

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	17 JANUARY 2013
TITLE OF REPORT:	PETITION – CHARGES ON ETNAM STREET CAR PARK, LEOMINSTER
REPORT BY:	COMMUNITY PROTECTION MANAGER

1. Classification

Open.

2. Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

3. Wards Affected

Leominster North, Leominster South.

4. Purpose

To provide the background and context to allow Cabinet to debate a petition submitted in respect of the introduction of a parking charge on Etnam Street car park Leominster.

5. Recommendation(s)

THAT:

Cabinet debate a petition submitted by ‘Friends of Leominster Town’ and that as a result of the debate the Cabinet Member, Education & Infrastructure, prepare a response to the petition.

6. Key Points Summary

- A petition submitted by the ‘Friends of Leominster Town’ has reached the trigger in terms of numbers of signatures to initiate a debate.
- The petition is submitted on the basis that the decision to introduce a charge to park on Etnam Street car park, Leominster, will result in shoppers and visitors staying away from the town which will damage local businesses and the economy.
- There is a projected shortfall in the car park income budget 2012-13. This is just a

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Shane Hancock, Community Protection Manager on Tel: (01432) 261752

part of a more significant budgetary challenge faced by the council.

- Following the annual car parking charges review 2012-13 a charge was introduced to park in the previously free short stay Etnam Street car park, Leominster, with effect from 19 November 2012.
- The charge introduced is believed to be reasonable in the context of the budget position faced by the council, and in terms of benchmarking against neighbouring and peer authority parking charges.
- The charge was introduced following consultation with Leominster Town Council and an open invitation to them to propose other options.
- Car parking charges, whilst a part of the economic mix, are not the sole determinant of the economic prosperity of an area.

7. Alternative Options

- 7.1 There are no alternative options to debating the petition. The Herefordshire Council Constitution, Part 5 Codes and Guidance, allows for a petition which pertains to an area or locality to be formally recognised within the petitions scheme and, using the electoral roll for the area as a baseline, should such a local petition receive a number of signatures equivalent to or greater than 5% then this could trigger a debate.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

- 8.1 The petition subject of this report has met the trigger point for a debate at a relevant council meeting.

9. Introduction and Background

- 9.1 In line with the council's charging principles an annual review of car park charges resulted in a Cabinet Members Report that recommended an increase to existing car park tariffs in a number of car parks across the County and the introduction of charges in two free car parks.
- 9.2 Specifically, in relation to the petition subject of debate, the report recommended the introduction of charges on Etnam Street car park, Leominster. The report was presented to the Leadership Team, Leaders Briefing, and was the subject of Ward Member briefings and consultation with the City and Town Councils. The decision to implement the recommendations was made by the Cabinet Member Education & Infrastructure on 11 October 2012 with the new charges being implemented with effect from 19 November 2012.
- 9.3 A petition has been submitted to preserve free parking on Etnam Street car park. This submitted petition, together with an e-petition, contained approximately 2,350 signatures, sufficient to trigger a debate.

10. Key Considerations

- 10.1 Following a review of car park charges, recommendations made to the Cabinet Member Education & Infrastructure were agreed and implemented with effect from 19 November.

This included a decision to implement parking charges on the previously free Etnam Street car park in Leominster.

