

OPEN

Highways and Transport Committee (H & T)

21st November 2024

National Parking Platform (NPP) & Mobile Payment App for parking payments

Report of: Tom Moody – Director of Highways and Infrastructure

Report Reference No: HTC/09/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: ALL

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides an update to Committee on the progress and opportunities that arise from development of the National Parking Platform (NPP).
- 2 The report relates to the strategic objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 and improvement plans as follows: -
 - (a) Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making,
 - (b) Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation,
 - (c) Creating a great place for people to live, work and visit, and
 - (d) Transformation of Cheshire East Council to achieve budget efficiencies of circa £100m over the next four years.

Executive Summary

- 3 The National Parking Platform is intended to transform payment for car parking by creating a joined-up market that is simple to use.

By joining hundreds of parking sites and connecting to the apps and payment methods drivers already use, the NPP will mean:

- **Drivers** can pay with their app of choice,
 - **Parking operators** can sell their parking online more easily,
 - **Innovators** can offer better apps and smarter ways to pay, and
 - **Towns and cities** can understand parking better to help deliver local transport strategies.
- 4 The NPP started real-world trials in late 2021. In 2023, government funded a system upgrade so that from 2024 it would be ready to operate across the UK. NPP is currently live at 10 local authorities, with many more expressing interest in its development.
- 5 Cheshire East Council joined the NPP as an associate member in January 2024. Associate Membership is designed for parking providers with a current contract with a payments provider who are interested to take advantage of NPP features and have the platform ready to take full membership in future. Associate members:
- Share their parking data through the NPP (e.g., with enforcement providers, mapping apps),
 - Receive standard national location codes for parking sites,
 - Are 'ready to go' for full membership, and can move across without further technical setup, but
 - Do not handle payments through the NPP.
- 6 Members of the Council's Parking Team engage with representatives of the National Parking Platform to monitor developments. NPP remains in the pilot phase, though they are hoping to have a live platform in autumn 2024. It has been confirmed that a fee of 2p per transaction is charged by NPP, which the Council can choose to pass on to the end user, over and above any other App convenience fees.
- 7 The NPP nor the council has overall control over supplier's convenience and transactional processing charges which can differ from one supplier to another. At the moment, in the current pilot, the NPP works with Just Park, Ring Go, Pay by Phone and APCOA Pay.
- 8 Cheshire East Council is currently in contract with a supplier offering App-based payment facilities at nil cost to the council and at reasonable rates to the service user. Recent market testing and procurement of a new contract has identified best value mobile payment app vendors, without prejudice to future reliance on the NPP.

- 9 Our incumbent suppliers contract ceases (with no further extension options) in October 2024. Through procurement, a supplier has been identified who offers a comparable pricing strategy, giving the opportunity to maintain App-based payment options with no financial implications for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Highways & Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the report in particular the choice to retain associate membership of the National Parking Platform (NPP) until the 'platform' is fully proven and ready for wider adoption. When the NPP has a fully functional offer, the council will review the benefits of full membership.
2. Note that the parking service will complete procurement of a best value mobile payment app solution (payment option) to ensure continuity of services and offer a competitive facility to service users.
3. Note that further updates to keep Committee advised on future developments will be circulated by the Members Hub.

Background

- 10 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.'
- A report was taken to the Highways and Transport Committee on 23rd November 2023 - the outcome of that report was that joining the NPP in its pilot phase is believed to be premature at this stage for two reasons.
 - Cheshire East Council is already under contract with a mobile payment app supplier at current zero cost to the Council until October 2024.

- The Council currently has no operational digital parking space counting machines on its 3 MSCPs (Multi Storey Car Park) although these are available on the new MSCP in Crewe.
- 11 The council has undertaken market testing with a range of suppliers of mobile payment app solutions. This was undertaken via the ESPO 509 Framework and G-Cloud. The Council has sought a solution that provides best value for money for users, including residents of the borough, that can be delivered and maintained at nil (or minimal) cost to the council.
 - 12 The Council continues to engage with the on-going development of the NPP to ensure we are in a position to assess whether and when it may add value to the customer offer in Cheshire East car parks. At present, the NPP is assessed to require further development before it can reliably be adopted by local authorities. When this is successfully completed, the Council will re-evaluate the costs and benefits of the platform for both users and the Council.

