more hours. So for example motorists purchasing two hours parking would get a third hour free. It is proposed that this is introduced in November 2014. Estimated cost £150k-£200K per annum. This means that in the four car parks with a lower tariff drivers will be able to park for three hours for £1:00. In other car parks it will be £2:00 for three hours.

(c) Measure 3: Supply of Additional parking

Provision of a temporary out of Town Park & Ride operating on Saturdays only, with free bus transport into/from the Town centre from Darlington College.

The College car park, which is not used on a Saturday can accommodate around 400 vehicles.

On presentation of their parking ticket people using the College Park & Ride will be able to catch an Arriva bus from the bus stops adjacent to the College to/from the Town Centre.

From February 2015 additional temporary parking will be available through the temporary re-instatement of parking adjacent to the Town Hall and new Department for Education Office. This will provide 110 spaces around the Town Hall.

It is proposed that the 110 additional spaces are in place prior to the start of construction work on the new Multi Storey Car Park and that this is retained as temporary public car parking until the point where the MSCP becomes operational.

## **Financial Implications**

16. The financial impact on parking income depends upon on how drivers who currently park at Feethams adapt to the temporary reduction in parking space in that area and to the parking promotions outlined in this report.
17. It is difficult to forecast the financial impact of the introduction of the reduced tariff at the less busy car parks. This would reduce income from the existing users of those car parks, but will capture new users, who might otherwise have not come into the Town Centre.
18. Gross income in the four car parks East Street, Garden Street, Chesnut Street and Upper Archer Street in 2013/14 was £186K. Introduction of the half price tariff of £0.50 would reduce annual income from existing users by £90K. However if successful in attracting drivers displaced from the Feethams car park, or other car parks there is potential to substantially increase annual income in those car parks.
19. The estimated loss of parking revenue from introducing an hours free parking for drivers paying for two or more hours is £175K per annum. This is based on an analysis of the average length of stay and the impact of this offer when previously available in the Councils off-street car parks.
20. The reinstatement of the reinstatement of the electronic signs, located on the main approaches to the Town Centre. Capital cost £15K plus £5K annual running cost.
21. It should be noted in November 2013 Council released £500K in 2014/15 to cover the cost of parking contingency measures. £170k of this has already been earmarked for the temporary re-instatement of parking adjacent to the Town Hall, the Park & Ride, plus other elements used for highway signage, marketing and communications.

22. Table 1 details the financial implications of the contingency measures marketing and promotions

Table 1

Measure	2014/15	2015/16
50p / hour parking in East St, Gdn St, Archer St and Chesnut St car parks	£45K	£90K
Extra hours free parking in all Council car parks	£85K	£175K
Loss of income due to displacement of drivers from Council car parks	£50K	£100K
Grant to Markets	£5K	-
Park & Ride	£5K	-
Re-instatement of parking adjacent to the Town Hall	£100K	-
Marketing Communications /	£15K	£10K
Highway Signage	£15K	£5K
Total	£320K	£380K