

RESPONSES TO INITIAL CONSULTATION Summary of Key Grounds for Objections

A large number of objections focussed on the following key themes which are summarised as follows:

1. Economic Impact

1.1 Objectors felt that parking charges will have an adverse impact on town centre businesses by discouraging customers who may choose to go to other town centres, superstores and retail parks where parking is free. The current recession may accelerate this. In addition, charges penalise low paid or voluntary staff who have to drive to work and for whom employers have no private parking. If businesses lose staff due to parking charges there will be knock-on effects on other businesses which rely on their expenditure in the town. Charging should at least be deferred until the recession is coming to an end.

Response: Effective control through charging will encourage the circulation and turnover of customers on short-stay 'shoppers' car parks and restrict long stay parking in the central locations. There is no clear evidence that the imposition of appropriate charges is the key factor in a customer's decision as to whether to visit a town. It is the retail offer itself which is the main determinant of a destination as well as other factors such as accessibility, convenience and security. Charging can provide the incentive to town centre workers to explore alternative means of travel to work. Equally, charging should encourage employers to assist their colleagues in doing so.

1.2 Congleton residents and Town Council raised the need for out of town "park and ride" car parks to improve long stay capacity and offer alternatives to charges.

Response: this can be considered subject to land availability but this is not a reason to delay the introduction of charges now in order to achieve a measure of control as well as contributing to the financing of such a facility.

2. Impact on Community Groups

2.1 Objectors considered that charges unfairly affect the elderly and less able to pay in some locations. Groups such as University of the Third Age (U3A), set up to encourage older people to be active, fear loss of membership and attendance due to parking charges. Community facilities such as churches and community halls, which rely on free use of the car park by their customers, will suffer reduced usage and therefore income. In many instances the car parks are regarded locally as "community assets" which help to promote thriving community and cultural life in the centres.

2.2 Similarly, several car parks serve medical centres or surgeries and objectors feel it unfair to charge visitors to these facilities.

Response: this position is similar for other facilities around the Borough, including hospitals, which are already served by charged for car parks. Charging control assists with

the availability of spaces and the current proposal uses a low tariff option to minimise the impact on such users.

2.3 Parents visiting schools in both Middlewich and Alsager have no choice but to use the car parks especially for safety reasons and so are unfairly affected by charges.

Response: The proposed Order includes a first half hour free on Alsager car park. However this will be extremely difficult and costly to implement. Instead, parents visiting schools or playgroups (Alsager and Middlewich) could be issued with a **parking permit or pass**, specific to the times and days required, which would then only require normal regular levels of patrol to enforce. As this might involve considerable administration, the school could be asked to administer it themselves (ie collect vehicle details, issue and update permits, maintain records and so on).

3.Tariffs

3.1 Sandbach Town Council suggested that the charges, if introduced, should be at a lower rate of 20p for 1 hour for short-stay but to double the proposed long-stay rates to address the need for control and separation of long stay parkers and encourage shoppers.

Response: it is difficult to justify this cheaper rate solely for Sandbach. If this were agreed it would require a review of all the rates in the Borough. This review is to be undertaken as part of the Budget setting process for 2010/11 anyway and the proposed rate in the Order of 30p is already the lowest across Cheshire East Borough.

3.2 Objectors in the smaller centres claim that charges should not be imposed because there is no availability or control issues in these locations and that again, a much lower rate should be considered. Charging in small towns and villages will not be cost –effective in that occupancy will be insufficient to cover operating costs.

Response: Charging is to be introduced consistent with Cheshire East’s policy of charging for parking at point of use. Control of long and short stay is most effectively achieved through charging. Financial modeling of these car parks suggest this will be cost effective.

3.3 Others request a “first hour free” tariff to aid local businesses who wish to encourage “top up shoppers” staying for short periods.

Response: This was previously considered by Cabinet following the call-in and is extremely difficult to put into effect without large capital investment in new technology or virtually full time patrol presence.

3.4 Some car parks were considered to be wrongly designated: in Congleton, Chapel St should be long stay, with Fairground and Roe Street both needing to be short stay. (In fact these changes were accommodated in the final, advertised proposal). In Holmes Chapel some felt that to control long stay parkers, the car parks needed to be restricted to a maximum of 4 hours.

