

**CAR PARKING
SCRUTINY REVIEW**



A report produced by
The Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee

**FINAL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2014**

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CAR PARKING

SCRUTINY REVIEW

FINAL REPORT

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
2.	INTRODUCTION.....	8
3.	BACKGROUND.....	8
4.	ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY.....	9
5.	FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	9
6.	MEMBERS OF THE REVIEW PANEL.....	25

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Context: The Council provides over 2400 car parking spaces in 25 Pay & Display car parks and over 1800 car parking spaces in 40 'free' car parks. There is a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) in the Birkenhead Town Centre with approximately 915 parking spaces managed by pay & display.

In 2012, the "*What really matters*" budget option consultation began. As part of this process the Chief Executive provided budget options developed by Council Officers.

One of the Budget Options proposed by Regeneration and Environment was to "*Increase Income from Parking*". This proposal rationalised the charging regime across the Borough. Broadly, parking in West Wirral had charges increased to align with the existing charging regime in the East. It was suggested that greater tendency for use of car parks in the West would generate additional revenue and would remove the inequalities of low charges in West Wirral. This meant that charges in these areas i.e. Heswall and West Kirby increased.

In addition to the harmonisation of charges, this option also included reducing the administration involved in servicing parking appeals, reducing the amount spent on parking enforcement and reducing expenditure on cash collection from parking meters.

The feedback from the public consultation of Budget Options showed that 63.5% of those who responded supported this option under the circumstances and 22.8% supported the option if it was absolutely necessary.

The option to increase income from car parking, by standardising parking charges across the authority was agreed at Council on 5th March 2013 and implemented from April 2013.

The proposed budget saving was forecast as £281,000.

The Panel was advised by Officers that whilst consideration had been given to the corporate objectives, no Car Parking strategy was in place when harmonisation was implemented. Therefore the changes to pricing or maintenance could not be checked against any existing objectives for Wirral's Car Parking services.

Evidence received by the Panel shows that the number of tickets issued at Wirral's off-street Car Parks had been in decline for a number of years. The panel also found that prior to the introduction of the harmonisation of charges the income received at Wirral's off-street Car Parks had also been in decline for a number of years.

Officers advised the panel that whilst parking income had increased by £174,283 for 2013/14 when compared to the previous financial year, the overall target for budget savings from Car Parking (£281,000) was not met.

In reviewing the practices of other Local Authorities the Panel found that a coherent Car Parking Strategy needed to be in place. The Panel decided to establish 'Objectives' and 'Principles' in order to measure how existing car parking policies apply, and how changes may be required in order to meet these Objectives and Principles.

Car Parking Strategy

In reviewing the Car Parking policies of other Local Authorities - in particular Stockport Council - the Panel observed that policies reflect the needs of users and the local economy. The Panel found that a recent Stockport Car Parking Strategy focused around areas of greatest demand such as main town centres and smaller outlying shopping and commercial centres.

The panel is aware that Wirral has a diverse range of centres, some healthy, some showing signs of weakness, and others requiring major intervention if the shopping centres are to survive.

Officers advised that other areas of increasing demand are leisure facilities and destination locations such as Country Parks, West Kirby beach front and New Brighton promenade.

The Panel agreed that the pressures on the retail and commercial centres are many and varied, and any Car Parking Strategy should be supportive of the economic sustainability of each of the centres.

The Panel has proposed the following 'Objectives' and 'Principles' which should provide a guiding framework for any future strategy.

The proposed 'Objectives' and 'Principles' are considered to be in full harmony with the Councils corporate plan.

Recommendation 1 – Cabinet approves the following 'Objectives' and 'Principles' which should provide a guiding framework for any future Car Parking strategy.

Proposed Objectives (not listed in any priority)

Objective

P01 To support the long-term economic viability of the Boroughs shopping and commercial centres.

P02 To ensure that the price for car parking is fair and not detrimental to the economic well-being of shopping and commercial centres and there is clear consideration of the cost to users of private car parks provided in the same area.

P03 That car park users are provided with convenient alternative methods of payment other than just cash, and that parking tariffs paid for in cash are in readily available coinage.

P04 To ensure that parking facilities are accessible and located in such places to meet the needs of users of shops and commercial premises.

P05 To provide sufficient numbers of disabled parking spaces in good proximity to shops and services.

P06 To ensure adequate numbers of parking spaces are available in areas of demand, particularly for visitors to the Boroughs tourist destinations.

P07 To maintain a good quality of life for local residents and visitors by tackling inappropriate parking and congestion.

P08 Ensure that new development supports the Councils policies and does not make worse any parking issues in areas of high demand.

P09 To ensure that there is adequate taxi, cycle, motorcycle, freight and coach parking provision in areas of demand.

P10 To ensure that car parks are adequately lit, appropriately signed, and that users feel safe and secure, particularly in the evening and in remote locations.

P11 To provide well maintained car parking facilities.

Proposed Principles.

In order that the proposed objectives are obtainable, the Council will:

1. Ensure that parking is included as an important part of any regeneration plans for the Borough.
2. Continue to regularly review car parking charges to ensure that they are appropriate and fair.
3. Cater for short stay use to support daytime and evening commercial activity.
4. Ensure adequate provision of off-street and on-street parking in areas of demand.
5. Work with partner organisations with regards to parking which allows for mutually beneficial outcomes.
6. Look for opportunities to create more parking facilities where there is demand, including mixed use of car parks, such as parking during the day and community use of an evening and weekend.
7. Provide adequate taxi, cycling and motorcycle parking (inc Taxi ranks) near to commercial centres and visitor sites (Including the provision of cycle hire centres where appropriate)
8. Dispose of car parks, or reduce the size of car parks in areas of low demand, in order to make alternative car parks more sustainable and provide appropriate land development opportunities
9. Maintain the car parks in terms of cleanliness winter gritting and grounds maintenance.
10. Pursue developer contributions under Section 106 agreements to further the Council's policies as well as to improve parking facilities where parking need is expected to increase as a result of proposed development.
11. Review the potential to provide lorry parking and rest facilities in the Borough
12. Adopt the practice set out in the 2004 Traffic Management Act Part 6 which addresses inappropriate parking.
13. Keep under review signage to and from car parks for users to ensure that they are adequate and appropriate.

14. Consider the use of 'Park & Ride' schemes in areas of high demand.
15. Review the potential to provide coach drop off, parking and rest facilities in the authority.

In addition to the proposed 'Objectives' and 'Principles' the panel consider further recommendations appropriate based on their findings.

Tariff Structure & Pricing

As detailed earlier in this Executive Summary, evidence shows that the number of tickets issued at Wirral's off-street Car Parks has been in decline for a number of years.

The option to increase income from car parking, by standardising parking charges across the Borough was approved and implemented from April 2013. This process is commonly referred to as the "harmonisation of charges" and therefore this term is used within this document.

The panel also found that prior to the introduction of the harmonisation of charges the income received at Wirral's off-street Car Parks had also been in decline for a number of years.

Overall income increased by 3.6% in the financial year following the introduction of the harmonisation of charges (April 2013/14). During the same period the number of tickets issued decreased by 4.5%. This however does not reflect the impact that the harmonisation of charges has had on local centres.

The Car Parks servicing the Birkenhead Retail area (referred to as Birkenhead Shoppers later in this report) noted an increase in usage of around 13% on the previous year, with a similar increase in income.

In contrast the Dee Lane and Concourse Car Parks in West Kirby (referred to as West Kirby Shoppers later in this report) noted a decrease in usage of around 22% on the previous year but an increase in income of over 100%.

The panel took the view that whilst recognising income had increased since harmonisation was introduced, a balance between revenue and the impact on the broader economy needed to be considered.

Whilst the panel considered suggesting actual tariff prices, it agreed that a banding structure governed by the proposed objectives and which gave consideration to demand, economic viability & competition would generate income and support local economies.

Recommendation 2 - Cabinet should introduce a banding structure for car park pricing tariffs to support the long term viability of Wirral's shopping and commercial centres and to ensure that the price of car parking is fair and not detrimental to the economic wellbeing of shopping and commercial centres. The banding structure should be governed by the objectives outlined and give consideration to;

- ***Demand at different areas and/or sites***
- ***The economic viability of district & local centres***
- ***Existing action plans for the regeneration of district & local centres***
- ***Private Contractor prices in the immediate area***

The Panel noted that tariffs applied in April 2013 required users to pay in sums which the Panel considered to be in inconvenient denominations. One hour, two hour and three hour tickets cost the user £1.05, £1.65 and £2.05 respectively.

The Panel also noted that no change could be given to users of pay and display machines and therefore users who did not have the correct denomination of coins could overpay.

The Panel considered that the requirement for users to pay in inconvenient denominations was unhelpful.

The Panel also considered ways which would make it easier for users to pay. The Panel were advised that a range of different technologies exist within the Car Parking services marketplace.

Recommendation 3 - Cabinet should ensure that the new banding structure pricing is set out in convenient denominations (removal of the odd 5p) and that where appropriate; technology should be used to make it easier for users to pay.

The panel further recommend that the introduction of a tariff banding structure and any technology should be tested thoroughly before implementation.

Recommendation 4 - Cabinet is requested to approve the testing of the tariff banding structure model and any associated technological implementation in a controlled pilot or series of controlled pilots. The outcomes from such pilot schemes should influence any model, pricing or implementation of technology and the views of traders and users considered. In addition;

- ***The Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee is requested to reconvene the Car Park Review Panel following the testing, piloting or collection of market research to review suggested tariffs and technological implementation.***

In support of the proposed 'Principles' the panel recommend;

Recommendation 5 - Cabinet should implement Car Park charges in areas of high demand for parking and ensure adequate car parking is provided in such areas. Cabinet should ensure that the development of new Car Parks or the introduction of charging at existing sites does not make any parking issues in areas of high demand worse for residents. Adequate provision of on-street parking in areas of high demand should also be considered. Cabinet should give consideration to the Corporate Plan and related strategies before developing new Car Parks or implementing charges.

Recommendation 6 - Cabinet should request officers to report on the opportunities for multiple use car parks & contract parking in the Borough. The report should be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Committee no later than July 2015.

Recommendation 7 - Cabinet should request that officers assess and report back on the continued viability of Car Park sites which experience low demand. Where continued viability is not found, Cabinet should seek approval for the sale or leasing of such land. Cabinet should ensure that officers give consideration to the potential requirement for Car Parking in the future based on known regeneration plans before seeking to dispose of the site(s). Officers should only present this report once viability can be fully assessed following implementation

of the proposed new strategy and associated recommendations found here. In the panels view at least a full year's data should be considered.

2. INTRODUCTION

In October 2013 the Regeneration & Environment Budget Option Scrutiny Panel report recommended a review of Car Parking. During a meeting of the Party Spokespersons for the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee, it was agreed that a review of Car Parking would be added to the work programme. A Task & Finish panel consisting of seven Members was set up in November 2013. The Chair of the panel was Councillor Paul Doughty.