- 10.2 Etnam Street car park is a short stay car park situated in the centre of Leominster town. It has around 160 car park spaces. Notwithstanding that it was a free car park it represented a cost to the council in terms of rates payable and enforcement of the limited waiting restriction.
- 10.3 The review of car parking charges was carried out in the context of the council's charging principles which aim to maximise income from fees and charges, a challenging budgetary position for the council particularly around social care provision, but also a projected shortfall in the car park income budget of £320,000, and an emerging Local Transport Plan seeking in part to influence driver behaviour over choice of mode of travel.
- 10.4 The decision to introduce a parking charge was influenced by a view that continued free parking was no longer affordable for the council in the context of its budget, and that ongoing free parking was unlikely to encourage people to think about alternative modes of travel.
- 10.5 Notwithstanding the desire to maximise income and influence travel behaviour, the greater dependence on cars in the market towns was acknowledged in the level of tariff applied to the car park, a charge that mirrors the charge in place on the other short stay car park (Central Area) in Leominster. This is an approach taken in all of the market towns. Tariffs also try to reflect the different economic challenges the market towns have over Hereford, and the prevailing economic position was also considered as a part of the review. As a consequence parking charges in Leominster for short stay car parking are 50% lower than in Hereford to reflect this.
- 10.6 Benchmarking carried out against neighbouring towns and against market towns in a wider range of peer authorities also formed a part of the review in determining charges. Whilst this exercise did reveal some free parking in some market towns, it also showed that the average charge for short stay parking, where charges were made, was between 23% and 40% higher across tariff lines than the average charge for short stay parking in Herefordshire market town car parks.
- 10.7 The availability of free on-street street parking in around Leominster town centre, so providing a degree of choice, was also a factor in determining that a charge for parking in Etnam Street car park was reasonable.
- 10.8 The issue of reasonableness is also evident in the context that, across all council car parks, the level of increase agreed by the Cabinet Member was such that projected additional income remained less than the shortfall in the car park income budget, which is now projected at around £120,000. The level of charge increase required to meet the shortfall was considered, but rejected on the basis of what was reasonable in the current economic climate.
- 10.9 In arriving at the proposed final charging structures across all areas the Cabinet Member was mindful of providing the respective City and Market Town Councils with an opportunity to influence and shape decisions. In respect of Leominster specifically, in furtherance of this a briefing session was held with Local Members on 25 July 2012. Following this, on 27 July a letter, with the proposals, was sent to the Clerk at Leominster Town Council. This invited the town council to put forward alternative charging options to those proposed if they felt that was appropriate. The town council responded to the consultation on 20 August. The response objected to the proposal to introduce charges on Etnam Street car park stating that it "is a key feature of the town centre in that it provides free parking for small shops in

competition with supermarkets and the free parking which they provide". The response did not propose any alternative parking charges. On 12 September the town council was sent, for consideration, a modelled option that showed increased charges across other town car parks that might realise the projected income and allow Etnam Street to remain as a free car park. A response to this was not received. A reminder seeking comment was sent on 21 September, but no response was received.

- 10.10 Whilst the consultation timescale was tight there is evidence from the process that it worked, with changes being made to the proposals for Hereford car parks as a consequence of feedback from the City Council, and in respect of Ledbury in particular, where significant work and local consultation by the town council resulted in their proposal for car parking charges across all town car parks being broadly accepted as an alternative to the proposal put to them.
- 10.11 The petition is submitted on the basis that the charge introduced will result in fewer visitors and shoppers going to the town which in turn will have a detrimental impact on businesses and the economy.
- 10.12 There is in fact limited hard research evidence to support a direct link between parking and either a strong or weak local economy, albeit it is often the argument put forward against parking charges. Whilst parking is undoubtedly a part of the economic mix, much of the limited evidence that is available suggests that it is a town's broader retail, commercial, leisure and/or tourism offer which is the primary factor affecting a towns' competitiveness, not parking charges.
- 10.13 It appears that at the heart of the debate is the issue of whether the principle of a charge on the car park, and the level of the charge, will have a serious detrimental impact on the local economy.
- 10.14 It is not unusual that when car park charges are raised or introduced for the first time there will be a fall off in usage at the car park(s) affected. This is currently being seen at Etnam Street with less people parking there than when it was free. Counts have been taken at different times and dates by enforcement officers and these are shown at Appendix A. Photographs taken on 17 December are shown at Appendix B.
- 10.15 Income off the car park in the period 19 November to 18 December was £5,842 net.
- 10.16 The projected full year income assumed off the car park is circa £79,000. If the level of parking remains at current levels the full year income is more likely to be circa £50,000.

11. Community Impact

- 11.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

12. Equality and Human Rights

- 12.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 A decision to re-instate free parking at Etnam Street car park will have a financial impact. The projected full year income off the car park is circa £79,000. This is an estimated figure calculated on the basis of income being achieved on the other short stay car park in Leominster and the estimated occupancy of the car park. This figure could be less or more depending on actual use. Current levels of use would indicate a full year income of circa

£50,000.

14. Legal Implications

14.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

15. Risk Management

15.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

16. Consultees

16.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

17. Appendices

17.1 Appendix A – occupancy count Etnam Street Car Park

Appendix B – photographs taken on 17 December 2012.

18. Background Papers

18.1 Car Parking Charges Review 2012-13 - a Report to Cabinet Member, Education & Infrastructure.