

OPEN

## Highways and Transport Committee

23 November 2023

### Notice of Motion – Access to the National Parking Platform (NPP)

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**Report of: Tom Moody, Director of Infrastructure & Highways**

**Report Reference No: HTC/26/23-24**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to outline a response to the Notice of Motion proposed at Full Council on 19th July 2023 that stated: -
  - (a) 'This council joins the National Parking Platform (NPP) Pilot expansion project for Q2/Q3 2023, with immediate effect.
  - (b) 'That this council, in joining the NPP pilot, incorporates current NPP evidential learning and practices into any future Car Park Charging Strategy for Cheshire East.'
- 2 This report explains what the pilot of the NPP seeks to achieve.
- 3 This report also details the effects, particularly financial impacts, which joining the NPP pilot expansion project either in Q2 or Q3 2023 would have on service budgets.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 4 The Notice of Motion to Council relates to a project currently funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) and co-managed by Manchester City Council with its partner agency 'Parking Matters.'
- 5 Further details about the NPP can be found at the link: <https://npp-uk.org/assets/images/intro/concept.png>, but are also summarised below.
- 6 The NPP is a local authority owned and DfT funded pilot project.

- 7 The NPP is a service that enables the exchange of standardised, reliable, up-to-date national parking data (parking space numbers and occupancy levels where available) through a data platform. It is not a public facing service, but citizens will benefit from improved service provision: real time availability, access to more reliable and detailed parking information, and multi-vendor payment options (from those suppliers who are signed up).
- 8 The Council currently operate and manage 111 public car parks of which 3 are multi storey car parks (MSCPs). There are currently no operational digital parking space counting machines, and it would require significant investment to install/enable this technology in the MSCPs and other public car parks.
- 9 The NPP pilot uses data from mobile payment app transactions. In Cheshire East, 33% of parking sessions are purchased by users of a mobile app – the remaining being card and cash payments.
- 10 The Council's current mobile app contract is at zero cost to the Council as no financial processing transaction fees are charged. Joining the NPP pilot would incur a transaction processing service charge estimated at £43,000 per annum. There would also be an additional transaction charge which would increase the fee for customers.
- 11 The Council's current mobile payment app contract does not end until October 2024 and it is therefore not possible to join the NPP before this date. However, it is proposed to engage with the NPP pilot local authorities and understand the lessons learnt, which could feed into future business cases as part of the Council's business planning cycle.
- 12 It is therefore considered to be premature to join the NPP pilot at this stage due to the financial implications and the existing contract arrangement which will expire in October 2024.
- 13 However; it is sensible that the Council continues to engage with NPP in order to form a view on the optimum time for joining its expansion. This will ensure we are fully informed of the requirements for joining and any potential opportunities for car park users in Cheshire East.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Highways and Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the National Parking Platform (NPP) pilot project.

2. Endorse that joining the NPP in its pilot phase is believed to be premature at this stage due to the financial implications and the existing contract arrangement which will expire in October 2024.
3. Note that the NPP pilot project will be monitored to explore potential future opportunities for the Council.

## **Background**

- 14 A Notice of Motion was submitted to Council on 19/7/2023 that stated: -  
  
‘This council joins the National Parking Platform (NPP) Pilot expansion project for Q2/Q3 2023, with immediate effect.  
  
‘That this council, in joining the NPP pilot, incorporates current NPP evidential learning and practices into any future Car Park Charging Strategy for Cheshire East.’
- 15 The National Parking Pilot (NPP) was initiated by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2019 as a joint project, hosted by Manchester City Council, DfT and Parking Matters. Over time, numerous additional partners have joined, including Liverpool City Council and CIPFA comparator authorities Cheshire West & Chester, Cornwall and Oxfordshire. The most recent NPP report was published in March 2023 and following the success of phases 1 to 3 of the pilot, the DfT has opened the Platform (Phase 4), to all Local Authorities and other interested parties for Q2/Q3 2023; (32 councils are now currently engaged).
- 16 We understand that it has the potential to simplify parking payment options for motorists. For example, it can enable those with the PayByPhone app on their android device to park in another local authority area that uses a different app, without having to download the alternative app. The council would receive its parking fees regardless of which app was used.
- 17 A meeting was arranged with representatives of the NPP (Parking Matters) on 1 August 2023 to discuss potential access to the pilot scheme. We were advised that the pilot scheme may end in March 2024 and that DfT expect the NPP to be self-funding by the start of the next financial year.
- 18 During the pilot, there would be no ‘on-boarding’ fee but transactional and service operational charges do apply for each parking session

purchased through the NPP via the mobile payment app providers. This cost is passed on to the council.

- 19 Currently, the council's incumbent supplier processes some 40,000 purchased parking sessions per fortnight and there are no financial processing transactions fees charged to the Council. Joining the NPP pilot could mean a charge of at least circa £43,000 to the council based on a 2.5% charge of the income turnover per annum.
- 20 If the council joined the NPP pilot, additional costs would apply, payable by the council, for the changeover of server for the current enforcement software system to a new IP address required from the incumbent supplier.
- 21 Further charges would be incurred for new signage required to direct motorists to the available suppliers of the payment app and new location codes of the car parks on each pay and display machine and in and around the peripheral area of the car parks.
- 22 It should be noted that central government are only willing to provide support for the back office functions at a national level.
- 23 The NPP is not in itself in possession of a financial bank account to facilitate the required end-to-end monetary transactional services. They cannot currently act on behalf of the suppliers to collect and collate payments for parking sessions. This leaves councils in a position where they are still currently dealing with multiple mobile payment app suppliers.
- 24 To find parking space availability, car parks must be electronically linked to a digital counter provision. Cheshire East does not currently have this facility apart from on the Grosvenor Centre MSCP – Macclesfield (counter out of use – deemed not cost effective to repair as usage is not near maximum levels). Only one future car park - Royal Arcade in Crewe – is proposed to have this system in place when operational.
- 25 No other data is currently held by the NPP that is not already on our Council web pages i.e., location of car parks, stay duration, charges and number of actual spaces on the ground.
- 26 The NPP is not involved in, nor has any plans to be involved in, a parking strategy nor is linked to any form of parking strategy.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 27 Engagement was undertaken with representatives from the NPP (Parking Matters) on 01 August 2023.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 28 The council currently has an incumbent mobile payment app supplier, the contract for which does not expire until October 2024.
- 29 The terms of the current contract are far more favourable both to the Council and motorist than those as described in the NPP discussion on financial terms.
- 30 The council does not have the budget to support the subscription to the NPP pilot in its 23/24 forecast.
- 31 The data offered is limited to that which is already set out on the council's web pages.
- 32 The council does not have the budget to install digital parking space counters on its current estate.
- 33 The council does not have the budget to support the changeover marketing materials, nor the software system changes require.

### Other Options Considered

- 34 To join the pilot scheme within Q2/Q3 of 2023 which the NPP advise it may take between 4 and 5 months to on-board the council.
- (a) This option will also incur substantial revenue charges to the Council for which there is no current budget.
  - (b) The motorist would also incur an increase in the current convenience fee level.
  - (c) This may compel them to consider alternative payment options such as coinage (increasing cash collection charges) or use at the pay and display machine itself of the chip/pin/debit/credit/contactless payment methods for which there are higher transaction processing costs to the Council.
- 35 To join the NPP now as there would be no onboarding charges.
- 36 Options appraisal:

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing – (Current recommended option)	Maintain the status quo – no changes in revenue cost or fee to the motorist.  4/5 month on-boarding process. Incur	N/A

Join the NPP Pilot	significant revenue costs. Motorist faces increased convenience fees. But no onboarding charges	Further budgetary pressures.
Join NPP leading up to the expiration of the current mobile app contract.	Obtain a value for money multi-vendor app – contract is with NPP and no procurement by the Council is needed	Incur on-boarding charges with the NPP. Must accept the transactional processing and service charges from the suppliers which may not be at the competitive rate of an open competition procurement exercise.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 37 The recommendation to only consider joining the National Payment Platform (“NPP”) at a later date (if at all) is noted. Legal has yet to see the contract documents that the Council would be required to sign up to if it were to join the NPP; if a decision to join is subsequently taken Legal would complete its review work at that juncture and advise accordingly.

### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 38 The approach recommended (not to join the NPP in 23/24) has no impact on the Council’s approved budget/ Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 39 The proposal to consider on-boarding with the NPP immediately prior to the current contract expiration will increase budgets by a potential of £43,000 per annum and would need to be considered in the next business planning cycle for MTFS approval in a future year namely 24/25.

### *Policy*

40 This report has no current policy implications.

### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

41 There are no equality implications because of this response to the Notice of Motion.

### *Human Resources*

42 There are no Human Resource implications because of this response to the Notice of Motion.

### *Risk Management*

43 There are no risk management implications because of this Notice of Motion.

### *Rural Communities*

44 There are no specific implications because of this Notice of Motion.

### *Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*

45 There are no specific implications because of this Notice of Motion.

### *Public Health*

46 *The result of this Notice of Motion has no implications on Public Health, that being either: -*

- a positive, neutral or negative overall impact on the health and wellbeing of Cheshire East residents*
- a greater (positive or negative) impact on some groups compared to others (e.g., rural vs urban; younger vs older; poorer vs more affluent; etc.)*

### *Climate Change*

47 The result of this response to the Notice of Motion will continue to help the council to reduce its carbon footprint and achieve environmental sustainability by reducing energy consumption and promoting healthy lifestyles. No additional cash collections are envisaged, thus reducing carbon footprint of the service.

**Access to Information**

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Appendices:

None

Background  
Papers: