

Kington Town Council

Thank you for your letter of 8th December which has now been considered by Kington Town Council at a meeting held on 10th January. We wish to record our strong opposition to the proposals to introduce car park charges for all car parks in Kington within the control of Herefordshire Council on the following grounds:

- In the first paragraph of your letter you state that the rationale for introducing car park charges is to ensure “a coherent approach to policy is applied equally across the City and all our market towns”. Notwithstanding that this is contrary to government guidelines on the subject, the policy is inappropriate as it ignores the unique characteristics, demographics, topography, and layout of the individual market towns. All the market towns except Kington have had a Transport Survey carried out. Some months ago, we requested this to take place but as yet have no indication when it might be actioned and would suggest that making assumptions about the appropriateness of a unified approach to the application of this policy is premature.
- The centre of Kington is largely of medieval origin with very narrow streets in all but the most recent developments. There is little or no parking provision for most residential properties within the town boundary. The High Street in particular (including surrounding streets) consists of small independent shops and businesses with flats above with no allocated on or off-street parking. The High Street businesses serve not only immediate town residents but attract shoppers from the surrounding villages. Recent work on Herefordshire Council’s Economic Development Plan for Kington identified lack of appropriate parking or public transport as a real barrier to economic development of the town.
- Employment opportunities for Kington residents are limited and many residents have no option but to seek work outside of the town. Public transport options for those residents are very limited with no public transport to the nearest town of Leominster or indeed any of the other market towns and a very limited service to Hereford. The last bus to Kington from Hereford leaves Hereford at 18.15 and the last bus from Kington to Hereford leaves Kington at 17.10. The “other means” of travel suggested in your letter simply do not exist.
- The small independent shops in Kington have suffered hugely from the pandemic. A significant investment to support local businesses by attracting visitors and shoppers to the town is underway through shop front enhancement schemes, better signage, town beautification and improvements to visitor attractions. The provision of free car parking is a major part of this process, and your proposals are contrary to the county-wide efforts to support local businesses and attract visitors.
- We believe the proposed level of charge will impact significantly on the household budgets of residents forced to use the car parks, many of whom are already on very low incomes. It is inevitable that many will chose to park their essential vehicles on existing narrow streets resulting in roads becoming blocked or inaccessible for larger vehicles, including emergency vehicles.
- Previous correspondence has suggested that the town council may wish to consider taking over responsibility for the car parks under the Community Asset Transfer provisions. We have indicated a willingness to consider this but still await any form of approach from Herefordshire Council’s Property Services Department regarding the terms and conditions that might apply to this proposal. Again, we feel that the proposal to introduce charging in those car parks is premature given the uncertainty of this option and lack of appropriate information.

We strongly recommend that you and other Herefordshire Council cabinet members attend a public meeting in Kington convened to consider your proposal for car park charges in Kington. We are happy to make arrangements for this (subject to Covid restrictions) but have been given little opportunity to do so within the deadline contained in your letter we received in December. We therefore formally request that a decision on parking charges be deferred until such a meeting has taken place.

Finally, we note that since receipt of your letter, we have had several indications from front line staff in Herefordshire Council that they are aware that car parking charges are to be introduced in Kington. Yet again we are left with the view that this consultation is little more than a sham with no intention of genuinely listening to the people of Kington on the appropriateness of these proposals.

Ward Member Kington, Councillor Terry James

Last week yourself and the Leader of Herefordshire Council invited local businesses and traders to a meeting in Kington to present the Council's Economic Vision and plan for regeneration in the County and Kington, which was mostly well received. It now appears that all the fine words and promises were a complete sham when the very next morning the Town Council and I received an email proposing to introduce new and increased parking charges on all the car parks in Kington.

This proposal shows a total lack of understanding of the damage such a proposal will make to the small and independent traders in Kington.

Kington having a medieval in origin high street, which large numbers of residents live above and will have nowhere to park other than incurring large financial charges. Perhaps your officers can explain how residents in the High Street who are predominantly on low incomes are going to be able to manage with increasing Council Tax charges and the cost of living rising well above income this will do enormous damage to the economy of Kington and the surrounding area.

It seems that Herefordshire Council is totally out of touch with the communities it is supposed to be serving. It seems that the senior management of the Council are acting more like colonial administrators than servants of the county's residents. It seems that the Council have no understanding of how impractical and damaging this will be to Kington.

Ward Member – Councillor Roger Philips, Arrow Ward

I wanted to express my concern at the Council's proposals to extend car parking charges in Kington.

The Town relies heavily on support from its rural hinterland which includes parishes in my ward who travel by car to Kington for shopping, business and employment. With the exception of a limited Bus service from Lyonshall village there are no real alternatives to the private car in this area.

I note that my Parishes and rural communities were not included in the brief consultation phase despite the fact they are also impacted. I would also agree with other correspondence that for this matter not to have been mentioned at the council's recent Economic forum at the Oxford where there were so many retail representatives was most regrettable. I am sure the Leader and the Chief Executive would have been aware of the changes if not precise details.

Kington`s economy and retail is more fragile than any of the other market towns and a county policy must reflect those different strengths and weakness. If the council is sincere in supporting local High streets and small businesses then it should be encouraging rural hinterlands to visit their local market towns to shop and do business rather than discourage. Introduction of these proposed charges will have a disproportional negative impact on customers than any income gained by the council.

The car parks in Kington are small and I also have concerns about the cost of the installation and maintenance of pay kiosks given the limited proposed return. You may have a longer business model which increases the fees in future which would be even more concerning. Have you any projected returns over a three year period you can share with the local community which have helped you come to your proposals?

Knowing Kington all my life I recognise the challenges that it faces and also the challenging times of delivering public services; but the economic and social reality of Kington and its hinterland would be valid reasoning not to proceed with your proposals

Kington Chamber of Trade

It was a pleasure to meet you at the Business Summit in Kington on Tuesday 7th December 2021 at the Oxford Arms where you presented the Council's Economic Vision for regeneration in the County. I know you were happy with the turnout, and I believe you said this was the best turnout that you'd had at these similar meetings across the County.

At this meeting, the main issue raised by attendees was communication, or lack of communication from yourselves. The original date proposed for this meeting hadn't been communicated to Kington Chamber of Trade nor Kington Town Council and we only found out about the meeting by someone mentioning it in conversation. Numerous issues were raised by attendees regarding communication, and I felt in the meeting, as well as other attendees, that this issue would be addressed, and you would work with us more closely in the future. However, this is not the case and in fact feels like this meeting was more of a box ticking exercise with a lot of empty promises.

We were and continue to be extremely disappointed to learn that the morning after this meeting, the Town Council received an email proposing the introduction of new and increased parking charges in all car parks in Kington. This proposal will be extremely damaging to small and independent traders in the Town. We have experienced the toughest 18 months of trading due to Covid and now when the trade is improving, new businesses are moving into Kington and opening in our High Street, you are planning on charging for all car parks and increasing the price, when the cost of living is increasing, and income is at an all-time low.

Numerous business owners travel into our Town, and this will have a detrimental impact on their outgoings. Free parking is a huge part of marketing campaigns for all the events that are organised in Kington, which are a big part of our economy and makes it attractive for people to attend these events but also visit on a regular basis.

Also, your proposal will affect the potential rental/purchase value of properties in the centre of Kington as there is a major lack of parking as our transport links are poor so there is no alternative methods of transport. Furthermore, Kington has had a shortage of offstreet public parking spaces for many years and a trading area (High Street, Bridge Street and Church Street) with ground floor trading and business premises with residential property/flats above. The result being that the available car parks are often filled with residential vehicles 24 hours for most days of the week. Your proposed increases in parking charges will be affecting many families already

on low incomes and often receiving benefits. Due to Kington being an old Town with narrow streets that are already congested with often illegal on-street parking causing issue for emergency vehicles, public transport, and delivery vehicles. Your proposed increases in parking charges will only add to this congestion problems as residents will seek to park for free on Kington's narrow streets which will then cause a reduction in shoppers and visitors to our town.

It appears that this has been part of Herefordshire Council's plan since introducing the new car parking charges in Mill Street car park. The notice board with the charges which I believe have only been put up during 2021, has all Zones noted on the board where all car parks are in Kington. If you would like to see a photo of this, I have one available. At no point have the Chamber of Trade, Town Council, nor the residents been consulted about this. Do you realise how damaging this will be to Kington?

At no point in your meeting was this proposal discussed. Were you unaware of the email being sent the next morning or did you not want to get into such a topical debate face-to-face? Communication isn't the only issue here. There are several issues, Kington being the smallest Market Towns always gets the bad end of the deal because we are so small, and some people even consider not important. However, being a small community means we come together when times are tough and fight for what we believe in.

A meeting with yourself, the Chamber of Trade and Kington Town Council would be hugely beneficial to discuss this detrimental issue within the next working week.