

139. **Countywide Analysis of the Impact of Car Parking Charges**

Public Participation

Mr Phil Matthews addressed Cabinet on this item.

The Leader explained that the report presented was a factual account with supporting evidence providing a Countywide analysis of the impact of car parking charges. This together with any other evidence submitted by city/town/parish councils and through the scrutiny process would be used to enable Council to consider the matter fully at its meeting on 8 November 2011.

Cllr Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport presented a report which examined the link between introduction of Wiltshire's new car parking strategy and charges with car parking usage in the context of the current economic climate.

It was noted that the evidence in the report included the following:

- National and local economic data
- Retail trends data
- Research and studies showing the relationship between parking and market towns
- Car park usage and income data
- Evidence from other authorities
- Other strategies and plans.

The report provided the following key conclusions:

- (i) The findings of wider research are that it is what a town or City has to offer is the primary factor affecting economic health and not parking charges.
- (ii) Parking ticket sales were already in decline before the introduction of the new parking charges in April 2011. Neighbouring local authorities are also reporting a decline in car park usage and/or an income shortfall.
- (iii) A large number of local authorities have either brought in increased parking charges or are considering such a move. A few have reduced their charges with limited and mixed results.
- (iv) National economic evidence shows that Britain is currently suffering from a period of slow growth, low consumer confidence and squeezed household disposable incomes. The rise of out-of-town shopping centres, large chain stores, supermarkets and the internet have also significantly impacted on the UK's high street.
- (v) There are signs that some of Wiltshire's towns are bucking the national trend.
- (vi) Parking charges provide essential Council income to support other services such as local buses and, as a demand management measure, can help the Council and its partners meet CO₂ and air quality targets.

Overall, it was considered that if parking charges were broadly appropriate, then the main factors affecting market towns were:

- wider economic factors (e.g. consumer confidence);

- societal trends (e.g. supermarket and internet shopping); and
- the actual offer a town makes.

The first of these factors was largely international in its origin and scope. The second was largely national. The third was local and was being addressed by the Council in the County's largest towns through the Vision programmes.

Cllr Tonge responded to questions and confirmed that he was seeking feedback from interested parties which together with feedback from the Environmental Select Committee's meeting on 1 November would be incorporated into a report to Council on 8 November 2011. Concern was expressed over the timescale available to provide feedback in time for consideration by the Select Committee and the timescale to in turn provide the views of the Select Committee to Council a week later due to the timing of the Select Committee.

It was noted that as previously offered by the Leader, assistance from the Council's Economic Development unit was available to towns that requested it. In this connection, Cllr John Noeken, Cabinet member for Resources explained that Amesbury had taken up this offer of assistance which had proved extremely helpful.

Cllr Tonge put forward a number of proposals which were agreed by Cabinet as detailed in the resolutions below.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- (a) notes the findings of the countrywide analysis of the impact of the current car parking charges as presented in the report presented;**
- (b) implements an additional free hour on any parking ticket purchased on 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th of December 2011 using a token printed in the next Wiltshire magazine, the only exception would be on street parking in Salisbury;**
- (c) extends the £50 service permits to cover registered charities. To be used for loading/ unloading and peripatetic staff working with vulnerable people, but not for employees;**
- (d) makes changes to apply a single restriction to all off street parking areas that allows all day parking when a blue badge is displayed. Immediately restrict enforcement strictly to non displayed blue badge contraventions until all applicable off street parking orders are amended in due course to reflect the new restrictions and**

Reason for Decisions

At its meeting on 12 July 2011, Council requested a full report on the car parking charges on a Countywide basis be presented to the next meeting of Council on 8 November 2011.