Response: restricting long stay is a valid alternative; however with limited space in the village it is felt better to allow long stay albeit with a charge.

4. Alternative Control

4.1 Several of the Town and Village Councils were interested in the idea that Cheshire East Borough Council should hand over control of the car parks to them in return for a sum to cover Cheshire East's fixed costs. This approach could be applied to all, or some of the towns concerned. To allow necessary negotiation and legal work, Cheshire East would be asked to defer the introduction of charging pending any agreement.

Response: this solution would fragment traffic and parking control across the Borough, against the aims of the Local Transport Plan and sets a precedent for a piecemeal, ad-hoc approach to the devolution of local powers. Further, it is not yet clear what residual costs or liabilities would lie with Cheshire East and any agreement would need to be in the form of a contract with specific terms and conditions. This suggestion could be considered in the future as part of the Council's overall approach to the *localism* agenda.

5. Legal Impediments

5.1 Several objectors cited legal reasons why charges could not be introduced including the existence of Common rights (in Middlewich and Alsager).

5.2 The issue of Scotch Common has also been given as a reason not to introduce charges in Sandbach at all until it is resolved.

Response: No evidence has been found of other legal impediments affecting the two Middlewich car parks proposed for charging. All other legal issues affecting car parks are dealt with in the Part II report referred to in the original Cabinet Report of 16th June.

6. Strategic Considerations

6.1 Charges should not be imposed without full reviews of parking and traffic control. Off Street charging will otherwise lead to increased on-street parking and therefore lead to worsening traffic control, safety and access problems.

6.2 Charges should not therefore be decided upon unless and until sustainable public transport alternatives are made adequate and cost-effective.

6.3 Income from charges, if introduced, should be ringfenced for improvements to local infrastructure and environment.

6.4 It was also felt that charges should only be imposed in tandem with on-street enforcement powers being granted to Cheshire East BC.

Response: Charging at point of use is in line with the Council's Parking Strategy and the Local Transport Plan as it is recognised as the most effective means of managing supply, accessibility and behaviour in support of a town's broader objectives. Income from charging is first applied to the costs of the service including ongoing improvements to parking facilities. Any surpluses accrue to the Council's General Fund for other services which include the development of sustainable public transport.

7. Residents' Parking

7.1 A number of responses to the Order stated that Residents' Permit Schemes should be introduced alongside the introduction of controls on car parks to avoid displacement problems due to imposition of charges. Introduction of charges should then be deferred until a Residents' Parking Scheme for town centre residents can be rolled out.

Response: It is very difficult to accurately predict the level or impact of any displacement of vehicles resulting from introduction of charging. There is a risk of introducing residents' schemes at considerable cost where they are not actually needed or helpful, whilst delaying the introduction of control and charging. It is usually more effective to react to observed difficulties and tailor scheme solutions to fit the local problem after charging has been introduced. Whilst a Residents' Parking Policy is to be imminently discussed at Scrutiny Committee and shortly submitted to this Cabinet, a simultaneous introduction in every town and projected location is virtually impossible given that the design of a scheme and proper consultation with residents can take up to six months. Residents' Parking Schemes are currently being piloted in the former Macclesfield Borough Council area.

8. Parking for Festivals and Events

8.1 Several car parks are used periodically by local groups for events and for annual fairs and festivals.

Response: these can be accommodated by existing car parking management policy either through dispensations or temporary closures. The events organisers will not be charged for this.

9. Other Free Car Parks

9.1 Objectors have referred to other towns and villages in Cheshire East where parking is uncharged. In addition, they refer to Council staff and members who receive free parking and claim this is unfair.

Response: All Cheshire East Council operated car parks are to be reviewed and considered for charging using the criteria established in the Parking Strategy. Staff and member parking is also under review and charges do apply in the former Macclesfield and Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council areas.

10. Development and Planning Applications Pending

10.1 Objectors refer to 'imminent' developments which could affect a decision to charge for parking in that this will act against the development aims of the town centre. In Alsager reference is made by the Town Council to the overall plan for the town contained in the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which sets the scene for town centre regeneration to encourage shoppers and visitors.

Response: the imposition of control through charging will assist with the circulation of users and management of our parking assets during major developments. Any loss of space due to development will be the subject of review and negotiation during the development proposal and planning application phases.