

Agenda Item

REPORT OF Planning and Economy Manager
To: Community and Resources Committee
Subject: Notice of Motion referred from Full Council
Date: 17th August 2020 **Reference:**

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To consider the following written notice of motion proposed by Councillor McGeough and referred to this committee by Full Council on the 27th July 2020.

Given the strong feeling from the recent C and R committee combined with petitions from the public and representations from local businesses, I propose that TDC introduce free car parking for the first one or two hours in some or all of the car parks in Bideford, Holsworthy and Torrington town centres for a period of two months in order to further help traders during this pandemic crisis . This measure to be implemented as soon as is possible. How the cost for this will be met is to be decided by members considering - but not limited to - reviewing the capital project and/or rebalancing current car parking tariffs."

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid 19 pandemic has swept across the globe causing both a health and economic emergency. The response of the Government, to limit the spread of the virus, was to lock the country down and advise people to stay at home. All non essential business were advised to close and specific direction for closure was made to retail establishments. This has obviously had a detrimental effect on the financial position of those businesses. To try to compensate the Government announced a range of grant and support schemes and each business in the Town Centres will have benefitted in some way from one or more of these schemes. These were intended to support businesses to survive until they could be reopened.

Covid 19 has also had a detrimental impact on the financial position of Torrington District Council and we are now being encouraged by the government to maximise our income generation to assist with economic recovery.

A previous notice of Motion that requested 2 months free parking in the Town Centre Car Parks to support town centre business was debated and subsequently rejected at Community and Resources committee on the 13th July. The committee were though minded to consider alternative proposals and gave words of encouragement to Cllr McGeough to propose an alternative motion for consideration, hence the motion as presented above.

A full covering report that debated the merits or otherwise of free town centre parking was provided at the previous meeting and therefore this report will not revisit that debate.

This report is intended to provide members with relevant information in order that they can be in an informed position when resolving whether to support or reject the above written notice of motion.



2. REPORT

The following table shows an estimate of the cost of providing a range of 2hrs free arrangements in a range of town centre car parks. The figures are based on average takings for each tariff or time slot over the six month period May- Oct 2019.

	Car Parks	Cost for Free Parking until 9:00	Cost for Free Parking until 10:00
Great Torrington	Sydney House	£2,312.44	£4,306.95
	Barley Grove	£982.25	£2,405.00
	Total	£3,294.68	£6,711.95
Bideford	Bridge Street	£1,178.49	£3,876.74
	The Quay	£1,711.13	£3,952.15
	The Pill	£1,060.69	£3,509.60
	Riverbank Longstay	£3,772.62	£6,038.45
	Riverbank Shortstay	£329.75	£1,008.15
	Clarence Wharf	£513.20	£967.04
	Total	£8,565.87	£19,352.14
Holsworthy	Holsworthy Manor	£1,717.06	£3,830.73
	Total	£1,717.06	£3,830.73
Grand Total		£11,265.18	£25,587.86
	Car Parks	Cost for 1 hour free parking for 2 months	Cost for 2 hour free parking for 2 months
Great Torrington	Sydney House	£2,988.40	£9,093.20
	Barley Grove	£1,421.70	£3,743.30
	Total	£4,410.10	£12,836.50
Bideford	Bridge Street	£6,523.60	£13,646.80
	The Quay	£6,770.00	£12,567.60
	The Pill	£5,082.00	£11,130.00
	Riverbank Longstay	£1,007.88	£5,082.60
	Riverbank Shortstay	£3,170.80	£8,908.40
	Clarence Wharf	£358.08	£1,073.76
	Total	£22,912.36	£52,409.16
Holsworthy	Holsworthy Manor	£2,984.40	£7,437.20
	Total	£2,984.40	£7,437.20
Grand Total		£30,306.86	£72,682.86

Permits and reserved bays

We would propose making no concession to permit or reserved bay fees or durations if this Notice of Motion were to succeed.

Pay and display machines

If any free parking period is agreed then the Pay and Display machines would need to be programmed to issue tickets at the start of a parking period in order that Civil Enforcement Officers will be able to know when any concessionary period ends. Therefore, car park users will still be required to enter their car registration number, select a tariff and display a ticket in their vehicle or they will be issued with a PCN.



Events and licenses

If charging concessions are agreed we would propose that this would not alter the charges set for events and licenses on the car parks and that those arrangements would continue as if a non charging period had not been approved. No refunds or discounts to license holders will be made.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

N/A

Financial Implications

The costs of additional free parking are set out in this report to C&R.

Human Resources Implications

N/A

Sustainability Implications

The incentivisation of car use through free parking would appear to be at odds with the Council's climate emergency declaration of 2019

Equality/Diversity

The equality of a proposal that benefits car owners above non car owners will need to be considered as will whether or not the cost to the Council Tax payer of providing up to 2 hours free parking for both residents of the district and those who do not contribute to the council's funds is acceptable.

The fairness of providing up to hours free parking for the three market towns and not for the coastal resorts of the District is another consideration.

Risk Management

The financial risks to the Council following the detrimental impacts of the Covid 19 crisis have been previously considered and recognised by this committee.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

Parking services are delivered in accordance with the Off Street Parking Places Order 2013 (as amended).

The notice of motion does not accord with the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and the objectives of its emerging Carbon Plan

Ward Member and Leader Member Views

Councillor Hodson, Lead Member Resources

I have considered carefully the content of the report outlining the financial implications for this Council. Having regard to the expressed opinions of my fellow Councillors during the last debate, I would now support an option to provide two hours free parking until 10am in selected car parks in Bideford, Torrington and Holsworthy for a period of two months.



3. CONCLUSIONS

Parking charges in Torrridge

The current car parking charges in Torrridge are low in comparison to those in other districts.

Recent takings and reports from the Civil Enforcement Officers provide evidence that the town centre car parks are extremely busy. Therefore the customers are in the area and using the car parks without complaint.

In Summary

As previously reported, evidence from other authorities suggests that whilst free parking can be popular with residents there is little to prove that it makes a demonstrable improvement to trading conditions in retail areas. In fact there is some evidence to suggest that free parking can have a detrimental impact on trading conditions because parking bays become filled with residents rather than shoppers and shoppers are forced to do their business elsewhere.

In Torrridge free parking on the Pill in Bideford was introduced as a pilot scheme to see if it improved trading conditions. We have been provided with no information from the town traders that this free parking has had a positive impact, instead we continue to hear that trading conditions have become more difficult (this is obviously not entirely related to parking). Our own monitoring of the Pill Car Park shows us that on Saturday afternoon the car park fills with many residents' cars that remain on site until Monday morning. Similar can be said in both the Sydney House Car Park Torrington and the Manor Car Park in Holsworthy.

It should also be noted that parking charges are an important revenue stream for the Council and are used to cover the costs of service delivery. The costs of providing a parking service do not decrease if free parking is offered and will still need to be paid for. Given that there are extreme pressures on the Council's budget it seems counter intuitive to recommend any scheme that would reduce income without evidence that there would be benefits elsewhere.

The above point was recognised by this committee at its meeting on the 29th June 2020 when the following recommendation of the Interim S151 Officer was unanimously approved:

That members consider the financial impact of Covid 19 upon the council and the necessity for the council to maximise its income streams wherever possible.

Parking at large out of town retail outlets and supermarkets is subsidised for motorists by the site owners on the basis that they will generate their revenues from consumers elsewhere on that site. The Council is not afforded that opportunity and instead has chosen to implement comparatively low parking charges to help manage the car parks effectively and, more pertinently, for the benefit of its residents and traders.

Having said all of the above it is likely that a period of free parking would be well received by a significant number of car users and business owners who might feel that they would benefit. The Council might therefore receive positive press coverage and some short term reputational enhancement if some concession were made.

Management

It will be easier to manage a free period between 8 and 10am than a free two hour period at any time of the day for a number of reasons. First, we will be able to organise the working hours of the Civil Enforcement Officers effectively. Second, it will be easier to manage those who might park for two hours in a car park and then move their car to another car park for another two



hours free. It will also help us to manage the scenario where a driver might park for two hours free and then at the end of that period simply return to the pay and display machine for a new ticket and another two hours free.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The success or otherwise of 2 hours of free parking in Bideford, Torrington and Holsworthy will be very difficult to measure given that so many external factors can have an influence on trading conditions. In reality it is likely that this would be a symbolic gesture by the Council rather than a strategic initiative that will create a demonstrable improvement in the trading environments.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Members consider the notice of motion in cognisance of:

- The previous resolution that the Council should seek to maximise its income streams wherever possible in light of the financial impact of Covid 19 on its financial position
- It's fit with Councils Climate Emergency Declaration and Carbon Management Plan
- The equality and fairness of the proposal for all residents
- Any perceived benefits the proposal might have for the trading environment of our town centres

2. Members resolve to approve or reject the Notice of Motion and decide whether to introduce free car parking for the first one or two hours in some or all of the car parks in Bideford, Holsworthy and Torrington town centres for a period of two months and that if approved the arrangements for enforcement, permits, reserved bays and events and licenses would be as proposed in the body of this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Consultations: Chief Executive, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Interim
S151 Officer
Contact Sean Kearney
Officer:
Background
Papers:

