

East Herts Council Non-Key Decision Report

Date: 8th March 2021

Report by: Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Report title: Bishop's Stortford Business Improvement District (BID) Parking proposal: Discover and Save

Ward(s) affected: ALL Bishop's Stortford wards

Summary

A period of funded parking is proposed to be offered in Bishop's Stortford with the aim of encouraging visitors and shoppers back to the town centre following the third national lockdown. The loss of parking income will be fully funded by the Bishop's Stortford BID.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT:

- (a) The "Discover and Save" parking proposal as described in paragraph 1.1 and funded by the Bishop's Stortford BID following the third national lockdown for a duration of one month be approved.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 It is proposed that, in partnership with the Bishop's Stortford Business Improvement District (BID), a special parking promotion referred to as "Discover and Save" is offered in the Causeway car park following the third national lockdown to encourage visitors back to the town centres supporting the recovery of businesses.

- 1.2 Any vehicle parking in the Causeway car park after 3pm on Mondays and Tuesday throughout the month will be able to park free of charge subsidised by the BID.
- 1.3 The promotion will be limited to one calendar month.
- 1.4 The go live date will be agreed with the BID and officers within the parking service in consultation with the portfolio holder for parking.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 As part of the Bishop's Stortford's Business Improvement District (BID) business plan there is a manifesto pledge to provide free parking after 3pm.
- 2.2 In September 2020, the proposal for free after 3pm parking was refused by the Council through the non-key decision process due to the Council's aspirations and support to achieve sustainable travel town status for Bishop's Stortford which was being determined in December 2020 by Hertfordshire County Council.
- 2.3 The outcome of the selection process meant that Bishop's Stortford was not selected as one of the towns to achieve sustainable travel town status.
- 2.4 Ongoing discussions have taken place between the Council and the Bishop's Stortford BID since the Council refused the initial proposal.
- 2.5 In light of the sustainable travel town status not progressing at this stage, the BID is requesting the Council's support to achieve this element of their business plan objectives by approving the Discover and Save scheme.
- 2.6 The BID is aware that cessation of free parking is being proposed as a saving/income for the Council's Medium Term Financial plan and as a step towards discouraging short car journeys to support the environmental sustainability agenda.
- 2.7 The BID has also been notified that since the inception

of the business plan the Council's stance on free parking has changed.

- 2.8 However, the Council recognises that it may be difficult for many businesses to recover following the third national lockdown and that this is an opportunity to approve a fully funded scheme to provide visitors and businesses support.
- 2.9 The 'Discover & Save' model has been adopted in other towns across the country featuring BIDs including Sunderland, Durham and Bury St Edmunds. The success of this promotion has not been formally measured but anecdotal evidence suggests that shoppers may stay for longer when parking is free.
- 2.10 Details of monitoring and evaluation of the scheme will be agreed by the BID, officers and the portfolio holders for parking and economic development. As a minimum this will include:
- Car park space counts
 - WIFI tracking
 - Spend in individual businesses
 - Qualitative data from the BID and its members
 - An agreed baseline

2.0 Reason(s)

- 2.1 The Council has an interest in the Bishop's Stortford BID with one of its members representing East Herts through the board membership and providing support where possible. It should also be noted that the Council was supportive of setting up a BID in Bishop's Stortford and covered costs for undertaking feasibility studies with businesses. The Council also collects the additional levy payments from businesses through our Revenues and Benefits Service. The Council works closely with the BID on a range of town centre issues and challenges.

This will be even more important as we seek to support High Streets recover from the impact of Covid-19

- 2.2 The BID's business plan seeks to encourage an increase in footfall into the town centre and promote economic vibrancy, one of the mechanisms to do this described by the business plan is to provide free parking.
- 2.3 The proposal will be cost neutral to the council as the BID have agreed to compensate the council for loss of income, as set out in the appendix A.
- 2.4 The Causeway car park has displayed a substantial drop in usage since the start of the pandemic and multiple lockdowns and unlike other car parks intended for shoppers, it has not returned to previous levels.
- 2.5 The Council's Corporate Plan supports economic development and growth.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Do Nothing – the Council could decide to do nothing which would not impact the service however it may have a detrimental impact on the relationship with the BID.
- 4.2 Alternative options – schemes such as rebate schemes have been discounted due to the intense resources required for the BID team.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 There are no major risks to report. The consultation section highlights areas to note.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The BID have received a copy of this report and asked to comment.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

Yes. The offer of free parking does not encourage sustainable travel. The scheme proposed in September raised concerns from a climate change group. To mitigate this, the offer will be limited to one month.

Financial

No loss of parking income as this will be paid by the BID.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A – financial information

Contact Member

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