



**Service Delivery
Committee**

8 July 2014

Matter for Decision

Title: **Improvements to town centre car parks.**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The annual capital programme includes a project 'Car Park Enforcement Improvements' with an allocated budget of £32K.
- 1.2 The aims of the project are to purchase and install ticket machines in all town centre car parks (except South Wigston) and require all drivers to obtain a free timed tickets to enable easier enforcement of 3 hour parking thereby allowing the reduction of enforcement officer time and creating a saving.
- 1.3 A report explaining the above aims in more depth was approved by Service Delivery Committee at its meeting on 24 September 2013.
- 1.4 Since that time further research has been undertaken that indicates that capital costs of implementing the project are likely to be around £12k more than the budget allocation and lead to a significant and on-going increase in revenue costs which cannot be compensated for in the savings in enforcement officer time.
- 1.5 In addition the project does not address the infrastructure problems or complaints relating to town centre car parks which are:
 - Poor surfaces and pot holes
 - Condition of bay markings and directional arrows
 - Unclear (and in some cases missing) signage
 - Missing height barriers

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the capital project 'Car Park Enforcement Improvements' no longer goes ahead and that members divert the money to a scheme that improves the infrastructure of the town centre car parks as set in 3.7 below.

3 Information

3.1 Current operation of car parks:

- 3.1.1 There are 8 town centre car parks; 3 in Oadby and 5 in Wigston. (There is no enforcement of off street parking in South Wigston and no proposal to change this arrangement).
- 3.1.2 Parking is free for up to 3 hours in white marked bays. In car parks where there are blue marked bays (1 in Oadby; 2 in Wigston) drivers can park over three hours by purchasing a ticket from a machine at the current cost of £2.70.

- 3.1.3 There are 5 existing solar powered ticket machines – 2 in Sandhurst Street, Oadby, 2 in Aylestone Lane, Wigston and 1 in Paddock Street, Wigston. Each machine requires a roll of tickets, battery (as back-up), data card and a phone line. The data card collects information and sends it via the phone line to 'Cale Web', which can be accessed by council staff.

3.2 Ticket machine maintenance:

- 3.2.1 In 2013-14 the 5 machines cost £2,130 in repairs and maintenance
- 3.2.2 Some repairs can be carried out by Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) For example battery failure, run out of tickets, cash box not inserted correctly etc.
- 3.2.3 There is a loss of income until faults can be rectified.
- 3.2.4 There is no maintenance contract and therefore obtaining an engineer can take up to a week.
- 3.2.5 CEOs are unable to enforce blue (long stay) bays when a machine breaks down until a repair is carried out.

3.3 Current Enforcement:

- 3.3.1 This council has a Service Level Agreement with Harborough District Council to provide enforcement officers (CEOs) and 'purchases' 1 full time equivalent officer in terms of enforcement hours.
- 3.3.2 There are 2.5 full time CEOs operating in the Borough; Leicestershire County Council (LCC) use the remaining time for enforcing on-street parking.
- 3.3.3 In 2013/14 this council paid Harborough District Council £47,957 for enforcement hours including on costs.
- 3.3.4 In 2014/15 this is predicted to be £43,000 which takes into consideration the reduction in purchased enforcement hours in line with the capital project proposal (from 1 April 2014 enforcement hours were reduced from 2 FTEs to 1FTE) but also includes an increase in other areas such as back office costs.
- 3.3.5 LCC operates the Notice Processing Unit. Anyone receiving a penalty notice pays the County Council and then LCC pay back to this council the income from off street penalties minus an administration fee.
- 3.3.6 Currently some areas of car parks cannot be enforced as the blue bay markings are fading and it is ambiguous whether a bay is painted white or blue. This is an ongoing issue as blue lining appears to wear more quickly. CEOs have been advised (temporarily) not to enforce in these specific areas as there is a cost to processing penalty notices whether the notice is upheld or quashed.

3.4 Original Capital Project:

- 3.4.1 The aim of the capital project as approved was to change the system so that all car park users obtain and display a valid ticket whether paid (over 3 hours) or free (up to 3 hours).
- 3.4.2 The following costs would be incurred in implementing this scheme:

CAPITAL COSTS	
Re-configure 5 existing ticket machines to enable them to produce free tickets	£11,745
Purchase and installation of 7 new machines	£17,325
Renewal of all car park signage to take account of need for free ticket	£8,500
Re-lining of car parks where required (blue and white)	£8,000
3G set up charge (7 machines)	£180
An advertising campaign would need to be carried out to ensure drivers understand the need for a free ticket.	£300
TOTAL	£46,050 (allocated capital budget = £32k)
REVENUE COSTS of machines (on-going)	
Annual 3G charge (12 machines)	£1,224
Annual Cale WebOffice charges (12 machine)	£1,980
Ticket rolls	£2,500 (conservative estimate assuming no abuse – see below)
Maintenance ('Gold' contract year 2 onwards)	£5,760
TOTAL	£11,646 (only approx £4k of this has been included within the 14/15 revenue budget)

3.4.3 There is a possibility that income from the issue of penalty notices might initially increase if the project goes ahead; this is likely to be from people who are unaware that they need a free ticket and are caught out by not being aware of the changes.

3.4.4 There is no provision within the project to undertake repairs to car park surfaces nor for the re-installation of height barriers that have been used in some areas in the past but are now all missing. There is no budget allocation elsewhere to cover these matters.

3.4.5 All machines would have the ability to take money in case this became an option in the future but there would be an additional cost to re-configure machines for this.

3.5 Advantages of implementing the original capital project

3.5.1 CEOs would only need to make one visit to a car park to catch overstayers as the free ticket would be timed. Currently two visits are required; the first to log the vehicle and the second is an enforcement visit.

- 3.5.2 Reduction in cost of enforcement from two full time equivalent staff to one full time equivalent. (This is approx £9k which is reduced officer time but includes an increase in other overheads)
- 3.5.3 Potential for increased income in penalty notices because everyone needs a ticket and some people may not be aware of this.

3.6 Disadvantages of implementing the original capital project

- 3.6.1 Increased revenue costs due to increase in number of machines and every car requiring a ticket (see table above).
- 3.6.2 Increased maintenance costs; 12 machines rather than 5
- 3.6.3 Greater wear and tear on machines due to increased use therefore more potential for breakdowns.
- 3.6.4 Increase in number of phone calls to council administration staff if a machine breaks down from an increased number of car park users who are unable to obtain a ticket.
- 3.6.5 Greater chance of loss of income and enforcement ability when a machine breaks down – where there is only one machine in a car park enforcement cannot take place on overstaying until the machine is repaired. (CEOs cannot revert to 2 x visits a day as this would be grounds for appeal as the method of enforcement would not comply with the car park signage)
- 3.6.6 Retention of blue bays is a problem for people who are colour blind (Penalty notices can be overturned on these grounds)
- 3.6.7 Potential for adverse publicity; why the need for a ticket when parking is free?
- 3.6.8 There is no evidence that costs will be reduced or income increased.
- 3.6.9 Increase in time taken by CEOs to check machines at the beginning of a shift (more machines over a wider area) leading to reduction in time available for enforcement).
- 3.6.10 Increased time to deal with re-charging batteries reducing time available for enforcement.
- 3.6.11 Blaby District Council introduced a similar scheme a few years ago. They initially experienced misuse of machines once people realised they could just press a button to obtain a ticket. They found machines had been emptied of tickets overnight and that sticky tickets were plastered around their car parks. In order to 'design this out' the costs in the table at 3.4.2 include for machines where a car registration number is required in order to obtain a ticket; machines can be configured to stop issuing tickets after 6pm. There is only £100 difference in the cost of new machines to enable them to take car registration numbers but upgrading the old machines is considerably more expensive (approx £1,500 per machine more). Blaby has since introduced charges in the majority of their car parks.

3.7 Alternative scheme

3.7.1 An alternative to the agreed capital scheme would be to divert the capital allocation to improve the infrastructure of the town centre car parks and address known problems as set out in the table below:

Capital costs	
Continue with the existing arrangements whereby all car parks are free for up to 3 hours (no ticket required) with 3 car parks remaining long stay on purchase of ticket.	No cost
Re-surface areas where there are pot holes.	£7,500
Line all bays in white	£7,000
Improve and simplify signage	£7,500
Install missing height barriers (to include Willow Park car park)	£13,000
TOTAL	£34,000 (slightly above allocated budget of £32k)
Revenue costs	
Ticket rolls/web support/phone lines/3G connectivity to 5 existing machines	Already budgeted for within revenue budget
Maintenance contract on 5 machines	£2,450 (this is cheaper than call out and parts charged for in 2013-14)
TOTAL	£2,450 additional revenue budget required (could be dealt with by a virement)

3.7.2 Enforcement time was reduced to 1 x FTE from 1st April 2014 in line with the original capital project. There is no proposal to increase this.

3.7.3 The opportunity exists to direct CEO time which does not appear to have actively happened in the past. For example, there was a 26% increase in the number of penalty notices issued in April 2014 over April 2013 by directing CEO to problematic areas despite enforcement time being reduced from the beginning of April.

3.8 Ticket income from long stay parking.

The income from drivers staying over three hours who purchase a ticket is unlikely to change significantly whichever scheme is implemented.

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Background Papers:-

1. Report to Service Delivery Committee, 24 September 2014, Off Street Parking Arrangements.

Implications	
Financial (CR)	It is important that both the capital and revenue budgets are not exceeded. The new proposal should ensure this while increasing the Council's ability to enforce its current car parking policy by improving the facilities.
Risk	See financial
Equalities (KG)	An EIA needs to be undertaken to consider the impact on the most vulnerable and consideration needs to be given to minimising any negative impacts that may be identified, for

	example the elderly, disabled, pregnancy & maternity etc.
Legal (KG)	The relevant traffic orders will need be reviewed and if required changes will be applied through the proper processes.