

**CABINET
8 NOVEMBER 2022**

TOWN CENTRE PARKING OFFER

**Responsible Cabinet Member
Councillor Jonathan Dulston, Leader & Economy Portfolio
Councillor Andy Keir, Local Services Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Dave Winstanley, Group Director of Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides an update on Town Centre Car Parking Offers and seeks approval to extend the current free car parking offer for a further three months.

Summary

2. Parking offers have been in place to support the town centre since June 2018. Since January 2021 the Tees Valley Combined Authority have provided the funding to support parking offers across the Tees Valley for a two-year period.
3. For Darlington this funding enabled a free two-hour parking offer in Council operated car parks and on-street pay and display parking areas in the town centre area.
4. The number of people using car parking places that have offers in place has returned to pre-covid levels. It is not possible to identify one single intervention that has supported this recovery. It is likely a mixture of the town centre offer provided by the businesses; the range of events and initiatives to support the town centre delivered by the council and the parking offer.
5. The funding from TVCA comes to an end at the end of December 2022. It is recognised that the Council cannot sustain free parking offers endlessly. However, it is the strong desire of the administration that the council should continue to support the town centre with a continued short-term period of parking offers to support the recovery through the more difficult post-Christmas trading period until April 2023 and the continuation of offers will be reviewed over the coming months.
6. The funding of this offer is covered in the financial implications section of this report.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
- (a) Either:
- (i) Agree that £475k is released to cover the costs of extending the parking offer for 3 months, or
- (ii) Agree not to extend the funding of the current car parking offer.
- (b) Subject to 7 (a) (i) being agreed by Cabinet, agree that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director, Highways and Capital Projects to implement the proposal.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) to support the ongoing recovery of the town centre;
- (b) to have regard to the best use of public funds.

Dave Winstanley
Group Director of Services

Background Papers

Town Centre Car Parking Cabinet Report June 2018
 Town Centre Car Parking Cabinet Report October 2019
 Town Centre Car Parking Cabinet Report September 2020
 Town Centre Parking Cabinet Report December 2020.

Dave Winstanley

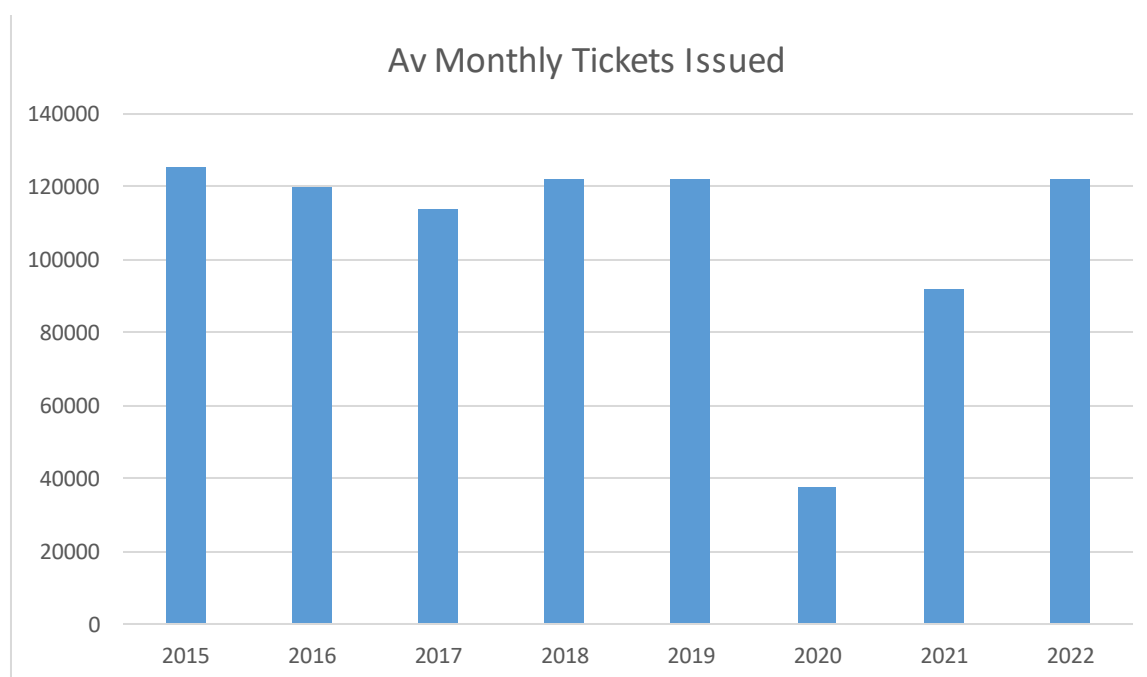
S17 Crime and Disorder	Whilst anti-social behaviour and crime does on occasions take place in car parks, there is no impact on crime and disorder as a result of this report
Health and Wellbeing	Parking offers can potentially conflict with some other Council and Government policy objectives such as promotion of sustainable transport and climate change that have a positive impact on health and well-being. However, this is a short-term extension to ensure recovery post Covid is established
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	Parking strategy and controls are a method of encouraging more sustainable travel choices and impacting positively on climate change. If the offer is extended there may be an impact on carbon emissions as a result of encouraging car journeys into the town centre
Diversity	An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken on the offer introduced in January 2021. The offer remains the same and therefore the assessment undertaken at the time remains in place.
Wards Affected	Car parks are located in Park East and Northgate, however residents from across the Borough and beyond will utilise them

Groups Affected	No group is affected any differently to any othe
Budget and Policy Framework	The extension of the parking offer does not affect the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	The proposals contained in this report have impacts on aspects of the Council Plan. The proposal seeks to provide a further period of support for the town centre recovery
Efficiency	There is no impact
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. The Council has funded a variety of Town Centre Parking initiatives to support the Town Centre Economy since June 2018.
10. Most recently the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet of 27 November 2020 approved funding to support parking offers across the Tees Valley for a two-year period. This funding ceases at the end of December 2022.
11. The graph below shows the average monthly tickets issued per year for car parks and on street locations included within the offer. The monthly tickets issued has recovered to pre-covid levels, but the offer has not boosted visits beyond pre-covid levels.



12. It is not possible to identify a single intervention that has supported the recovery in parking numbers, it is likely a mixture of:
 - (a) the town centre offer provided by the businesses.

- (b) the range of events and initiatives to support the town centre delivered by the Council, and.
 - (c) the parking offer.
13. The funding from TVCA comes to an end at the end of December 2022. It is recognised that the Council cannot sustain free parking offers endlessly. However, it is the strong desire of the administration that the council should continue to support the town centre with a continued short-term extension of parking offers to support the recovery through the more difficult post-Christmas trading period until April 2023, and the continuation of offers will be reviewed over the coming months. It is acknowledged that if the parking offer is extended it temporarily prioritises town centre recovery over other policy objectives, specifically the promotion of sustainable transport and climate change impacts. However, this is a short-term extension considered to be necessary by the administration to support the recovery of the town centre economy. Sustainable Transport and Climate change outcomes continue to be extremely important and high priorities for the Council.
14. In assessing other aspects of recovery bus patronage and boarders in the town centre have not returned to pre-covid levels. Pre-Covid bus boarders in the town centre were far higher than car users, this is now significantly less than pre-covid levels.
15. It is not possible to identify a single reason for this, it is likely a mixture of:
- (a) Changing work patterns as a result of Covid
 - (b) Advice and guidance given through Covid regarding use of public transport may have deterred vulnerable and elderly from using public transport and they have not returned.
 - (c) Change in shopping patterns.
 - (d) Current issues associated with the performance of bus services.
16. Work is ongoing with bus operators to improve performance and once reliability, consistency and confidence is restored bus services they will be promoted and bus, walking and cycling will be promoted as option of choice to visit the town centre.
17. Bus operators have told us that free parking offers have a detrimental impact on provision of bus service and patronage. However, there is currently a real challenge with performance and reliability. Government is also positively directing the use of parking policy as a means of promoting sustainable transport and achieving climate change objectives. The reintroduction of parking charges could assist with increased numbers using public transport which may help sustain the commercial network and the continuation of offers will be reviewed over the coming months.
18. The aim of the extension is to continue the offer through the more difficult post-Christmas trading period. The proposed offer is the same as the current offer that was detailed and approved by Cabinet in December 2020.

Financial Implications

19. The Rail Heritage Quarter has drawn down funding from the TVCA Indigenous Growth Fund (IGF) programme and a further drawdown of £496k is being sought for the refurbishment of the Loco1 replica, which contributes to the aim of the overall project and contributes to the targets of the IGF Programme to:
 - (a) Remediate/regenerate vacant and derelict land and property
 - (b) Revitalise town centres and urban core and stimulate investment
 - (c) Enhance culture and tourism physical infrastructure
20. Subject to approval from TVCA under their assurance framework this would release Council funds to extend the current free parking offer until April 2023 at which point it will be reviewed. It will reduce the available Indigenous Growth Fund by the amount indicated in the report.

Legal Implications

21. Members must take into consideration that the parking offers for Council operated car parks are likely to have adverse impacts on providers of private car parks. The proposals set out in the report have been reviewed from the perspective of subsidy control and anti-competition law and it is considered that the proposals are lawful.