3. BACKGROUND

The Council recognises the essential contribution that private motor vehicles make to the lives of local people and to the success of the local economy. Providing suitable and sufficient public parking for private motor vehicles, whether on or off street, is essential to maximising the benefits of this contribution.

The Council provides over 2400 car parking spaces in 25 pay & display car parks and over 1800 car parking spaces in 40 'free' car parks. There is a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) in the Birkenhead Town Centre with approximately 915 parking spaces managed by pay & display.

In 2012, as part of the "What really matters" budget option consultation, the Chief Executive provided budget options developed by Council Officers. An option to increase income from parking was proposed using the following rationale;

"Currently, car parking charges vary across the Borough. It is much more expensive to park in Birkenhead or Liscard, for example, than it is to park in West Kirby. This option would include standardising charges across Wirral to bring them all onto the same current tariff as Birkenhead, and reduce the 'all day' charge to a competitive rate of £2.50 and annual and seasonal permit rates in outer Birkenhead car parks. This option would also include reducing the administration involved in servicing parking appeals, reducing what we spend on parking enforcement, and reducing what we spend on collecting cash from and performing maintenance on parking meters.

This proposal rationalises the charging regime across the Borough. Broadly, parking in western areas would have charges increased to align with the existing charging regime in the East. The greater tendency for use of car parks in the West would generate additional revenue. This will remove the inequalities of low charges in West Wirral but will mean charges in these areas i.e. Heswall and West Kirby will increase substantially.

Through standardising car parking charges across the Borough, income is expected to increase by £150,000 per year although business in some locations is expected to fall. Through setting a competitive 'all day' rate in outer Birkenhead Car parks, this should encourage a return to parking in some of these areas."

4. ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope

A scoping meeting was convened with the Scrutiny Panel in January 2014. The agreed scope is included as Appendix 1. It was agreed that the focus of the review would concentrate on the development of an evidence based car parking strategy which considered how best to maximise income from Car Parks whilst minimising the effect on the local economy. As the review developed, the panel proposed to provide a framework for Officers to develop a Car Parking strategy by way of recommended Principles and Objectives. In addition the panel have also made further recommendations relating to pricing, technology and demand based decision making.

4.2 Methodology

The Review was undertaken over a number of meetings, from January to July 2014. The meetings aimed to give Members of the Panel an understanding of current and historic usage and income data. Members of the Panel also considered town centre economic viability and the effect that the harmonisation of charges has had on usage. The policies of similar sized authorities with similar competition from larger commercial and retail offers were also considered.

Evidence and research detailed in this report was provided by the Parking Services Manager, the Scrutiny Support Officer and further information was provided by Senior Council Officers.

Members of the Scrutiny Panel would like to thank all those who have assisted in the development of this Review.

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council provides over 2400 car parking spaces in 25 pay & display car parks and over 1800 car parking spaces in 40 'free' car parks. There is a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) in the Birkenhead Town Centre with approximately 915 parking spaces managed by pay & display. The number of on-street restricted parking spaces in the Borough (permit controlled or limited waiting) is unknown.

Harmonisation of Charges

In 2012, the "What really matters" budget option consultation began. As part of this process the Chief Executive provided budget options developed by Council Officers.

The proposal rationalised the charging regime across the Borough. Broadly, parking in western areas had charges increased to align with the existing charging regime in the East. It was suggested that greater tendency for use of car parks in the West would generate additional revenue and would remove the inequalities of low charges in West Wirral. This meant that charges in these areas i.e. Heswall and West Kirby increased.

Cabinet were advised on 7th February 2013 of the findings from "What Really Matters" Consultation. Agenda Item 8, Appendix Two¹ presented the

1

<http://wir06metrognome/documents/s50009650/APPENDIX%20TWO%20REGENERATION%20AND%20ENVIRONMENT.pdf>

options, together with the quantitative data gathered through the consultation questionnaire, a summary of any related comments received through the consultation process and, where applicable, further consultation which had taken place.

The feedback relating to the “Increase Income from Parking” Budget Option was as follows;

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	63.5%	3144
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	22.8%	1131
I find this completely unacceptable	13.7%	677

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

There was a mixture of responses in relation to parking. Some people believe that raising charges would have a negative impact on businesses, while others agreed that the same charges should be applied across the borough.

OPTION SUMMARY

Some concerns were raised in the free text comments which related to this option, but overall the consultation is demonstrating strong support for implementing this option.

As detailed in the report of 7th February 2013 the consultation demonstrated strong support for implementation. The option to increase income from Car Parking, by standardising parking charges across the Borough was agreed at Council on 5th March 2013 and implemented from April 2013.

The proposed budget saving was forecast as £281,000.

Car Parking Strategy

The panel was advised by Officers that whilst consideration had been given to the corporate objectives, no Car Parking Strategy was in place when harmonisation was implemented. Furthermore, Officers advised that the target of increasing revenue from Off-Street Car Parking whilst maintaining and developing further the focus on ensuring Wirral is a place where businesses flourish was challenging.

In reviewing the Car Parking policies of other Local Authorities - in particular Stockport Council - the panel observed that policies reflect the needs of users and the local economy.

The Panel reviewed research and policy from a range of Local Authorities.

The Panel found that the location of parking, usage and demand is a key factor in setting the level of charges. Evidence suggested that whilst charges can vary from town to town there should be some uniformity with regards to stay periods.

Preston City Council

Results of surveys undertaken by AECOM (Management Support Services) showed that destination was the main priority for Preston's Car Park users.

Recommendations from the report suggested that by reducing existing tariffs usage and income would increase, however Preston have not reduced their prices at this time.

Preston have set their tariffs to be competitive with private parking and in order to remain competitive and be able to respond quickly, officers have been given delegated powers to amend contract parking charges to stay in line with private parking contractor charges.

Preston's strategy is to move away from running public car parks because they can not afford to provide the level of service/ standards the public expect.

Preston only own around 30% of the parking stock and therefore they can not influence the parking charges

Burnley

Burnley has implemented the following policy;

To deliver cost effective car parking to ensure available car parking for both shoppers, commercial users and to assess the need for changes in the car parking fees structure whilst agreeing efficient pricing strategies, striking a balance between Council revenue and economic requirements of the Town.

Tariff structures will be reviewed in the context of trends in neighbouring towns and competing private car parks and will be set balancing the need to maintain income levels and needs of car park users.

Stockport

Stockport's policy states that it will *"ensure that the pricing of Car Parking is not detrimental to the economic vitality and regeneration of the district, neighbourhood, and local centres and shopping parades by ensuring checks and balances are in place for controlling charging."*

Stockport will consider the *"introduction of alternative methods of payments and review the need for alternative charging regimes in the future. This will include the potential development of loyalty schemes such as money back from traders for parking charges when purchases are made in local stores."*

Cheshire

Cheshire has the following policy;

Parking charges should be set at levels, to reflect the role and economic strength of centres, effectively manage demand, and respond to integrated transport and sustainability.

Provide excellent parking facilities, at an appropriate charge, to customers and Council tax payers.

Review charges annually, in accordance with the Council's Fees and Charges policy, at least recovering the cost of the car park service.

The scale of charges should conform to a consistent pattern across the stay periods in all towns, to improve choice and optimise management of parking supply. The steps in charge level from one time period to the next should be broadly consistent throughout all locations.

Stafford

This Authority will in principle impose charges for parking at levels reflecting local pressures and needs. These may vary between Town Centres and zones. The scale of charges should conform to a consistent pattern across the stay periods in areas. These should follow national guidelines. Thus the percentage increase in charge from one time period to the next should be consistent throughout all locations.

Mole Valley

Mole Valley will introduce differential charging to encourage maximum use of car parks in a way that supports the needs of businesses, workers, shoppers and commuters.

Middlesbrough Council

Middlesbrough introduced free parking for first two hours in February 2013, this is currently being reviewed. Charges on most car parks are £1 per hour thereafter.

Phone to park has been in place for around 3 years and usage has tailed off since the introduction of free periods of parking

Periods of free parking require the motorist to obtain and display a pay & display ticket.

London Borough of Lewisham

Lewisham has a similar approach to Middlesbrough, with a period of free parking but with a more varied tariff structure depending on car park type and location.

London Borough of Westminster

In some areas of this Borough a dual tariff is in operation. This charges a higher hourly tariff if a motorist parks before 13.30 and a lower hourly tariff if a motorist parks after 13.30.

Free After 3

“Free after 3” is a Car Parking promotion which encourages visitors to an area after 3pm offering them free parking. This promotion has been offered by numerous Local Authorities across England at some time or another.

“Free after 3” promotions are currently offered in some North West Local Authorities though at limited sites. Research found that Chester and St.Helens currently offer the promotion at some of their Off-Street Car Parking sites. Ellesmere Port offers the “Free after 3” promotion at all Off-Street Car Parking sites.

Wirral has offered “Free after 3” promotions in the past, and the panel was interested to hear if this promotion had actually encouraged more visitors. Officers advised that no data was collected during the “Free after 3” promotions and therefore no evidence base exists to provide quantitative data to the panel on its effects.

Officers advised that because Car Parking was free after 3pm those who parked after 3pm did not obtain a ticket. Therefore, the number of people who used the Car Parks after 3pm is unknown. Officers advised that should future promotions, such as “Free after 3” be offered then robust data gathering of such promotions would be obtained.

Objectives & Principles

Officers advised that it is important to recognise that parking is important to a retail centre; but is not **the** most important issue. Many centres in Wirral are showing signs of stress. Therefore, any parking strategy needs to be carefully thought out and nuanced towards the different centres and also be adaptable to future changes.

Officers further advised the panel that Wirral has a diverse range of centres, some healthy, some showing signs of weakness, and others requiring major intervention if the shopping centres are to survive. However demand for Car Parking is increasing at leisure facilities and destination locations such as Country Parks, West Kirby beach front and New Brighton promenade.

The Panel agreed that the pressures on the retail and commercial centres are many and varied, and any Car Parking Strategy should be supportive of the economic sustainability of each of the centres.

The Panel has proposed the following ‘Objectives’ and ‘Principles’ which should provide a guiding framework for any future strategy.

The proposed ‘Objectives’ and ‘Principles’ are considered to be in full harmony with the Councils corporate plan.

Recommendation 1 – Cabinet approves the following ‘Objectives’ and ‘Principles’ which should provide a guiding framework for any future Car Parking strategy.

Proposed Objectives (not listed in any priority)

Objective

P01 To support the long-term economic viability of the Boroughs shopping and commercial centres.

P02 To ensure that the price for car parking is fair and not detrimental to the economic well-being of shopping and commercial centres and there is clear consideration of the cost to users of private car parks provided in the same area.

P03 That car park users are provided with convenient alternative methods of payment other than just cash, and that parking tariffs paid for in cash are in readily available coinage.

P04 To ensure that parking facilities are accessible and located in such places to meet the needs of users of shops and commercial premises.

P05 To provide sufficient numbers of disabled parking spaces in good proximity to shops and services.

P06 To ensure adequate numbers of parking spaces are available in areas of demand, particularly for visitors to the Boroughs tourist destinations.

P07 To maintain a good quality of life for local residents and visitors by tackling inappropriate parking and congestion.

P08 Ensure that new development supports the Councils policies and does not make worse any parking issues in areas of high demand.

P09 To ensure that there is adequate taxi, cycle, motorcycle, freight and coach parking provision in areas of demand.

P10 To ensure that car parks are adequately lit, appropriately signed, and that users feel safe and secure, particularly in the evening and in remote locations.

P11 To provide well maintained car parking facilities.

Proposed Principles.

In order that the proposed objectives are obtainable, the Council will:

1. Ensure that parking is included as an important part of any regeneration plans for the Borough.
2. Continue to regularly review car parking charges to ensure that they are appropriate and fair.
3. Cater for short stay use to support daytime and evening commercial activity.
4. Ensure adequate provision of off-street and on-street parking in areas of demand.
5. Work with partner organisations with regards to parking which allows for mutually beneficial outcomes.
6. Look for opportunities to create more parking facilities where there is demand, including mixed use of car parks, such as parking during the day and community use of an evening and weekend.

7. Provide adequate taxi, cycling and motorcycle parking (inc Taxi ranks) near to commercial centres and visitor sites (Including the provision of cycle hire centres where appropriate)
8. Dispose of car parks, or reduce the size of car parks in areas of low demand, in order to make alternative car parks more sustainable and provide appropriate land development opportunities
9. Maintain the car parks in terms of cleanliness winter gritting and grounds maintenance.
10. Pursue developer contributions under Section 106 agreements to further the Council's policies as well as to improve parking facilities where parking need is expected to increase as a result of proposed development.
11. Review the potential to provide lorry parking and rest facilities in the Borough
12. To adopt the practice set out in the 2004 Traffic Management Act Part 6 which addresses inappropriate parking.
13. Keep under review signage to and from car parks for users to ensure that they are adequate and appropriate.
14. Consider the use of 'Park & Ride' schemes in areas of high demand.
15. Review the potential to provide coach drop off, parking and rest facilities in the Borough.

Income and Usage

Through the harmonisation of car parking charges across the Borough, income was expected to increase by £150,000 per year, although usage in some locations was expected to fall. It was proposed that the setting of a competitive 'all day' rate in outer Birkenhead Car parks would encourage a return to parking in some of these areas.

In addition to the harmonisation of charges, this option also included reducing the administration involved in servicing parking appeals, reducing the amount spent on parking enforcement, and reducing spend on collecting cash from and performing maintenance on parking meters.

Table 1 shows current Off-Street Car Park locations with the number of spaces and charging tariffs for each.

Table 1 Off-Street Parking

Car Park		No. of Spaces	No. of Blue Badge Spaces	Tariff
BIRKENHEAD SHOPPERS				
1	Europa Square	150	14	A
2	Cook St	11	0	A
3	Wilbraham St	54	0	A
4	Oliver St	16	6	A
5	Exmouth St	48	3	A
6	Atherton St	21	2	A
7	Barton St*	117	5	A
8	Europa Pools	197	22	A
9	Hamilton Building	60	2	A
BIRKENHEAD LONG STAY				
10	Woodside Approach	25	1	B
11	Quarry Bank St*	49	0	B
12	Elgin Way	45	2	B
13	Hinson St	90	0	B
14	Duncan St	40	0	B
15	Price St	500	0	C
HESWALL SHOPPERS				
16	Rocky Lane	15	0	A
17	Pye Road	152	6	A
18	Mount Ave	88	2	A
19	Puddydale	60	2	A
HESWALL LONG STAY				
20	Upper Mount Ave	24	0	D
WEST KIRBY SHOPPERS				
21	Dee Lane	173	4	A
22	Concourse	171	5	A
LISCARD SHOPPERS				
23	Seaview Rd	193	6	A
24	Liscard Village	94	2	A
25	Liscard Crescent	7	0	A
TOTAL		2400	84	

*Quarry Bank Street and Barton Street car parks also have a first half hour tariff of 50p

Tariff Guide

A		B		C		D	
Up to 1 hr	£1.05	Up to 1 hr	£1.05	Up to 1 hr	£1.05	Up to 2 hrs	£1.05
Up to 2 hrs	£1.65	Over 1hr	£4.10	Up to 2 hrs	£1.65	Over 2 hrs	£4.10
Up to 3 hrs	£2.05			Up to 3 hrs	£2.05		
Up to 4 hrs	£3.40			Over 3 hrs	£2.90		
Up to 5 hrs	£4.10						
Over 5 hrs	£8.00						

Officers advised the panel that whilst parking income had increased by £174,283 for 2013/14 when compared to the previous financial year, the overall target for budget savings from Car Parking (£281,000) was not met. Table 1.1 shows a breakdown of income and expenditure.

Table 1.1 Parking Services - Income/Expenditure

Financial Information	2011 – 2012	2012 – 2013	2013 – 2014
Item	£	£	£
Income - Penalty Charge Notice	741,000	721,000	664,000
- Car Parking Charges	1,711,130	1,555,549	1,729,832
Expenditure - Enforcement, back office staffing and overheads, IT/Court fees/Adjudicator Fees, maintenance, rates (operational costs)	1,583,455	1,430,195	1,512,400
Net Surplus - transferred to highway spends	868,675	846,354	881,432

The panel noted that the harmonisation of charges had a different effect on different areas of the Borough with some car parks seeing an increase in usage (number of tickets purchased) and others a decrease in usage.

The Car Parks servicing the Birkenhead Retail area (referred to as Birkenhead Shoppers) noted an increase in usage of around 13% on the previous year, with a similar increase in income.

In contrast the Dee Lane and Concourse Car Parks in West Kirby (referred to as West Kirby shoppers) noted a decrease in usage of around 22% on the previous year but an increase in income of over 100%.

The Panel also noted that the intention of the budget option to increase usage of Birkenhead Long Stay Car Parks had on the whole, not encouraged greater use. Table 1.2 shows a reduction in the number of tickets sold at Birkenhead Long Stay sites on the previous financial years.

The table also shows that with the exception of Birkenhead Long Stay Car Parks income increased at all sites.

Table 1.2 *Income & Usage Comparison at Off-Street Car Parks against previous financial years*

ALL OFF-STREET CAR PARKS	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	1022935	895841	855992
% Change on previous year		-12.50%	-4.50%
P&D INCOME (£)	1057914	914024	1120295
% Change on previous year		-13.60%	22.57%

BIRKENHEAD SHOPPERS	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	395496	312191	355757
% Change on previous year		-21.06%	13.68%
P&D INCOME (£)	471447	380596	429884
% Change on previous year		-19.27%	12.95%

LISCARD SHOPPERS	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	190816	174629	144797
% Change on previous year		-8.48%	-17.08%
P&D INCOME (£)	166103	134134	158643
% Change on previous year		-19.24%	18.27%

BIRKENHEAD LONG STAY	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	96018	83156	74840
% Change on previous year		-13.39%	-10.00%
P&D INCOME (£)	212842	192623	172899
% Change on previous year		-9.49%	-10.23%

HESWALL LONG STAY	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	1131	1202	2173
% Change on previous year		6.27%	80.78%
P&D INCOME (£)	1043	1078	2426
% Change on previous year		3.35%	125.00%

HESWALL SHOPPERS	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	166146	158537	148829
% Change on previous year		-4.57%	-6.12%
P&D INCOME (£)	120476	122287	186966
% Change on previous year		1.50%	52.89%

WEST KIRBY SHOPPERS	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
P&D No of TICKETS SOLD	173328	166126	129596
% Change on previous year		-4.15%	-21.98%
P&D INCOME (£)	86003	83306	169477
% Change on previous year		-3.13%	103.43%

(P&D = Pay & Display)

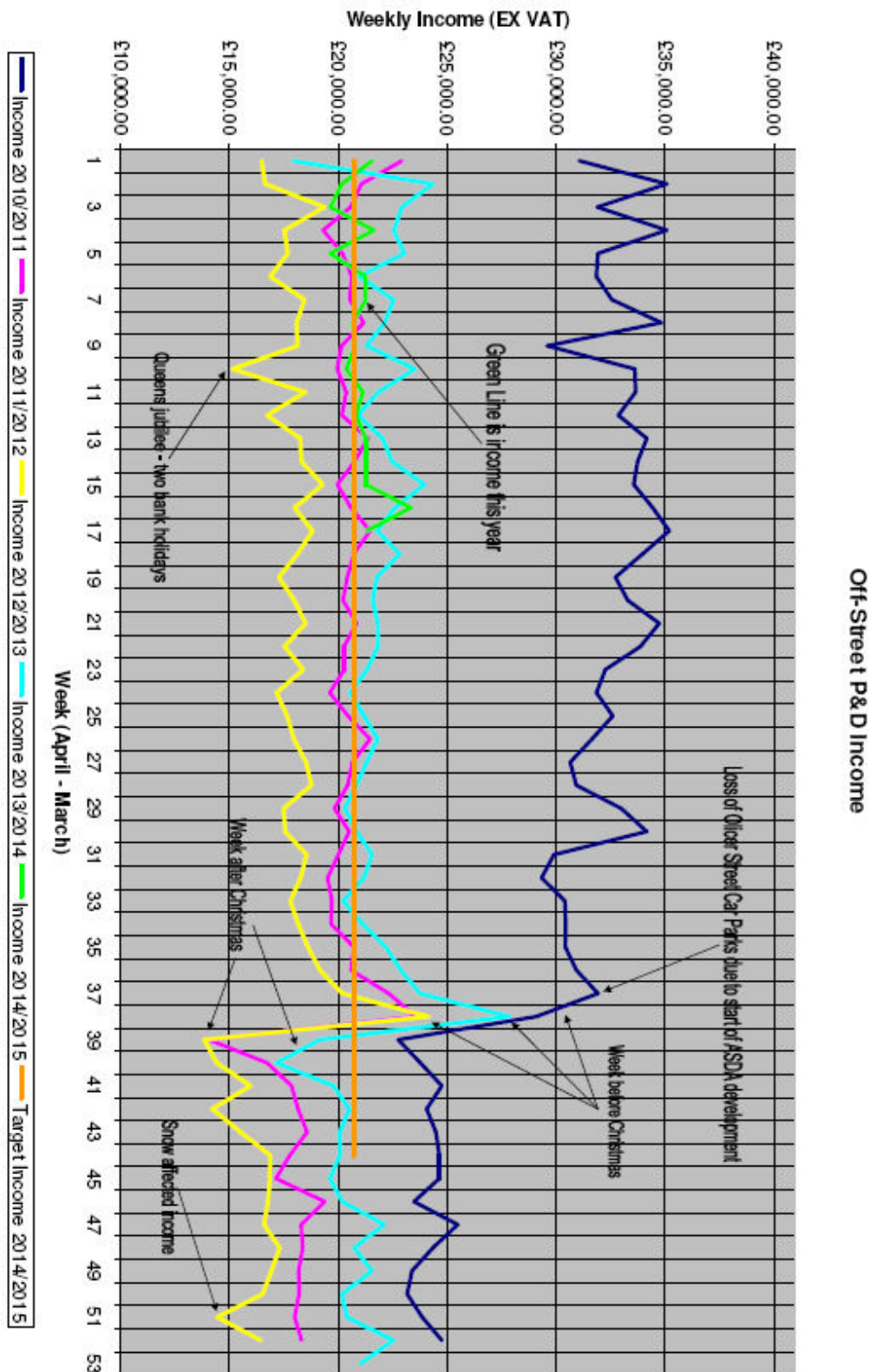
Table 1.2 highlights that usage (number of tickets purchased) has decreased across all Car Parks (with the exception of Heswall Long Stay) each year since 2011/12.

Table 1.3 highlights the week to week variations of Car Park income. The table shows a decline in income year on year since 2010/11; before harmonisation of charges was implemented in 2013/14.

The Panel took the view that whilst recognising income had increased since harmonisation was introduced, a balance between revenue and the impact on the broader economy needed to be considered.

Table 1.2 and 1.3 combined demonstrate a year on year reduction in usage prior to and following harmonisation.

Table 1.3 Weekly Off-Street Pay & Display Income



The Panel reviewed the weekly figures for income from off-street parking from the last four years and noted that income had been in decline year on year prior to harmonisation in 2013/14.

In addition, income for the first fifteen weeks of 2014/15 appears to show a decline on the previous year.

The Panel was advised that weekly variations occurred depending on the time of year, school holidays, the weather, economic changes and competition from private contractors.

Economic Impacts of Parking Management & Charges

In consideration of the potential economic impacts of parking management and charges the panel reviewed the findings of a recent study (January 2013) into town and city centre parking. The study entitled Re-Think – Parking on the High Street², had been jointly commissioned by the Association of Town and City Management, British Parking Association, Parking Data and Research International and Springboard Research Limited, and aims to explore the relationship between car parking provision and town centre prosperity.

Key findings on the Economic Impacts of Parking Management (from a study undertaken for market towns in Yorkshire);

- Parking is not usually one of the primary factors affecting competitiveness; other factors such as the quality and range of shops on offer, retail occupancy levels, the “feel” of the place etc are more important.
- Charging is not the only important aspect of parking provision; the availability of parking and ease of use appear to be more important;
- Properly formulated parking policy measures should have a neutral or beneficial impact on economic performance; i.e. charges should be set to ensure a turnover of space but not be so high that they have a negative impact on footfall.
- The acceptability of the level of charging relates to several factors;
 - Relative costs (and offer) of competitor towns;
 - Availability of free parking elsewhere;
 - The status and pull of the town; and
 - only where all other things are equal, might parking controls play a role in the competitiveness of neighbouring settlements.

Greater parking management controls and/or charges could have a negative impact when the town’s economy is weak;

The following is a list of signs that greater management of parking may not bring benefits:

- When there is no overall shortage of car parking spaces;
- Where parking does not appear to be the number one local transport issue;
- The town performs a local role, without a significant external catchment;

² http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf

- The town's economy is weak (for example retail vacancies are high and/or there are few 'higher order' shops);
- The town has a nearby competitor with a better retail offer; or
- The town has a nearby competitor with a similar retail offer and free or cheaper parking.

The panel heard from Officers that it could be concluded that many towns in Wirral have weak economies and more stringent controls may have a negative impact.

Officers advised that some work has already been done around the Local District Centre Traffic Management Plans.

The panel agreed that safe, secure and accessible parking is vital to the attractiveness and viability of town centre parking and that the future viability and promotion of town centres is key to the economic regeneration.

The panel agreed with Officers that it is essential that Traffic and Parking Services work together to create a parking strategy that will help support regeneration of town centres, while also encouraging the use of more sustainable transport choices and improving highway safety.

Members of the panel remarked that they had experienced conversations with Traders from different areas of the Borough who had suggested that Car Park charges had negatively impacted upon their trading income.

The Panel noted that at Council in July 2014 a petition of over 4,000 signatories was presented by traders in Heswall demanding the immediate reduction of charges. The petition demanded that the Council "*acknowledge the damage being done to trade and businesses by the outrageous increase in parking charges in April 2013*" (harmonisation of charges).

The Panel heard from the Head of Regeneration and Planning who gave an overview of local centres (excluding Birkenhead) with an indication of their assessment status taken from a Cabinet report of 21 July 2011³.