Consultation and Engagement

- 13 This report follows a response to a Notice of Motion at full council in Summer 2023 which was responded to at the Highways and Transport Committee in November 2023. At that meeting, committee asked to be kept updated on progress of the National Parking Platform.
- 14 No other public or stakeholder consultation has taken place at this stage.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 15 Highways Committee requested an update on the NPP at the meeting in November 2023.
- 16 The current development status of the NPP means that it remains in the pilot stage, with a new version expected to be launched in autumn 2024.
- 17 The recommended approach takes account of the need to avoid any additional financial burden for the Council
- 18 It is important for service users that the Council is transparent and open in its parking charges and any associated fees, and that best value is sought.

Other Options Considered

- 19 The Committee not noting the recommendation (resolving to do nothing),
- 20 To join the scheme in full, NPP advise it may take between 4 and 5 months to on-board the council.

This option will also incur substantial revenue charges to the Council for which there is no current budget.

- (a) The motorist would likely incur an increase in the current convenience fee dependent on the App they use. In addition, they would incur an additional 2p per transaction.
- (b) This may incentivise drivers to park elsewhere, outside of the borough's public car parks, increasing the likelihood of neighbourhood nuisance and congestion.
- (c) However, membership of the NPP would provide users with increased flexibility in their choice of payment application, with greater interoperability with other local authorities, albeit at additional cost to the user.

1. Options appraisal:

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing –	Maintain the status quo – no changes in revenue cost or fee to the end user until current supplier contract ends in October 2024.	N/A
Join NPP in full leading up to the expiration of the current mobile app contract.	4/5 month on-boarding process. Incur significant revenue costs. End user faces increased & differing (possibly variable) convenience fees.	Incur signage charges for stickers 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, but it could be passed

		<p>onto the end user. Council may have 5+ MoR's. Legal colleagues may not approve this type of procurement avoidance or contract</p>
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 21 The NPP advise that the council would be required to complete a Membership Agreement which form a contract containing all legal terms. This is a rolling annual contract with exit provisions contained therein. This is outside of normal procurement procedures. <Please indicate the legal implications of this report and its recommendations/decisions here.>

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 22 In Cheshire East, the average number of transactions is 96,000 per month or 1.15million per year. Estimated transactions fees payable to NPP are circa £23,000 per annum. There is no budget for processing payment fees, delivering and maintaining a new mobile payment app solution/provider. A solution 'at nil cost to the council' must be sought.
- 23 All associated running/operational costs, should the decision be taken in the future to join NPP in full, must be passed over the end user as there is no budget for this element.

Policy

- 24 The policy implications of this report and its recommendations/decisions here are relevant to delivery of the Council's priorities for delivering an transport system that is inclusive and sustainable. The recommendations are also pertinent to being an efficient and financially sustainable organisation.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 25 There are no EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) implications of this report however, an extensive EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) was undertaken for the committee decision to work towards going 'cashless' for parking payments. This assessment would provide a basis for

preparing an updated EIA to inform consideration of adopting the NPP in future.

Human Resources

There are no HR implications.

Risk Management

The risk management implications include financial risks that may adversely impact the council & service budgets, that may arise from any decisions to join the NPP.

Reputational and customer service risks need to be managed should the NPP be widely adopted nationally, leading to a general expectation amongst car park users that multiple and various pay-by-phone Apps are generally available.

Rural Communities

There are no specific rural community implications.

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

There are no specific implications.

Public Health

There are no specific implications for public health.

26 Climate Change

There are no implications

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Richard Hibbert Head of Strategic Transport & Parking Richard.hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	Response to NoM November 2023 CEC (Cheshire East Council) Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Highways and Transport Committee

1. Note the National Parking Platform 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 expires in October 2024.
3. Note that the NPP pilot project will be monitored to explore potential future opportunities for the Council.
4. Agree to add a review of the NPP Pilot Project to the Committee Work Programme for September 2024.

National Parking Platform website:

www.npp.org.uk