

REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 22 AUGUST 2013

REVIEW OF CAR PARKING IN ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

1 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- 1.1 welcome the progress to date on the review of car parking in the towns currently with parking charges in place;
- 1.2 consider the proposals in relation to the traffic order as set out in section 2.3 of the report;
- 1.3 agree to the proposed changes to the Traffic Order covering all public car parks in Aberdeenshire becoming part of the consultation process ;
- 1.4 agree to the proposal that transaction costs associated with cashless parking are absorbed within the operational costs of the service for a period of 2 years.
- 1.5 consider the charging regime in the car parks within Country Parks that are currently subject to parking charges.

2 Discussion

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 Within the approved 2012 Local Transport Strategy the role of modern parking policies, tariff structures and pay systems that continue to support and strengthen the economic vitality of our town centres in partnership with local Communities is fully recognised and there is a clear set of commitments to consider the Car Parking Charging Regime for the period 2013-16. This ongoing work also ensures that the wider objectives within the Nestrans Regional Parking Strategy are also brought forward in a co-ordinated manner.
 - 2.1.2 Reference is made to the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee on 15th March 2012 (Item 7) at which it was explained that the review would focus on not just charging, but also making car parking easier and more efficient by considering specific patterns of parking within the local communities taking into consideration unique problems faced within these settlements. The Committee was asked to note that a full range of parking models had been considered as part of consultation process with the initial reviews being undertaken in Banchory, Huntly, Ellon and Fraserburgh during 2012. After due consideration the Committee were generally supportive of the review but emphasised the need to ensure that issues such as enforcement, technology, parking models and business/individual parking rates should all be taken into consideration as part of the review of car parking in Aberdeenshire and car parking regimes for the future.
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2.1.3 Members then requested that officers look to including Peterhead and Inverurie within the programme of works for 2012.

The Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) the programme at Appendix A of the report to undertake a comprehensive review of car parking in Aberdeenshire, as set out in the recently approved Local Transport Strategy 2012;
- (2) the key issues to be covered in the reviews and provide feedback on any additional issues that Members would like to see covered in the scope of the reviews; and
- (3) that Peterhead and Inverurie be included in the 2012 parking review programme of works.

2.1.4 The review process that has been applied in the work with communities during 2012 and 2013 has used the following 7 key issues to structure the discussion:

1. What should be the aims of parking policy in Aberdeenshire?
2. Should consideration be given to a policy that aims to establish each town in a parking context as cost neutral, or should we be looking for cost neutrality across the overall Aberdeenshire car parks budget, an increase or decrease?
3. Linked to this, what should happen to charges between 2013 and 2016 e.g. should they be increased, decreased or stay the same?
4. Is there an opportunity to introduce free parking or limited time free parking (e.g. 20/30 minutes etc) on-street and in Pay & Display car parks?
5. Should the option of linking car parking income to wider transport related functions on a local basis be considered?
6. What is the potential for Aberdeenshire Council managing on-street parking provision to ensure maximum benefit to a town from all of available parking?
7. Regarding ticketing types, what is the potential for introducing alternative technology, such as cashless parking systems, to allow motorists to pay for their parking using alternative means to traditional Pay & Display methods?

2.2 **Town Centre Car Park Reviews**

2.2.1 A programme was presented to the meeting of this Committee on 14th March 2013 (Item 13 refers) which showed that the review of car parking charges would be carried out in a phased way and be completed by April 2014. When detailed programming of the work and the impact on resources was done, it became apparent that it was not practical to have six area based traffic orders so the programme has been reworked to continue to have one Aberdeenshire-wide traffic order and the work which informs that order process has been fast tracked to compensate.

- 2.2.2 A series of meetings have taken place during June and July of this year across the nine towns currently with car parking charges in place. These meetings were held with interested groups such as local members, business associations and traders groups. These meetings have been very valuable in gaining a local insight into how our public car parks are used in each of these towns and the key part that they can play in encouraging increased footfall in our towns which is of course a core part of encouraging a sense of place.
- 2.2.3 At these meetings, it was stated that reports would go to Area Committees from 20th August to 24th September 2013 seeking views on draft proposals for each town that would be presented to the meeting of this Committee on 10th October. However, it became apparent from the meetings that it would significantly enhance the process if the general public were given the opportunity to comment on any draft proposals and to make any other comments or suggestions for car parking issues in the towns in Aberdeenshire.
- 2.2.4 Reports will still go to the Committee meetings originally stated but after that, subject to the agreement of each Area Committee, a three week period for gathering views and comments from the public will be built into the timetable and a further round of reports, including any public comments with supporting analysis, will go to the Area Committees from 1st October to 19th November with a follow up report to this Committee at the meeting on 5th December. The revised timetable is shown in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2.5 The meetings held in each town have led to a series of draft proposals for future discussions with both Area Committees and the wider local communities. These will be included in the Appendices to the Area Committee Reports. The range of draft proposals that emerged from the initial meetings include :
- a. free periods from charging within current Pay & Display car parks
 - b. removal of Pay & display from some car parks
 - c. introduction of Pay & Display into some car parks alongside other measures
 - d. free periods after 3pm
 - e. reduced tariffs for shorter visits
 - f. a need for additional parking

Following consideration of these draft measures at Area level and with the opportunity for public comment a full set of proposals will reported back in more detail to this Committee at its meeting on 5th December 2013.

2.3 Car Parks Order

- 2.3.1 As well as looking at individual towns with car parking charges, the opportunity is also being taken to look at the rest of the aspects of the current traffic order covering the car parks in Aberdeenshire. There are a number of issues in relation to the current order that the views of this Committee are sought on. These are set out in the paragraphs below.

2.3.2 Formalising the use of public car parks for activities and events with a commercial nature

- a. The present Off-Street Car Parks Order does not allow any commercial activities. However, in most towns, informal or in some cases more formal arrangements are in place to allow events such as Farmers Markets and Continental Markets to be held in public car parks. Although they have a commercial element to them, these events bring economic benefits to our town centres and seem a common sense use of these public assets. **It is proposed** that the Order will allow for these uses.
- b. Most mobile traders operate using a Street Traders Licence issued by colleagues in the Legal and Governance Service. This allows traders to operate on streets but does not allow them to trade within car parks. The issue of traders wanting to work in car parks has come up most recently by a fish van that has been operating on car parks in Huntly and Turriff. The traders' argument is two fold; firstly, that there are no available spaces on streets in the town centres that would make them available to their customers and, secondly, that they are providing a service that is not available from the existing shops in these towns. In this particular case, these are valid points but this would not always be the case e.g. any hamburger van would take businesses away from cafes in any of our town centres. To strike the correct balance, **it is proposed** to introduce a permit system whereby the applicant must demonstrate that : a) they are proving a service that is not currently provided by existing shops in a town centre; b) there is a persistent difficulty in getting parked on streets in the town centre and c) there is available parking available in the town centre car parks.
- c. At present, it costs £5 for an all-day ticket in our car parks. **It is therefore proposed** to set the cost of the permit at this rate and charge £250 per annum each day of the week the trader uses the car parks in the town centre. This would be reviewed annually and would be reviewed and set at a level based on the all-day rate if that is changed in the town in question.

2.3.3 Excess Charge Notices

At present, Excess Charge Notices have a standard charge of £50 which is reduced to £40 if paid within 21 days. This level of charge and deduction for an early payment has been unchanged for some time and the opportunity has been taken to review it compared to the charge for Excess Charge Notices in neighbouring local authorities.

As of July 2013, the current charges are :

Authority	Standard Excess Charge Notice	Notes
Aberdeenshire	£50	£40 if paid within 21 days
Aberdeen City	£60	£30 if paid within 14 days
Moray	£65	£40 if paid within 14 days
Angus	£30	£25 if paid within 7 days
Dundee City	£60	£30 if paid within 14 days

As can be seen from the table above, there is a wide range of charges and payment terms across Aberdeenshire and its neighbours. The setting of these charges and the terms and conditions should be driven by what is reasonable to reflect the misuse of a public resource, to minimise workload on staff and to ensure that monies are collected effectively. It would appear that a standard charge of £60 would seem appropriate with a lower charge of £40 if paid within fourteen days of issue of the Excess Charge notice. To provide greater options for payment and to further minimise staff workload, it may be an option to introduce a lower payment tariff of £20 if the payment is made on the day of the issue of the notice and is done electronically via the key pay and Chip and Pin facility on the new machines as detailed in section 2.4.2 of this report. **The suggested changes** to the Excess Charge Notice which could be part of the formal consultation are:

Standard Excess Charge Notice	£60
If paid within 14 days	£40
If paid on the day of issue	£20

2.3.4 Residents Permits

At present, there is a scheme in place to allow residents adjacent to Pay & Display car parks who meet certain conditions to apply for a permit to park in these car parks to display in lieu of purchasing a ticket. The current cost for an annual permit is £20 which is equivalent at the current rates to paying for four days parking per annum. Whilst it is not proposed to do away with the scheme, the current charge seems very low and **it is proposed** to raise this charge to £80 per annum. At present, a resident has to obtain a new permit and is charged another £20 when they change their vehicle. It is proposed to do away with this charge. The zones that have been established for each town are due to be reviewed and **it is also proposed** that the details of each town will go before the relevant Area Committee during the proposed consultation for discussion.

2.3.5 Additions/Changes to the Schedules

Since the last review of the order, there have been a number of changes to the car parks in Aberdeenshire and these are reflected in the proposals below that would form part of the information taken to Area Committees and the formal consultation process. The substantive issues include;

- a) The informal arrangement currently in place at the Bellfield Car Park in Banchory for medical staff to use the Pay & Display spaces free of charge when the spaces they have been allocated are full. **It is proposed** to formalise that agreement and at the same time make most of the spaces currently allocated for the medical centre and health clinic available for general use. Details will be discussed with the establishments to reach an agreement.
- b) At St Mary's car park in Banff, there is an informal arrangement with the contractor who brings individuals on remand to the adjacent Court to park out with marked bays and free of charge for the required periods. This is done for security reasons. **It is proposed** to formalise that relationship.

- c) Crathie car park has been handed over to Balmoral Estates under a lease arrangement that also includes the toilet block and tourist information shop on site. **It is therefore proposed** to remove this car park from the schedules within the order.
- d) In addition there will also be additions/alterations to the order in Laurencekirk, Stonehaven and Macduff along with a revision to allow for 9 electric vehicle parking spaces (1 in each car park)

2.3.6 Procedural Issues associated with changes to the Off Street Car Parks Order

These have always been agreed by the Infrastructure Services Committee and the Order has always been Aberdeenshire-wide. Whilst it is intended to keep the Order Aberdeenshire-wide to minimise work, it would be beneficial if changes were brought in that made any review of the Order quicker and less bureaucratic to reflect local circumstances. The need for greater flexibility has been made in comments at several of the meetings held to discuss car parking. **It is therefore proposed** that a revised procedure is developed in discussion with colleagues in Legal and Governance which will make it easier to make changes within one or two towns that fall within an administrative area by taking a report to the relevant Area Committee and then coming to this Committee for agreement.

2.4 Car Parks within Aberdeenshire Council's Country Parks

At present, the car parks within the Country Parks at Aden, Balmedie, Haddo and Haughton are subject to charges. Given the nature of these attractions and the type of visits, the charging regime has been set differently to the car parks in towns. The charges are only in place from April to September between the hours of 10am and 6pm and are :

	Car	Minibus	Bus
0-1 hour	£0.30	£1.20	£3.00
1-4 hours	£0.70	£3.00	£7.50
4-8 hours	£1.50	£6.00	£15.00
Season ticket	£20.00	£80.00	£200.00

By way of comparison car parking charging regimes at other similar locations that are currently in operation are as follows

- Forestry Commission – 1hr £1.00 / 2-3hr £1.50 / all day £2.00
- National Trust for Scotland £2.00 per day flat fee

While the charges are not structured in the same way as the current regime in operation at the Country Parks, they are of a similar scale for cars, with our maximum charge being £1.50, and our 1-4 hour rate appearing to be very good value.

Taking into account the maintenance and operational costs associated with the car parks, the annual nett income from the four sites is approximately £17k.

2.5 Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE)

At almost all of the meetings held to discuss car parking in our town centres, the issue of on-street enforcement and how it can impact on the efficient use of public space came up as an important aspect of car parking in our towns. As members will be aware, Aberdeenshire Council employees are responsible for enforcement within the off-street car parks and Police Scotland are required under the 1991 Road Traffic Act to enforce waiting restrictions on street which they do via their Traffic Wardens. Police Scotland have recently indicated that they will be reviewing the role that they see for their existing traffic wardens in their new structure and Aberdeenshire Council is being kept informed of that process. Furthermore, discussions are taking place on the same review via COSLA, SOLACE and SCOTS. The suggestion has been raised at several of these meetings that Aberdeenshire Council should consider decriminalisation i.e. the enforcement of on-street restrictions would become a civil matter and could be undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council staff. Whilst this could present an opportunity in terms of wider place based warden duties and more co-ordinated monitoring and enforcement in our town centres both off and on-street it would certainly require greater resources as all current evidence indicates that DPE is only viable where there is a significant level of on-street charged parking. Given the review by Police Scotland is only just underway, it is anticipated that a report including the outcome of that process and decriminalisation in general will come before a future meeting of this Committee.

