

**Background report on preparation of traffic orders for the introduction
of new parking charges and other parking proposals in Rickmansworth Town Centre
17 September 2017**

1. Three Rivers District Council intends to implement proposals to charge for short-stay parking that were agreed by the Full Council in February 2017. This proposal entails provision of short-stay parking for up to 2 hours in the six short-stay car parks in Rickmansworth town centre, with the first hour free and second hour charged at £1.00. This proposal was developed during meetings of the Parking Member working party and was based on a study of vehicle movements in these car parks, carried out by a consultancy, Bassleton Woods, in late 2016.
2. That study did not include any form of feasibility study to support these proposals and no such study has since been undertaken, so there has been no structured consideration of the implications or impacts of the implementation of these proposals. This background report is intended to consider the risks and outcomes that are considered likely as a result of this traffic order being implemented.
3. Through the preparation of a traffic order to implement the proposal, it has become evident that several details must be confirmed. It has also become clear that implementing the proposal in its' original form as set out above is likely to have unintended consequences that have not been assessed.
4. In preparing traffic orders, the District Council must comply with the general principle that public car parks may be operated by the LA for the benefit of the public (not only those shopping, although that is the political priority) and that the purpose of these car parks is to address on-street parking congestion (RTRA 1984 and TMA 2004).
5. The 15 car parks in the town centre currently provide two main services (four services in total). These two main services are:
 - *Short-stay (2 hours maximum, no charge) – 245 bays*
 - *Long-stay (24 hours maximum, £4.00 per day) – 129 bays*The other two services are:
 - *Medium-stay (4 hours maximum, £1.00 per day) – 10 bays*
 - *Permit-holders (Resident or business) – 52 bays*

Potential issues for implementation of Full Council decision to be resolved before traffic orders are made

6. These details include the payment mechanism (which is the subject of a separate report) which was subsequently required by Members to be designed to become 'cashless'. This payment mechanism must be specified in the Orders.
7. Another detail was the car parks to which this applied. The February Full Council decision:
 - a) Did not encompass two car parks which as the remaining uncontrolled parking places would be likely to be used instead of the current short-stay car parks, once charges were introduced, being the
 - Three Rivers House staff car park and
 - Basing House car park
 - b) Did not include the other nearby car parks of
 - Scots Hill car park or

- the Aquadrome car park; and
- c) Did not reference the Bury Lane car park which provides a mixture of parking provisions.
8. It is therefore proposed to include the Three Rivers House decked staff car park in the current scheme (at weekends) The other car parks referenced above may be left until the next phase of car park improvements.
 9. The main issue raised with the introduction of parking charges is the impact on unassessed demands from different user groups other than those addressed by the original study (which were shoppers and other short-stay visitors; and local workers and others using the short-stay car parks for long-stay parking).

Impacts on User Groups that have not been identified

10. A significant risk which has not been addressed has been identified in that this is likely to create, in that the parking demands of some user groups (not identified by the study, which focussed mainly on vehicle movements) may be negatively affected.
11. As user needs have not been considered as part of the available parking supply, there is a lack of evidence to show what demands come from what groups at what times and on what days because the surveys carried out in November 2016 show only the usage of each car park at different times, with no indication of who is using them.
12. This risk is not related to the fact of charging for parking but to the level of parking demand at different times and to balancing parking needs effectively. This is a requirement for any traffic order making process.
13. User groups that were identified by the study that proposed charges include local workers and others causing a long-stay or medium-stay demand, but parking in short-stay car parks.
14. It is essential that this behaviour is interpreted correctly, but in the absence of any user survey data, the District Council cannot determine whether this use of short-stay capacity is due to the evasion of charges levied in long-stay car parks; or to an overall deficiency in long-stay capacity in Rickmansworth (which has for some time been posited by the local business association as a factor); or for some other reason (such as convenience due to the location of the different types of car parks and the fact that the 15 car parks in the town centre provide two main services (five types in total)).
15. This third possible factor seems more significant due to the unusual traffic routeing around the town centre. Rickmansworth is accessible from points on three sides which lead to the one-way High Street, so that not all car parks are available from every access point, notably those on the north section of Talbot Road.
16. The user groups not identified by the study include, for example, users of local facilities other than the retail offer; local workers, residents or occasional visitors (such as those visiting Watersmeet or other conference or meeting centres).
17. Charging may not affect these users but it may change the pattern of parking across the town as a whole in a way that disadvantages them.

Targeted charging

18. There is no benefit in charging to control low-priority parking by specific user groups that are able to visit at other times of day when charging is not in force. Charging is likely to affect only those groups that create peak demand, so for example there is no consideration in this report of user groups that demand parking in the evenings.
19. Conversely there may be an opportunity (or a need) to charge higher rates in some locations in order to accommodate particular user groups that are not the focus of this proposed

change. This could include for example local workers with opportunities to park elsewhere but whose parking is currently disadvantaging short-stay visitors who may otherwise choose not to use the local retail offer.

20. This data could be obtained from occupancy surveys or personal surveys which would enable the District Council to determine what user groups are actually behind the figures, in order to develop a more effective, targeted and strategic solution to the range of perceived parking problems.

Specific user groups

21. One obvious likely effect is that the user group generally identified as local workers (which anecdotally moves cars around the various short-stay car parks to achieve the effect of cheap long-stay parking) could decide to pay for long stay parking (£4.00 daily, rather than the same cost around a range of short-stay car parks), which would have the effect of significantly reducing long-stay availability for other user groups (such as visitors and tenants in the TRH offices who are currently advised to use long-stay car parks).
22. This would indicate a need to convert some short-stay parking to long-stay as suggested above.
23. One need that has been identified is for users of Watersmeet who require half-day parking for film and stage events.
24. This indicates a requirement for parking for more than the agreed two hours.
25. While this need is unique in the town there are other attractors that are likely to require parking over two hours to be viable;
26. This is a normal consideration in parking provision near retail centres and typically includes users of personal care providers such as hair salons.
27. There are very likely others given the density of land uses here.
28. This lack of data presents a risk to any changes made.

Possible solutions

29. There are several solutions to address these risks. These are detailed below, comprising options either to:
 - Increase flexibility of existing parking spaces to allow all unassessed demands to be met as effectively as possibly by opening provision to the widest possible range of demands
 - Increase flexibility of some limited parking spaces
 - Increase capacity

Increased flexibility

30. The only recommendation that is considered strongly to reduce the risk (of failure to effectively provide parking that is suitable to meet these demands, which are unknown in scale but evident from observation) would be to create maximum flexibility to make available the most parking spaces to the highest number of user.
31. **Option A** is the most effective way to create maximum flexibility to deal with the risk of user group exclusion. This option would revise the parking offer in every car park to enable short- and long-stay parking controlled by a sliding scale of charges. This means that customers can use any car park for any length of time, but that they are charged commensurately. This option is the most effective as this would cater for all user groups.

32. Option A could be modified in specific car parks to deter longer-stay parking in those locations. This would avoid the risk to short-stay turnover. This **Option A1** could involve either:
- that charges after the first hour in some car parks are increased more rapidly than in others, making these locations less attractive (but more viable) for long stay parking (*preferred option*)
 - that the first hour free is retained in some car parks (or all car parks)
 - that some areas (or specific car parks) are retained as dedicated short-stay car parks. The car parks that are most suitable for this treatment are those most accessible to the High Street. One of these listed below should be selected:
33. Northway upper and lower stories (100 bays) (but note accessibility issues for around 40 bays due to construction of car park in building undercroft)
- Rose Garden (37 bays)
 - High Street (West) (67 bays)
 - Ebury House (8 bays)
 - The car parks next nearest to the High Street are those at
 - Talbot Road (High St) (45 bays) and
 - Talbot Road (West) (33 bays)
34. **Option B** - If Option A is not accepted, to address the needs referred to above (taking into account the fact that this is not an evidenced nor exhaustive list, as none of the required additional research has been conducted - so there may be other needs that have not been identified), it is proposed that: Some short-stay car parks, or areas within car parks, are identified as four-hour maximum stay, with a scale of charges related to the remaining two-hour short-stay provision. This is suggested either:
35. **Option B1**: An additional £1.50 per hour for the third and fourth hours, to a total of £4.00 for the maximum four hour stay, in order to discourage long-stay users from these car parks.
36. **Option B2**: An additional £1.00 per hour for the third and fourth hours, to a total of £3.00 for the maximum four hour stay. This may be less effective to discourage long-stay users from these car parks as with one move to a short-stay car park (at which staying for 2 hours would cost £1), their total paid charge daily would be £4.00 for the whole day, the same as the long-stay charge). This assumes a total daily stay of up to six hours.
37. **Option C**: More long-stay provision is made available in order to cater for a wider range of demands. It is proposed that some short-stay car parks are converted to long-stay, with a sequential increase in charge over the day to allow flexible use of these car parks.

