

## **East Herts Council Report**

### **Council**

**Date of meeting:** 13 December 2023

**Report by:** Councillor Tim Hoskin - Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

**Report title:** Car Park Fees - Bishop's Stortford

**Wards affected:** Bishop's Stortford All Saints, Bishop's Stortford Central, Bishop's Stortford North

### **Summary**

The council wishes to use the tools at its disposal to address the priorities of its Climate Change Strategy and emerging Air Quality Action Plan as well as contribute to the goals of Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4.

One such tool available to the council is car parking tariffs as it is argued that differential pricing can be used to encourage modal shift and more effective use of existing car parks which has the benefit of reducing unnecessary journeys, driving around, and idling within already full car parks.

The effects of charges could be cumulative with the impact of the installation of new Variable Messaging Signs (VMS) about parking space availability and other measures such as installing e-vehicle chargers in Northgate End car park, Bishop's Stortford, and other locations.

This report proposes amended charges to car parks in Bishop's Stortford as a first step to exploring the impact of tariffs on behaviour.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL:**

- a) To work towards climate change and air quality aspirations by amending car parking tariffs in Bishop's Stortford to influence parking behaviour by implementing the amended**

**charges as set out in Appendix A, which also incorporate inflation uplifts.**

- b) To authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to publish a Notice of Variation under the Road Traffic Regulation Act to give effect to the introduction of the new tariff structure.**

## **1. Proposal**

- 1.1 The council's Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 2026 recognises the importance of supporting our residents to make behavioural changes to tackle climate change, such as adopting more active travel and modal shift. The council's emerging Air Quality Action Plan, while recognising that cars will still be a component of travel decisions in the districts, seeks to reduce the impact of congestion and car journeys on air pollution, notably in the Hockerill junction Air Quality Management Area in Bishop's Stortford. In the wider context, Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4 supports reductions in car travel, with moves towards more sustainable transport.
- 1.2 The council is promoting many measures to promote less polluting car use, such as installing e-vehicle chargers in Northgate End car park, Bishop's Stortford and other locations. One of the tools that the council can use to influence behaviour is car parking tariffs. Differential pricing can be used to encourage modal shift and more effective use of existing car parks which has the benefit of reducing unnecessary journeys, driving around and idling within already full car parks.
- 1.3 Currently Bishop's Stortford's car parks are often full before 9.00 am with long-stay parkers, which means that shoppers arriving afterwards drive between car parks while searching to find a space. This generates unnecessary traffic movements, increases

congestion, adds to air pollution, and makes Bishop's Stortford town centre a less appealing place to visit.

- 1.4 For residents, poor air quality is detrimental to their health and can lead to respiratory illnesses and premature death. The NHS in Hertfordshire spends £100 million a year treating residents with the effects of poor air quality across the County.
- 1.5 It is argued that by implementing an amended tariff structure, the council can reduce the number of unnecessary journeys between car parks, relieve the need to circle round full car parks and, in doing so, promote long stay parking in Northgate End and free up spaces in the other car parks for shoppers and visitors.
- 1.6 Given the financial pressures on the council, it is important to ensure that the proposed tariff amendments lead to no loss of income. Modelling by officers indicates the council's revenue stream would be maintained.
- 1.7 The tariffs have been designed to incorporate the CPI uplift of 6.7% (the rate in September 2023).
- 1.8 The impact of the proposed new tariff structure on behaviour change will be kept under review.

## **2. Reasons**

- 2.1 To reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality through encouraging long stay customers to use car parks positioned on the edge of town, reducing vehicle journeys, idling and space hunting in busy car parks, and congestion in the town centre roads.
- 2.2 At the same time, the proposals will help support:
  - residents with the cost of living by reducing the need to use fuel driving between car parks in slow moving congested traffic while trying to find a space.

- local businesses by ensuring customers can park close to the shops.
  - town centre workers by offering a cheaper all day parking option in Northgate End.
  - an increase in the usage of Northgate End car park as the pricing strategy should encourage an increase in occupancy.
- 2.3 Council is recommended to make this decision now in order that the tariff changes can be introduced on 1 April 2024. With the reprogramming of Pay and Display machines and the Pay by Phone parking application changes, there is a three month lead time before the changes can be implemented.
- 2.4 Should Council approve the tariff change, then the changes will be undertaken as part of the annual uplift reprogramming project, which will be more cost effective than a separate exercise later in the year.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 Maintain the existing structure and uplift in the normal manner by applying the inflation rate to individual tariffs. By not acting, the council cannot attempt to address the historic issues relating to congestion, idling, space hunting. **Not Recommended.**
- 3.2 Modify the tariff structure in accordance with the options outlined and implement the changes on 1 April 2024. **Recommended.**

### **4. Risks**

- 4.1 There could be an argument that the proposed tariffs could lead to an increase in journeys which could result in the potential for congestion to increase, leading to increased journey times as people drive from the South Street side of town to Northgate

End, increasing pollution and creating negative impacts on air quality levels in this monitored area.

- 4.2 That said, the total number of journeys ought to be lower as fewer customers hunt for spaces. Long stay parking tends to commence from 7.00 am and it is likely that increased journeys will be outside the 8.00 am to 9.00 am peak congestion period; therefore, traffic should flow better with lower air pollution levels in the context of moving traffic when compared to stop start traffic.
- 4.3 There is a risk of the proposed £6.50 All Day tariff in Apton Road and Basbow Lane car park may be considered too high by the public and business community. Motorists may decide not to park in East Herts car parks. In this scenario the council may experience a drop off in car park users, which would reduce income.
- 4.4 Assuming a 10% reduction in All Day parking transactions in Apton Road and Basbow Lane car parks, and no relocation to other East Herts car parks, this would result in a reduction of £22,650 in revenue against expectations. To mitigate this, officers will keep parking revenues under close review and report accordingly.

## **5. Implications/Consultations**

The Bishop's Stortford BID (Business Improvement District) made several representations to East Herts Council requesting a review and reduction of the All Day tariff in Northgate End car park, to support town centre workers and local businesses. They felt that a lower tariff would aid staff recruitment and retention rates and generally support the business community.

East Herts Council has worked closely with the BID to understand the parking issues that their members have experienced in Bishop's Stortford town centre and to develop proposals to deliver workable solutions.

An increase in All Day tariffs in Apton Road and Basbow Lane car parks is regarded as an appropriate way to effectively regulate the two prime town centre car parks. This approach will also enable the council to offer the lower tariff structure in Northgate End car park.

### **Data Protection**

No issues.

### **Equalities**

The initial Equality Impact Assessment screening indicates this proposal does not adversely affect groups with protected characteristics. Poor air quality and associated ill health disproportionately affects groups with protected characteristics and this policy is designed to reduce air pollution and so should benefit those groups positively.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

The tariff structure is expected to move some long stay parking to Northgate End, which may lead to increased traffic movements in the mornings and evenings. Long stay parking tends to commence from 7.00 am and it is likely that journeys will be spread over a longer period than the 8.00 am to 9.00 am peak congestion period.

Traffic should continue to flow as a result and the total reduction in vehicle movements over the day ought to reduce congestion and therefore improve air quality.

The tariffs may encourage additional short stay parking. The average dwell times in Apton Road and Basbow Lane might drop from the current 5 hour average.

## **Financial**

Based on like for like transactions in Northgate End car park, a reduction in the "All Day" and "5 Hour" tariffs from £5.20 to £4.20 and £4.30 to £3.70 will result in approximately £30,000 reduced revenues against forecast.

Assuming there are no changes to parking behaviours, the total increase in income is estimated at £170,250 annually. This includes an assumption of a £30,000 Northgate End debit, associated with the relatively lower long stay tariffs.

One hypothetical scenario is based on 10% of the current All Day tariff parking customers ceasing to use Apton Road and Basbow Lane car parks, with no transference to other car parks. This would result in a £22,650 loss against estimates. In the context of Bishop's Stortford car park budget overall, this would translate into the forecast additional revenue reducing from £170,250 to £147,600.

The proposed £6.50 All Day tariff in Apton Road and Basbow Lane car parks is more expensive than the "off peak" Bishop's Stortford railway car park (operated by NCP on behalf of Greater Anglia), where the All Day parking tariff is set at £6.00 from 10am onwards. This may attract customers away from East Herts car parks, with revenue impacts arising.

## **Health and Safety**

There are no concerns.

## **Human Resources**

N/A

## **Human Rights**

N/A

## **Legal**

Legal Services have been involved in discussions. The changes to the tariffs may be implemented by the advertising of a Notice of Variation 21 days prior to the date of implementation pursuant to section 35C of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (as amended).

## **6. Background papers and appendices**

Appendix A - Differential Tariffs - Bishop's Stortford 2024

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