

**CABINET  
8 OCTOBER 2019**

---

**TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKING**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Members –  
Councillor Paul Howell, Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio  
Councillor Alan Marshall, Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams,  
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services**

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider car parking initiatives in the town centre to support the town centre economy.

**Summary**

2. An initial review of town centre parking and charges has been undertaken to consider options to further support town centre trading.
3. In June 2018 the Council introduced a low cost long stay parking offer in East Street Car Park in the town centre and a free two-hour parking offer in numerous car parks to support the town centre. The first year of this offer was subject to review following an initial year of operation and was funded through a one-off financial contribution. It is proposed to retain this parking offer (subject to paragraph 5 below) with additional promotion by businesses and the Council to further stimulate town centre trading.
4. To provide further free parking and encourage greater use of the town centre a Free on Sunday initiative is proposed from 1 November 2019 to send a simple message that can be promoted by both the Council and Business. The offer will apply in all Council operated pay and display car parks, Feethams multi-storey car park and all on-street pay and display parking bays. This initiative will support trading and town centre use on the approach to Christmas and extend beyond Christmas. This offer will replace the offers that have been previously run on the approach to Christmas.
5. It is intended that both these offers run until 1 May 2020, with a review of their impact during the offer period. More initiatives to encourage town centre activity are being developed as part of the Town Centre Strategy and Future High Streets Fund and these will be brought forward as they are developed.

6. The review identified that the Imperial Quarter and Duke Street areas of the town centre are some of the busiest parking areas. The Council proposes to develop plans that can be consulted on to increase the amount of parking spaces available in these areas. This will be developed and built into the Council's Local Transport Plan programme. In developing the options for the Duke Street area, the Council will also look to investigate other known issues in terms of road safety and the general environment as a potential holistic scheme for area.
7. The Council has been investing in the refurbishment of car parks across the town and Abbots Yard Car Park will be refurbished next year. The Council will consider the pedestrian approaches to the car park to try and improve the arrival into the town centre, the spaces available and layout of spaces to make it more user-friendly car park. This will be developed and built into the Council's Local Transport Plan work programme.
8. The Council will work with business to promote the range of offers in the town centre to encourage support for the town centre.
9. The potential cost of the offer is £205,000 but this depends on usage and other factors. The cost will be funded by the Town Centre Futures Fund and the financial position will be kept under review.

## **Recommendations**

10. It is recommended that:
  - (a) a Free on Sunday initiative is introduced from 1 November 2019 in all Council operated pay and display car parks, Feethams Multi-storey car park and on-street pay and display parking bays. The initiative will run until 1 May 2020 with a review taking place ahead of the end date as referred to in (c) below.
  - (b) the parking offer introduced in June 2018 be continued to cover the same period as the Free on Sunday offer as referred to in (a) above; The offer being:
    - (i) two hours free car parking in specific car parks located outside of the ring road,
    - (ii) East Street car park having an offer of all day parking for £2.00.
  - (c) both the Free on Sunday initiative and the parking offers introduced in June 2018 are reviewed ahead of May 2020:
    - (i) determine their impact.
    - (ii) consider them in conjunction with the emerging Town Centre Strategy as it is developed.
    - (iii) have regard for the Council's overall financial position.
  - (d) Plans are developed that can be consulted on to increase the amount of parking spaces available in Duke Street and the Imperial Quarter areas.

## Reasons

11. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To approve the amendment to charges
- (b) To enhance the attractiveness of the town centre to visitors and residents.

**Ian Williams**  
**Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services**

## Background Papers

Town Centre Car Parking Cabinet Report 5 June 2018

Dave Winstanley: Extension 6618

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 Well Being	No additional impact on health and wellbeing of residents as a result of this report.
Carbon Impact	There may be an impact on carbon emissions as a result of encouraging more car journeys into the town centre.
Diversity	An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken on the offer introduced in June 2018. Equality and diversity will be considered in the development of the parking proposals outlined in this report in the design stages. Removing parking charges on a Sunday is not considered likely to have an impact on diversity but implementation will be monitored to ensure any potential adverse impacts are identified and addressed.
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 other.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This a key decision as the proposals result in financial implications which are significant to the budget for the service.
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The proposals contained in this report have an impact on the Perfectly Placed element of the strategy; encouraging more people to utilise the town centre for business, retail, social and leisure.
Efficiency	There is no impact on the Council's Efficiency agenda as a result of this report.
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

12. The Council's Parking Policy is in place to try and manage the space available within the town centre between the competing demands. The general principle is that within the inner ring road parking is generally intended for short stays with a regular turnover and availability of space for shopping and leisure visits. Commuters and more longer-term parking requirements are generally provided outside the inner ring road.
13. Town centre retail trading across the country continues to be challenging and Darlington is no exception. Well known high street retailers are regularly announcing profit warnings and many businesses are contracting or closing.
14. The Council is responding through the Town Centre Strategy and has been successful in progressing to the next stages of the High Streets for the Future Fund. However, car parking and parking charges continue to be cited by the public and traders as a barrier to town centre footfall. It is difficult to demonstrate cause and effect; however, views are very strong that parking availability and pricing is a key consideration.
15. As the Town Centre Strategy and Future High Streets Fund initiative are developed and delivered there will be a need to review the parking strategy and other policies to further support town centre activity. Therefore, it is probable that there will be changes to parking arrangements over the short, medium and longer terms to adapt as these strategies are delivered. The parking policy will be reviewed and amended to reflect the changes.
16. In June 2018 a parking offer was introduced that provided low cost long stay parking in the town centre at East Street Car Park and also introduced a two-hour free period in car parks outside the inner ring road. This effectively offered three hours parking for £1. This offer was funded through a one-off contribution. The continuation of the offer will have financial impact on the Council that will need to be considered.
17. A further review has been undertaken looking at the present offer and further options that could be introduced to assist and support the town centre economy in the short term.

### Review and Parking Options

18. In reviewing and developing options the current car park arrangements and usage levels have been a starting point to develop options based on the data available. The review has considered several factors:
  - (a) the parking charges
  - (b) the times of operation
  - (c) occupation and usage of parking areas
  - (d) the location of parking; inside or outside the inner ring road.
  - (e) the type of parking whether it be on-street parking bays or car parks.

19. As mentioned above it is the intention to continue to review and develop parking options to support the town centre. However, some initial outcomes that are recommended to be progressed are as follows:

#### Imperial Quarter and Duke Street Areas

20. Some of the busiest parking spaces exist in the Duke Street and Imperial Quarter of town. A review has identified the possibility of increasing the number of on-street parking bays in this area. It is proposed that the Council develops options and consults on proposals to increase the amount of parking spaces available in these areas. This will be developed and built into the Council's Local Transport Plan work programme.
21. In developing the options for the Duke Street area, the Council will also look to investigate other known issues in terms of road safety and the general environment as a potential holistic scheme for area.

#### Abbots Yard Car Park

22. The Council has been investing in the refurbishment of car parks across the town and Abbots Yard Car Park will be refurbished next year. As part of the refurbishment the Council will consider the pedestrian approaches to the car park to try and improve the arrival into the town centre, the spaces available and layout of space to make it more user-friendly car park. This will be developed and built into the Council's Local Transport Plan work programme.

#### **Offer Approved by Cabinet in June 2018**

23. In June 2018 Cabinet approved the following offers to stimulate and support the town centre.
  - (a) East Street car park, which is within the inner ring road changed to allow people to park all day for £2. This is low cost long stay parking in the town centre.
  - (b) Specific car parks outside the inner ring road have a two-hour free offer. This provides a free option for two hours and offers three hours parking for £1.
24. The estimated cost of this proposal was £120,000 per annum, but this was caveated on the fact that this was dependent on usage and other factors. It was agreed that the costs for the first year were to be funded from the Town Centre Futures Fund, however subsequently the call on this account was not required due to savings in other areas of parking. The offer has a financial implication of around £158,000 per annum and has provided low cost all day parking in the town centre and free two-hour parking in numerous car parks. It is recommended that the parking offer continues until 1 May 2020 and be supported by additional promotion by businesses and the Council to further stimulate town centre trading. It is recommended that this offer is reviewed again as the emerging Town Centre Strategy initiatives are developed.

## **Further Offers**

25. In addition to the initiatives mentioned above a new parking offer is proposed. A Free on Sunday initiative is intended to send a simple message that can be promoted by both the Council and Business to encourage use of the town centre.
26. The offer is proposed to commence on 1 November 2019 and will extend to all Council operated pay and display car parks, Feethams multi-storey car park and on-street pay and display parking bays. It is proposed that this offer be introduced for a six month offer period to support the approach to Christmas and extend beyond to provide further free parking in the town centre. There is a financial impact of around £73,000 for the initial six-month period. This offer will replace the offers that have been previously run on the approach to Christmas
27. The impact of the Free on Sunday offer, and the offer introduced in June 2018 will be reviewed ahead of May 2020 and the offers will continue until a decision is made regarding their continuation.
28. The Free on Sunday offer removes both charges and control of parking duration to encourage free longer stay visits into the town centre for shopping and leisure the spaces will operate on a first come, first served basis. This could mean prime spaces are occupied all day and this will require review and monitoring during the trial period.
29. It is recommended that this is reviewed in conjunction with Town Centre Strategy initiatives as they are developed and the overall financial position of the Council.

## **Financial Implications**

30. The reviews of parking areas in the Imperial Quarter and Duke Street will have a cost implication to implement and this would be considered as part of the development of a proposal and the Local Transport Plan Programme. However, if additional spaces are created there could potentially be additional parking revenue generated.
31. The Council receives income from car parking charges which is used to offset the running costs such as repair and maintenance, business rates and staffing. Although not included as a cost in the budget, there is an apportionment cost of holding the land for the purpose of car parking. This net income provides resources to fund other services provided by the Council and if income is not achieved, it is to the detriment of the Council's overall financial position.
32. Car parking charges are used in many ways and, whilst it is a view held by some that they are only levied to raise income for the Council, this is not the case. A pricing structure clearly needs to cover costs and is acknowledged as a town centre issue. The Council's overall financial position must also be a significant factor when considering the pricing structure.
33. The funding predictions this year show that income is likely to be less than that set in the Council's Financial Plan and as such any continuation or new offer will compound the predicted position and the Council's overall financial position.

34. The cost associated with maintaining the offer introduced by Cabinet in June 2018 until May 2020 is estimated in the region of £132,000 and the estimate of costs associated with the Free on Sunday offer from 1 November 2019 until 1 May 2020 is £73,000.
35. It is proposed the full cost of £205,000 is funded from the Town Centre Futures Fund.
36. The Council recognises the importance of the town centre and need to encourage trade and use of the town centre. However, it must carefully consider the offers that can be provided in relation to the Council's overall financial position which is why these offers are to be reviewed and in tandem with emerging work on the Town Centre Strategy.

### **Legal Implications**

37. Subject to Members' approval the necessary legal notice will be made to implement the offer.

### **Equalities Considerations**

38. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out for the parking offer introduced in June 2018. The main impacts identified were as a result of the 9 long stay car parks being located outside the inner ring road, which means a short/moderate walk into the town centre that some individuals may find more difficult. The particular groups of people with protected characteristics this affects are; Age, Disability, Pregnancy, and Carers. However, as a result of introducing the 2 hours free parking it is likely that the pressure on the short stay parking within the inner ring road will be reduced, freeing up more spaces for individuals who find the walk difficult to access parking. In addition, on street car parking for Blue Badge Holders is not affected and there is also a car park exclusively for Blue Badge Holders at the Town Hall.
39. An EIA screening exercise has also been undertaken for the proposal to remove car parking charges on Sundays for a trial period. This concluded there is a very low risk of the proposal leading to insufficient car parking spaces to meet demand – including for Blue Badge holders – and therefore people with disabilities and/or older people not being able to park in the town centre as easily, however the likelihood of this is considered to be minimal. Sufficiency of parking spaces will however be monitored during implementation to ensure any potential adverse impacts are identified and addressed.
40. Equality and diversity will be considered in the development of the parking proposals for Abbots Yard, Imperial Quarter and Duke Street area as part of the feasibility and design stages.

### **Consultation**

41. The proposals for Abbots Yard, Imperial Quarter and Duke Street will be subject to consultation as part of the feasibility and design stages.