2.6 Machine Replacement Programme

2.6.1 As part of providing an improved service to users of our Pay & Display car parks almost half the stock of Pay & Display machines has already been replaced with solar powered machines that as well as accepting cash will allow payment using the Chip and Pin system available on debit and credit cards.

2.6.2 These machines are also equipped with keypads that are not currently operational but will be available for a number of services still to be fully developed such as the possible rapid payment of excess charge notices discussed in more detail earlier in this report.

2.6.3 The redundant power supply for the replaced machines will be used to install one Electric Vehicle Charging Point in each town with Pay & Display. As previously discussed, the electricity will initially be made available free of charge but the vehicle will still require a valid ticket to be purchased (or time bought via a cashless parking service provider, when in place). The use of these Electric Vehicle Charging Points will be monitored and reported back after a full year of usage. The points will be operational towards the end of 2013.

2.7 Cashless Parking

- 2.7.1 The other initiative to provide an improved service to users of car parks with car parking charges is to introduce a Cashless Parking system by the end of 2013. Possible suppliers are currently being identified and a best value exercise will take place in the autumn.
- 2.7.2 Typically, users of the system register with the service providers' website and thereafter people buy time in a car park with charges via their mobile phones. There is a transaction cost associated with each purchase and in most local authorities this is typically charged to the registered user e.g. a transaction of any value (60p, £1.20, etc) would cost the user about 10-15p additional.
- 2.7.3 To make this service more attractive to users, and therefore in due course help reduce cash collections and perhaps even the number of machines in some car parks, **it is proposed** that the transaction costs are met from the Council's Car Parking budget for at least a period of two years at which time it would be reviewed. It is difficult to put an accurate figure on how much this would cost because obviously it depends on the take up of the system but discussions with industry suppliers indicate that 5% of all transactions would be reasonable for a well established scheme. In Aberdeenshire, there were in 2012/13 approximately 750,000 transactions and if 5% were made via Cashless Parking, the transaction costs to the Council would be £4k - £6k.
- 2.8 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Corporate Services have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated within the contents of the report.

3. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 3.1 The staffing and financial costs for undertaking the review of car parking in our main towns is being met from existing resources and budgets within the Strategy Unit (Page 94, Line 21).
- 3.2 Due to the draft nature of the proposals and the consultation process still to be completed with Area Committees and local communities, it is not possible to put an exact figure on the impact on income to Aberdeenshire Council from the proposals. A very approximate cost based on current draft proposals would put the potential loss of income, if all of the proposals currently under consideration were to be fully implemented, to be in the range of £100k to £150k. The impact of the changes will be considered further once Area Committees and communities have input formally and more detailed budget implications will be brought back to this Committee and will be put into the budget process, as a budget pressure in relation to the Car Parking Income Budget for financial year 2014/15 and beyond (Page 85, Line 16).
- 3.3 The net income from parking charges in car parks in Country Car Parks is currently £17k per annum. That could be impacted subject to any decision by this Committee (Page 103, Line 15).
- 3.4 The cost of installing Electric Vehicle Charging Points is estimated at £40k and will be met from agreed budgets (Page 94, Line 21).

- 3.5 The transaction costs of introducing Cashless Parking as a means of paying for parking is a function of the take up rate by users of the car park and is estimated at approximately £5k per annum(Page 85, Line 16).
- 3.6 An equality assessment is not required as there will be no differential impact, as a result of this report, on people with protected characteristics. All of the specific interventions, strategies, projects and policies referred to in the report will be separately assessed against the relevant legislation.

Stephen Archer
Director of Infrastructure Services

Report compiled by Mark Skilling
Date - 12/08/2013

APPENDIX 1

COMMITTEE TIMETABLE

<u>Committee</u>	<u>First Report</u>	<u>Second Report</u>
Marr	20 th August	1 st October
ISC	22 nd August	5 th December
Buchan	27 th August	8 th October
Formartine	3 rd September	29 th October
Banff and Buchan	10 th September	5 th November
Garioch	17 th September	12 th November
Kincardine and Mearns	24 th September	19 th November