

CONGLETON BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE 16th January 2008

SUBJECT: Car Park Management

SOURCE: Head of Safer Communities**WARDS AFFECTED: All**

SUMMARY:

This report reviews the progress made on the available options for managing the provision of public car parking within the Borough. The impact of the proposed reorganisation of Local Government in Cheshire on this issue is also considered.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the established Council policy of providing 'free at point of use' parking on Council owned car parks is re-confirmed.
2. That the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee should work with the Head of Safer Communities to investigate non-charging options to improve the Management of the car parks.

IMPLICATIONS:**a) Strategies and Policies:**

The Medium Term Financial strategy published in October 2007 identifies a need to address an underlying funding 'v' expenditure gap by either making further cost efficiencies or by increasing income streams. However, although income for car parking is an option in this, the 2008/9 budget is not dependant on it and it remains the democratic right of this Authority to (following due consideration) determine its own policy on this matter. Note though any new costs of improving car park management without an associate income stream may have an impact upon the assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

b) Financial and Legal:

A rough costing of various options available for car park management are laid out in the report received by Executive on the 19th September 2007. In broad terms charging for car parking at selected 'shopping car parks' at an assumed tariff level would deliver a net revenue stream of £200K pa. to the Council as opposed to the current net cost of £83K pa. There would also be an initial capital implementation cost of £180k.

Various other non-charging car park management systems exist. In the absence of determining which is the preferred option, it is not possible to predict the likely financial impact. However, it is probable that in the absence of charging, improvements to car park management systems will have an net annual cost greater than is currently budgeted and there may be some capital expenditure implications. As stated above, there is no provision for any additional revenue costs made in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Although the delivery of decriminalised on street car parking enforcement powers by the Borough Council is currently optional, it is likely that central government will ensure that the powers are delivered by either the new Eastern Cheshire Authority or the existing County Council by 2010.

c) Consultation and Representations:

Leader of the Council
Management Team
Safer Communities Portfolio Holder

Background

Following consideration of a previous report on Car Park Management delivered to the Executive in December 2005, the then Head of Streetscape Services was asked to commission a more in depth study focusing primarily on the use and management of designated 'shopping' car parks within the Borough. An initial draft of this report was presented to an Executive informally in November 2006. Initial comments on the draft report made it clear that further investigations on the level of on-street parking order contravention was required. This was completed and the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee subsequently considered the report on the 11th April 2007 and the 10th July 2007. The committee resolved:

1. That no further investigation be carried out until Executive clarifies its priorities and objectives regarding the car parking review;
2. That the Committee is dissatisfied with the report produced by RTA Associates as it felt that it was flawed and biased in favour of car park charges;
3. That the Executive considers maintaining the present system of free parking and maintenance of car parks to the correct standard.

At its meeting held on the 15th August 2007, the Executive considered the recommendations from the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee. The Leader of the Council responded to the request from the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee for the Executive to clarify its "priorities and objectives regarding the car parking review".

In response to this request, the Chairman (Leader of Council) informed Executive that:

RTA Associates Limited had been commissioned to produce a report prior to inform the debate by the Borough Council to consider formally the possibility of introducing car parking charges. The decision as to whether to introduce a policy for charging on Council car parks would be a matter for Council not Executive. Notwithstanding the principle of charging for car parks, the Council would still have to consider and introduce a formal car park management system.

In connection with the powers available to the Council in respect of decriminalisation of on street parking, the Chairman acknowledged that although this was in fact a separate issue, there were linkages between car park management and decriminalisation of on street parking.

In that meeting, the Executive also resolved that:

1. That the report be received;
2. That the Head of Safer Communities be requested to arrange to meet with the Chairman of the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee to clarify further the dissatisfaction expressed by the Committee in connection with the report received from RTA Associates
3. That the Head of Safer Communities be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of Executive on the study carried out by RTA Associates together with additional information clarifying the position of the Scrutiny Committee in respect of the comments now reported.

Following point 3, the Head of Safer Communities met with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, made some alterations to the report previously scrutinised and then submitted the report to the

Executive for their consideration in their meeting on the 19th September. Having considered the report, the Executive resolved that:

1. That subject to the deletion of the reference to the potential sale of land forming part of the car park at Fair View Alsager, the report be received;
2. That the Head of Safer Communities be requested to produce a consultation document based on the RTA study for circulation to key stakeholders including the customer panel;
3. That in the first instance, the draft consultation document be referred to the Prosperity Scrutiny Committee to allow that committee to feed its comments to Executive prior to the document being formally approved for the consultation process.

Following the above instruction in item 2, work to prepare a consultation document commenced.

Impact of LGR

It is clear from the protracted period of time that the issue of 'car park charging' has been under consideration that the issue is both complex and controversial, drawing a wide range of opinions both for and against their introduction. An initial assessment of the work involved to conduct a proper stakeholder consultation exercise indicates that it would require a full time officer 3 months to deliver. Additional resources over and above those already budgeted would be required. Given this, and the need to divert a substantial amount of resources to implement the planned Local Government Reorganisation, the Council's Management team has considered whether embarking upon this consultation exercise is sustainable. It should also be noted that the introduction of a charging regime would constitute a major change in the Council's established policy of 'free at point of use' parking. It would have implications for both the County Council and also the neighbouring District Council's re. the introduction of decriminalised on-street parking enforcement.

In the light of this, the Head of Safer Communities recommends that the Executive should re-confirm the established policy of providing 'free at point of use' car parking pending a review by a future successor authority. In the event that the planned implementation of the new Eastern Cheshire Authority does not take place, this decision should be reviewed as and when it is thought appropriate. In the meantime, non-charging options to improve the Management of the car parks should be investigated.

Head of Safer Communities

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Reference:

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 : Background Papers

Report to Executive meeting on 19th September 2007 – Car Park Management – interim report.

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