³ <http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=3498>

Table 1.4 Local Centres Assessment Status 2011

Healthiest centres	Showing signs of weakness	Major intervention needed
Heswall	Liscard	New Ferry
West Kirby	Bromborough Village	New Brighton (Seabank Road)
Upton Village	Moreton	Laird Street
Tranmere Urban Village (Old Chester Road)	Prenton (Woodchurch Road)	Seacombe (Poulton Road)
Oxton Village	Wallasey Village	
Greasby	Lower Bebington	
Eastham	Irby Village	
	Dacre Hill	
	Hoylake Town Centre	
	Borough Road	
	Victoria Road (New Brighton)	
	Claughton Village	

Officers advised that some areas showing signs of weakness are action plan sites, whilst others may require intervention to tackle issues such as the diversity of the retail offer, level of vacancies and other matters such as car parking. Officers further advised the panel that in areas of weakness the options to expand either on-street or off-street parking facilities are limited.

The panel noted that shopping areas can be difficult places to deal with in terms of reconciling the demands of the various road users, such as customers and staff (whether in cars or walking / cycling, etc), public transport, deliveries and general through traffic, each of which have their own often competing requirements for road space.

The Panel took the view that whilst recognising income had increased since harmonisation was introduced, a balance between revenue and the impact on the broader economy needed to be considered.

Whilst the Panel considered suggesting actual tariff prices, it agreed that a banding structure governed by the proposed objectives and which gave consideration to demand, economic viability & competition would generate income and support local economies.

Recommendation 2 - Cabinet should introduce a banding structure for car park pricing tariffs to support the long term viability of Wirral's shopping and commercial centres and to ensure that the price of car parking is fair and not detrimental to the economic wellbeing of shopping and commercial centres. The banding structure should be governed by the objectives outlined and give consideration to;

- ***Demand at different areas and/or sites***
- ***The economic viability of district & local centres***
- ***Existing action plans for the regeneration of district & local centres***
- ***Private Contractor prices in the immediate area***

Ease of payment

The panel noted that tariffs applied in April 2013 required users to pay in sums which the panel considered to be in inconvenient denominations. One hour, two hour and three hour tickets cost the user £1.05, £1.65 and £2.05 respectively.

The panel also noted that no change could be given to users and therefore users who did not have the correct denomination of coins could overpay.

Officers advised that by reducing tariffs that currently require 5 pence by 5 pence could reduce income by around £35,000 per year. The panel noted the Officers information regarding reduced income. The panel felt that the requirement for users to pay in inconvenient denominations was unhelpful and if this pricing had led to increased likelihood of overpayment then this was unfair.

The panel also considered ways which would make it easier for users to pay. The panel were advised that a range of different technologies exist within the Car Parking services marketplace.

Recommendation 3 - Cabinet should ensure that the new banding structure pricing is set out in convenient denominations (removal of the odd 5p) and that where appropriate; technology should be used to make it easier for users to pay.

The panel further recommend that the introduction of a tariff banding structure and any technology should be tested thoroughly before implementation.

Recommendation 4 - Cabinet is requested to approve the testing of the tariff banding structure model and any associated technological implementation in a controlled pilot or series of controlled pilots. The outcomes from such pilot schemes should influence any model, pricing or implementation of technology and the views of traders and users considered. In addition;

- ***The Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee is requested to reconvene the Car Park Review Panel following the testing, piloting or collection of market research to review suggested tariffs and technological implementation.***

In support of the proposed 'Principles' the panel recommend;

Recommendation 5 - Cabinet should implement Car Park charges in areas of high demand for parking and ensure adequate car parking is provided in such areas. Officers should ensure that the development of new Car Parks or the introduction of charging at existing sites does not make any parking issues in areas of high demand worse for residents. Adequate provision of on-street parking in areas of high demand should also be considered. Cabinet should give consideration to the Corporate Plan and related strategies before developing new Car Parks or implementing charges.

Recommendation 6 - Cabinet should report on the opportunities for multiple use car parks & contract parking in the Borough. The report should be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Committee no later than July 2015.

Recommendation 7 - Cabinet should request that officers assess and report back on the continued viability of Car Park sites which experience low demand. Where continued viability is not found, Cabinet should seek approval for the sale or leasing of such land. Cabinet should ensure that officers give consideration to

the potential requirement for Car Parking in the future based on known regeneration plans before seeking to dispose of the site(s). Officers should only present this report once viability can be fully assessed following implementation of the proposed new strategy and associated recommendations found here. In the panels view at least a full year's data should be considered.

6. MEMBERS OF THE REVIEW PANEL

Chair's Statement:

I would like to thank the Members and officers who have participated in the Car Parking Review for their time and careful thought as we have reviewed Wirral Council's Car Parking options and challenges for the future. We have looked in detail at the policies of other Councils, and using our own experiences, good or bad of parking policy of Wirral, put together a group of Principles and Objectives that we believe should be considered by Cabinet and officers as we seek to move forward in developing a cohesive and fair Car Parking Policy for the Wirral.

In considering our work as a Task and Finish group, we have made every effort to consider the representation we have received from residents of Wirral and our own constituents. We believe that Car Parking can be a very emotive issue for many as it affects many aspects of economic development and the sustainability of the borough's many shopping areas. It can also be a cause of frustration for those seeking to park a car in a convenient location and at a cost they consider fair and reasonable. We ask Cabinet and officers to carefully consider the proposals put forward in this report and would welcome the opportunity as a group to participate in further discussions and work as ideas progress towards establishing a fair Car Parking Policy for residents of and visitors to the Wirral.

Panel Membership

Councillor Paul Doughty
(Chair)



Councillor Alan Brighthouse



Councillor Steve Williams



Councillor Leah Fraser



Councillor Jerry Williams



Councillor Anita Leech



Councillor Jim Crabtree



This Report was produced by the Car Parking Scrutiny Review Panel
(which reports to the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee)