

Report on the viability of free parking and the introduction of alternative payment methods for Market Harbourough..

The information sets out the potential options for Market Harbourough with regards to the introduction of :

- Permanent free parking schemes
- Temporary free parking schemes

Permanent Free Parking Schemes For Market Harbourough

Background information

There is a difference in the parking tariffs for Market Harbourough and Lutterworth. Because there are a larger number of private car parks in Lutterworth which do not charge, the Council owned pay and display car parks offer the first hour free parking. In Market Harbourough there are a number of free 30 minute bays in various car parks which allow user a limited time to park without incurring any charges.

Considerations and assumptions made.

When reviewing the impact of introducing free parking in Market Harbourough a number of issues were considered.

- Due to the current charging banding the pay and display machine data only records transactions down to the 2 hour period. Consequently limited detailed information is available to determine the actual usage and turnover of vehicles using the car park.
- Total income in 2012-12 for the 2 hour period from all short stay car parks except Springfield Retail car park is £179,000.
- The Springfield Retail Park car park is owned by Sainbury's Ltd and Khandahar however it is enforced by the council under a Service level Agreement. The SLA allows for reimbursements costs to customers, management costs and a £10,000 contribution to Harbourough Improvement Team (HIT). The remaining income is divided between the companies and the Council on a 50:50 basis.
- For all car parks in Market Harbourough over 80% of the total transactions take place in the two hour band.
- With all the car parks it is not possible to establish accurately how many vehicles used the car park for periods of less than two hours. For the purposes of this assessment presumptions have been made for the fact that for 75%, 50% and 25% of the vehicles using the car park in the 2 hour banding actually only did so for 1 hour.

- The Example below shows the potential impact on income for each scenario.

Total Income received for the two hour band	75% of vehicles used the car park for 1 hour or less	50% of vehicles used the car park for 1 hour or less	25% of vehicles used the car park for 1 hour or less
£179,000	£134,250	£89,500	£44,750

These figures are not absolute values and are only indicative of the potential impact on the income received.

The introduction of complete free parking has not been considered in detail here because the costs to the Council would be significant and would have a significant impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Costs and Benefits

In addition to the loss of income there will be implementation costs in the region of £3000 - £4000 for software upgrades, signage and advertising costs etc.

For any amendment to the tariff banding there will be a requirement to vary the existing Parking Order which will require public consultation and Executive decision before it can be implemented.

The current SLA for the Springfield Street car park does not include the provision of free parking and the SLA would have to be re-negotiated if free 1 hour parking was proposed for all car parks.

There are currently 65 free 30 minute parking bays in various car parks in Market Harborough. Increasing the number of free bays would have an impact on the overall income received from the car parks however this would be significantly less than introducing 1 hour free parking. In addition the Parking Order would not need to be amended and the only cost associated with this would be to re-line the existing car parks to incorporate more free bays.

The main benefit for both of these options would be to encourage more users into the car park. By limiting the time for free parking the Council would be potentially encouraging more people to shop locally and there would also be a potential increase in the turn over of parking spaces.

Temporary Free Parking

As an alternative approach consideration could be given to introduce free parking for particular events throughout the district or linked to holiday periods to encourage more people into the town centres.

This approach is more straight forward to implement as it does not require amending the fee schedule or the pay and display machines. It would be a simple process to advertise prior to the event and then covering up any pay and display machines during the event to prevent people inadvertently using them.

Costs and Benefits

The introduction of temporary free parking would encourage more people into the town centre for specific events or periods of the year which would have a benefit to local businesses through increased trade.

Temporary arrangements can be implemented with minimum disruption and provide the flexibility to adapt to local community circumstances and needs.

The potential income loss would be dependant on how many times this provision was used. As a guide, the daily average income lost for the highest income month would be approximately £3,700.