Increased capacity

38. There are options to increase capacity through better design of car parks and reallocation of current user-limited bays to become new multi-user bays.
39. **Option D**: Some capacity in car parks, without the need for major civil engineering works, can be increased in
- The Bury (possible 6-8 spaces)
 - High Street West (possible 3 spaces)
 - Talbot Road (South) (possible 4 spaces)
 - Scots Hill (possible 5 spaces)

- Talbot Road (West, short-stay) (possible two spaces)
40. **Option E:** It is also recommended that the business permit bays in The Bury CP and Talbot Road car parks, which are restricted to local businesses (and not their employees) are converted to either (**Option E(a)**) general use or alternatively (**Option Eb**) to permit-holder use.
 41. Option E(a) would be accompanied by a change to the long-stay car parks orders to allow permit holders to use these bays.
 42. All bays would become dual-use 'long-stay P&D' or 'permit holders' bays. This would enable eligibility of permit holders to be set. The effect of this would be to:
 - Regularise the current situation for business permits to enable local workers to buy a 'reduced cost season ticket' to allow them to commute by car and park in any long-stay bay
 - Regularise the current provision of 'season tickets' which is not currently legitimate (while offered by Watford, these are not set in any orders in TRDC, so are not legal).
 - Enable, potentially, resident permit holders to be able to park in these bays.
 43. There is a very significant benefit to be gained by enabling point (3) in that some capacity can be released on- and off-street especially in CPZs B and C, based on occupancy surveys carried out in 2017.
 44. By making residents of CPZ C eligible to park in these car parks, the converse can also be justified: permit holders of local worker permits, business permits and any other appropriate permit can be made eligible to park in the on-street bays around Zone C which includes 66 bays off-street that have been found to be 61% during weekday daytimes (39 bays).
 45. The provision of business permits is separately being investigated, but it would be easily feasible to provide parking for these users on-street locally.

Conclusions

- It is recommended that option A above is adopted as the least risk option to avoid negatively affective parking service users in central Rickmansworth customers. Option A1 gives more control over short stay parking for shoppers in this scenario.
- A less adventurous alternative could be option B1, although this would not give the security of option A that all needs, where possible, had been met.
- Options D and E are most effective overall in releasing parking capacity.
- Note that all or any options may be combined with dual-use parking bays and it is recommended that any change to public car parks should include this change to enable permit holders (types to be agreed for each locations) to use these bays. Specific permit types to be enabled include local workers through proposed local worker permits; local business' vehicles through the existing business permits; possibly long-stay visitor permits similar to the current Season tickets and any other relevant permits such as those issued to local attractors such as Watersmeet that will be agreed in future.

Agreed recommendations by DCES – September 2017:

- Agree to flexibility in length of stay in some short stay car parks to cater for different users. Tariffs for additional hours need to be set at a level which, whilst allowing longer term users in the short stay car parks, still encourages those customers to use the long term car parks to ensure vehicle churn in the central short stay car parks (£1 for 2 hours, £2.50 for 3 hours, £4 for 4 hours).

- Agree that other 4 hour car parks have their existing tariff amended to match ie The Bury
- Agree that existing staff car parks at TRH need to have P&D implemented on the weekends. Satisfied this could be up to 4 hours.
- Agree to changes in long term/short stay car parks if considered more convenient for users ie accept manoeuvring difficulties in lower deck of Northway).
- Agree to roll out free-vend, card only parking ticket machines in other existing short stay car parks in TRDC, to assist with enforcement and future possibilities to extend a charging regime.

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