

Cabinet

18 September 2024

Review of Removal of Temporary Free After 2pm Parking concession

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy, and Growth

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy, and Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To review the removal of Free After 2pm in council owned car parks as agreed by County Council on 24 January 2024.
- 2 To consider the impact in regard of the removal of Free After 2pm.

Executive Summary

- 3 In response to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the council introduced a temporary suspension of parking charges from 2pm in all of our pay and display parking areas as a stimulus to support the economic recovery from the global pandemic.
- 4 Free parking after 2pm for town centres across County Durham was introduced on 1 April 2021 where a suspension of charges would initially apply until 31 December 2021 with an option to continue the suspension to 31 March 2022 if required.
- 5 Cabinet further extended this suspension period, however parking charges were subsequently reinstated on street in Durham City on 1 April 2023.

- 6 The temporary initiative for off-street car parks continued for a further period and was to be considered by Cabinet as part of a wider Parking Strategy proposal. Removal of the temporary 'Free After 2pm' in off street car parks was agreed by Cabinet in October 2023 with charges re-instated on 1 January 2024.
- 7 At County Council on Wednesday 14 January 2024, Cabinet accepted a motion to reconsider the decision to end Free Parking After 2pm.
- 8 The impact of the temporary Free After 2pm initiative and its removal have now been assessed and the decision reconsidered based on the evidence available for the following areas:
 - a) Original cabinet decision on 17th March 2020;
 - b) Governments removal of all COVID measures from 24th Feb 2022;
 - c) Free after 2pm period extended beyond original agreement;
 - d) Principles relating to parking management;
 - e) Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, Section 55;
 - f) Our Parking Strategy;
 - g) Declared Climate Emergency;
 - h) Air Quality Management Area;
 - i) Complaints received;
 - j) Footfall data;
 - k) Car park and Park and Ride usage data;
 - l) Neighbouring authorities; and the
 - m) Medium Term Financial Plan

Recommendation(s)

- 9 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) to note the outcome of the review of the decision to end Free Parking After 2pm.
 - (b) to endorse the decision taken by Cabinet in October 2023 that parking charges after 2pm be reintroduced with effect from 1 January 2024.

Background

- 10 The national and local lockdown restrictions, required in response to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, impacted on trade and footfall across all on our town centres.
- 11 At the time, the demand for parking in our town centres remained low and it was unclear how this would change and how quickly demand would return to pre-pandemic levels once lockdown measures were eased. At its meeting on 17 March 2021, Cabinet considered a report which sought to review the provision of subsidised or free parking for centres across County Durham for both on-street and off-street parking as a stimulus to support the economic recovery from the global pandemic.
- 12 The report concluded that in order to assist with the recovery of our town centres, free parking should be offered in both on and off-street car parks from 2pm each afternoon. This offer was initially to be introduced from 1 April 2021 until the end of December 2021 with regular monitoring and review to understand the success of the scheme against clear objectives of increasing town centre footfall and supporting town centre vibrancy.
- 13 The report recommended Cabinet:
 - (a) Agree that parking charges are suspended from 2pm each day in both on and off-street town centre car parks;
 - (b) Agree that the suspension of charges should initially apply until the end of December 2021 with delegated authority given to the Corporate Director of Regeneration Economy and Growth in consultation with the portfolio holder for Economic Regeneration to continue the suspension to 31 March 2022 if required.
- 14 Cabinet resolved that the report be approved.
- 15 Free parking after 2pm for centres across County Durham was introduced on 1st April 2021 for both on street and off street parking, as a stimulus to support the initial economic recovery from the global pandemic, and in advance of government allowing non-essential retail to open from 14th April 2021.
- 16 On 9 February 2022, Government announced that all remaining COVID-19 related restrictions in England would expire on 24 February 2022.
- 17 A number of local Councillors voiced concerns on behalf of individual businesses and trade representatives concerned that businesses continued to struggle to return to pre pandemic levels.

- 18 Despite the temporary initiative originally having agreement to be in place until 31st March 2022, Cabinet extended this period, in acknowledgement of concerns raised, and Free After 2pm remained in place until 1st April 2023.
- 19 Parking charges were subsequently reinstated on street in Durham City on 1st April 2023 but it was agreed by Cabinet to continue with the temporary initiative for off-street car parks for a further period and be discussed as part of a wider Parking Strategy proposal.
- 20 Following the removal of Free After 2pm in on street pay and display bays, Parking Services received 2 complaints, one via direct email and one via an MP (appendix 4).
- 21 A report was presented to Cabinet in October 2023 where the removal of the temporary 'Free After 2pm', in line with the original intent, was agreed with charges re-instated on 1st January 2024.
- 22 Following the removal of Free After 2pm in off street car parks, Parking Services received 9 complaints via direct email, an MP, the CRM, and corporate complaints (appendix 4).
- 23 At County Council on Wednesday 14th January 2024, Cabinet accepted the following motion, which was approved after a vote, to reconsider the decision to end Free After 2pm:

Councillor A Batey

“Due to the concerns raised by business and local residents, this Council calls on the Cabinet to reconsider the decision to end Free Parking After 2pm.”

Parking Management

- 24 Charging for car parking is a complex issue and is only one aspect of a complex interplay of factors influencing willingness to travel by car, time and money spent, and business activity in town centres. It is very difficult to separate the influence of car parking charges from other factors.
- 25 “Re-Thinking Car Parking” (2020), commissioned by The Association of Town and City Management (ATCM), the British Parking Association (BPA), Parking Data and Research International (PDRI), and Springboard recommends that car parking provision should be set within a holistic strategy considering a centre’s wider accessibility and transport strategies, rather than being thought about in isolation. However, the relationship between footfall and the cost of parking is not so clear-cut.

- 26 Car park charging is often perceived, particularly amongst businesses, as being a key determinant for changes in footfall levels in town and city centres. However, the available evidence is almost entirely anecdotal and there is very little published evidence which links changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall.
- 27 Visitors put attractiveness of destination, retail choice, ease of access and the general availability of spaces ahead of parking cost in their overall decision about visiting a location.
- 28 Focusing on parking, availability of space is most important with cost being 7th:

The “Retail Distinctiveness of Market Towns” survey undertaken by mruk Research questioned people about parking in market towns. Of the respondents, 65% stated that they found it easy to park in the town centre; 25% found it quite or very difficult. When asked which parking attributes were important to them, the availability of spaces was the top response, followed by the ease of parking. Price was the 7th highest response (see graph below).



- 29 Whilst free parking is often suggested to encourage more car park users, this generally does not benefit target visitors (for example, the spaces are occupied primarily by town centre workers and commuters who take up spaces all day, rather than shoppers) and consequently have a negative impact on footfall.
- 30 Government guidance requires that local authority parking enforcement should be self-financing and that authorities need to bear in mind that if

their scheme is not self-financing, then they need to be certain that they can afford to pay for it from within existing funding. The Secretary of State does not expect either national or local taxpayers to meet any deficit.

- 31 Consequently, there is a need for a local authority to recover the costs associated with the expenditure. Our mechanism for doing this is through parking charges. It is clear that Pay and Display parking was self-financing pre-covid, however, throughout the 'Free After 2pm' parking concession this was not the case.
- 32 Whilst it is accepted that some motorists would prefer not to pay a charge (or pay a reduced charge), paying for parking ensures that it is the end user who contributes to the operational costs of the facility rather than the community at large, via direct taxation.
- 33 The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Section 55 states that councils in England can only use parking revenues for parking and other related local transport maintenance purposes and cannot raise parking revenues towards the General Fund by other purposes.
- 34 Any surplus from on-street parking charges or on- street and off-street enforcement activities, must be used in accordance with the legislative restrictions.

Section 55 of the RTRA 1984 (as amended):

if it appears to the local authority that the provision in their area of further off-street parking accommodation is unnecessary or undesirable, the following purposes—

- (i) meeting costs incurred, whether by the local authority or by some other person, in the provision or operation of, or of facilities for, public passenger transport services,
- (ii) the purposes of a highway or road improvement project in the local authority's area,
- (iii) in the case of a London authority, meeting costs incurred by the authority in respect of the maintenance of roads maintained at the public expense by them,
- (iv) the purposes of environmental improvement in the local authority's area,
- (v) in the case of such local authorities as may be prescribed, any other purposes for which the authority may lawfully incur expenditure.】

- 35 Income from both on and off street parking is ringfenced to provide the service and maintain facilities to a good standard. Example of how surpluses were/are currently used would include; supporting Park and Ride, rural bus services, active travel measures and incentives, small traffic/pedestrian schemes.
- 36 The expenditure associated with providing a parking service includes, but is not limited to, the following; non-domestic rates, water rates, electricity, landline (VMS) rental, computer software rent & maintenance, traffic management, minor maintenance (off street), street

lighting SLA, gritting/winter maintenance, cash collection, P&D machine maintenance & management reimbursements.

Parking Strategy

- 37 All local authorities are expected, where possible, to provide parking that is convenient, safe, and secure. In general, such car parks are typically those facilities that are well maintained, well-lit and subject to regular patrols. There is a cost associated with providing these services. In addition, all car parks are subject to business rates, water rates and electricity bills.
- 38 There is also a balance required between maintaining the economic vitality of commercial centres as places to shop, work and visit and the environmental impact in providing a scheme that incentivises people to drive.
- 39 Transport emissions account for 33% of all emissions in County Durham. The availability of spaces, together with the price point is the major determinant of modal shift. Free or cheap parking makes car travel a more attractive option, leading to increased congestion and transport emissions.
- 40 The local authority is actively working towards being a net zero county by 2045 and parking management is recognised as a tool, that can, and will, be utilised to promote a shift to more sustainable modes of travel. Charging for parking will encourage people to reduce unnecessary car use where there is adequate public transport, or where walking/cycling are realistic alternatives, as is the case in the town centres where parking charges apply.
- 41 It is anticipated that a revised pricing strategy for council owned car parks, will assist in tackling traffic congestion within Durham City by encouraging modal shift to cleaner, more sustainable travel modes such as busses or the Park and Ride. This could have a positive impact on health outcomes and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions associated with climate change. This is also an action in the Air Quality Action Plan.
- 42 It is inevitable that changes to parking tariffs will be unpopular with some car owners. However, it should be recognised that any changes will potentially lead to a positive impact for those who rely on other modes such as public transport, walking or cycling, as any surplus income generated from parking is ringfenced for transport measures, as per Section 55 of the RTRA 1984.

Impact of Temporary Free After 2pm and its removal

- 43 Whilst the aim of Free After 2pm was to drive forward our economic recovery, we received a number of representations illustrating some negative impacts as a result of the 'Free After 2pm' intervention:
- a) Residents within Durham City who live on a street that has both pay and display and permit parking said that the initiative led to them struggling to find a space in their street when returning home in the afternoon;
 - b) Crookhall Gardens, a private car park provider, estimated that the initiative resulted in a reduction of income in their car park of approximately 50%;
 - c) Observations by enforcement agents indicated that prime 'on street parking' areas such as Old Elvet, Prison Green, New Elvet, and Church Street were at capacity post 1pm thereby reducing the ability to access businesses and services in the area.
- 44 The Free After 2pm initiative was not embraced by private sector parking providers who continued to charge their normal tariff.

Correspondence/Complaints/Publicity

- 45 Following the introduction of Free After 2pm, 6 complaints were received via email and telephone (appendix 4).
- 46 Following the removal of Free After 2pm in on street pay and display bays on 1st April 2023, Parking Services received 2 complaints, one via direct email and one via an MP (appendix 4).
- 47 Following the removal of Free After 2pm in off street car parks on 1st January 2024, Parking Services received 9 complaints via direct email, an MP, the CRM, and corporate complaints (appendix 4).
- 48 No cases have been logged via Member Services with regards to free parking after 2pm, this data however may not show the full picture, residents may have contacted Councillors with regards to the free parking after 2pm but they might not have reported information through this channel.
- 49 Between 26th October 2023 and 3rd April 2024, there were 12 articles that appeared in the press in relation to the removal of the Free After 2pm initiative (appendix 5).

Consultation

- 50 The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 (SI 2489) requires us to carry out a consultation

exercise to introduce new car parking charges. The purpose of the consultation exercise is to gather feedback from the public to allow Highways Committee to consider objections raised, which then guides the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy, and Growth in making the final decision on the charges.

- 51 The pay and display parking charges were consulted upon, prior to their introduction, a number of years ago and the appropriate orders were made and sealed.
- 52 Free After 2pm was a temporary measure, agreed by Cabinet, introduced to assist town centre recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and not subject to the requirements of the above legislation.

Footfall

- 53 Reviewing the footfall data from the County Durham main centres with chargeable car parking, there is no discernible change to footfall trends that can be linked to the reintroduction charges after 2pm (Appendix 6).
- 54 For Barnard Castle, there was no immediate drop in afternoon footfall after the end of Free After 2 although throughout the year afternoons have become quieter than comparable periods in 2023.
- 55 In Bishop Auckland, the January footfall appears unaffected by the reintroduction of charging after 2pm, although again as the year has progressed, afternoons are quieter.
- 56 This pattern is also replicated in Chester le Street although footfall has improved as the year progresses.
- 57 In Consett however, the first quarter showed increases in afternoon footfall against the general trend January -April with afternoon footfall tailing off in the period May – July.
- 58 In addition to car park pricing there are a wide range of factors impacting on footfall. The availability of spaces and the presence or otherwise of sustainable travel alternatives are other transport factors which need to be taken into consideration alongside town centre vacancy, the quality of the retail/ leisure offer, cost of living pressures and weather.

Park and Ride

- 59 During 2020/21, the Park and Ride (PR2) from Howlands site was suspended from 24th March 2020, and PR1 from 27th March 2020. P&R1 was reinstated on 29th June 2020 and PR2 on 20th July 2020. Consequently during 2020/21 Park and Ride saw usage reduced to just 19% of the figure prior to Covid.

60 Post Covid, this usage increased slightly with a step change when Free After 2pm on street was removed (April 2023) and again when Free After 2pm off street was removed (Jan 2024).

Park and Ride	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Passengers	19%	45%	46%	56%	59%

24/25 forecast

61 It is not expected that P&R usage will return to pre-Covid levels for a considerable time, as a result of changing working patterns, seismic shifts towards online and out-of-town shopping, and continued reluctance of elderly and vulnerable groups to use public transport since the pandemic.

62 However, any increase to park and ride usage is not only beneficial to helping make the costs of providing the service but also reduces the number of vehicles driving through the Air Quality Management Area thus instrumental in reducing emissions to achieve government targets.

Parking Activity after 2pm

Pay By Phone

63 It is not possible to establish how many parking instances took place during the period of the temporary Free After 2pm initiative as no transaction was required in any of our car parks.

64 The Pay and Display machines used in most of County Durham do not support any kind of reporting facility, such as time of payment, other than cash and card reconciliation. However, during the Pandemic we introduced PayByPhone (PBP) to allow customers to pay for parking via their mobile phone. This technology does allow us to interrogate parking patterns and when compared with historic manual surveys and income received helps up build a pattern of parking over time.

65 From reconciled income figures we know that the number of transactions after 2pm for parking using PBP in the first quarter of 2024 was:

PBP Payment %	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
County-wide	41%	44%	44%	41%	41%	39%

Using the number of PBP Transactions after 2pm in the first half of 2024 (when Free After 2pm was fully removed) and apportioning the percentage share for this payment type across each payment option for each month it can be reasonably estimated that the number of vehicles parking in our car parks after 2pm could be up to 530,000 per annum.

This is a robust estimate as parking activity can be impacted by any number of unforeseen events such as weather, road works, building works, school holidays economic factors, national and/or global influences...

Transactions after 2pm	
Jan-24	35,617
Feb-24	37,462
Mar-24	37,070
Apr-24	44,512
May-24	52,531
Jun-24	58,486
Total (6 mths)	265,677
Total Yr (range)	531,354

*Excludes Seaham as charges started from 15th April 2024

Income after 2pm

66 The PBP data also details the payment made during each transaction. Following the same principle of apportioning percentage share for this payment type across each payment type for each month it can be reasonably estimated that the income generated in our car parks after 2pm could be up to £0.900 million per annum. This is a robust estimate as parking activity can be impacted by any number of unforeseen events.

Income after 2pm	
Jan-24	60,426
Feb-24	64,800
Mar-24	62,466
Apr-24	81,967
May-24	97,853
Jun-24	108,464
Total (6 mths)	475,977
Total Yr (range)	951,953

* Excludes Seaham as charges implemented from 15th April 2024

Sands Multi Story Car Park

67 Sands MSCP opened to the public in June 2022 which was when Free After 2pm was in place in off street car parks. The table below compares the number of vehicles entering the car park between 13:00 and 22:00 in 2022 and the same time frame in 2023 (no Free After 2pm on street) and 2024 (no Free After 2pm off street).

- 68 The increase in usage in 2023 corresponds with the removal of Free After 2pm on street. Usage in 2024 with no Free After 2pm exceeds that in 2022 when Free After 2pm was in place.

	2022	2023	2024
Arrival Time	June	June	June
1300-1400	291	448	369
1400-1500	212	603	301
1500-1600	146	738	295
1600-1700	202	820	191
1700-1800	164	658	224
1800-1900	103	427	201
1900-2000	64	201	97
2000-2100	22	83	56
2100-2200	6	20	27

Finance

- 69 The temporary introduction of the Free After 2pm initiative resulted in a budget pressure of £0.600 million per year for loss of income on car parking.
- 70 The table below details the parking income received by month from April 2022 to June 2024 and for comparison purposes includes pre-Covid figures and excludes Seaham, where charges were only introduced in April 2024.

Month	2019-20 (pre-covid)	2022-23*	2023/24**	2024/25***
April		(132,944)	(168,950)	(220,782)
May	(174,318)	(139,736)	(160,235)	(238,863)
June	(214,325)	(139,461)	(190,778)	(258,387)
July	(184,297)	(134,807)	(208,032)	
August	(221,953)	(142,901)	(192,392)	
September	(184,864)	(142,532)	(193,485)	
October	(171,452)	(161,138)	(197,661)	
November	(172,796)	(144,498)	(187,266)	
December	(154,577)	(139,092)	(174,975)	
January	(141,213)	(130,892)	(169,993)	
February	(147,720)	(146,810)	(205,977)	
March	(303,470)	(140,700)	(209,864)	
Grand Total	(2,070,983)	(1,695,510)	(2,259,607)	(718,032)

* Free After 2 - Both On and Off Street

** Free After 2 - Off Street Only (Apr-Dec 23)

*** Free After 2 - Removed

- 71 Using the above data and after discounting for car park price increases introduced in April 2024 to allow a fair comparison, it is forecast that the annual income in 2024/25 would equate to approximately £2.300 million. This demonstrates that current income levels are expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels and should the Free After 2pm initiative be re-instated, it is anticipated that the council would lose approximately £0.600 million income per year.
- 72 For purpose of comparison the figures in this report do not include Seaham, however, should Free After 2pm be reintroduced this would be further reduction in income estimated to be in excess of £0.050 million.
- 73 The base budget pressure of £0.600 million was subsequently repaid in line with the re-introduction of car parking charges after 2pm, with £0.250 million repaid for on-street car parks in the 2023/24 budget and forecast £0.350 million repaid for off-street car parks in the 2024/25 budget.

Benchmarking

- 74 A benchmarking exercise against other north east authorities has been undertaken with responses from 8 authorities being received. A summary of the responses received is attached at appendix 3.
- 75 Responses indicate that Tees Valley Combined Authority funded periods of free parking initiatives in Darlington and Middlesborough for a period after lockdown. These measures were removed once funding was withdrawn.
- 76 No other local authorities provided any temporary free parking initiatives post Covid.

Conclusion

- 77 The decision to end Free Parking After 2pm has been reconsidered and for the following reasons should be agreed as being the correct decision:
- a) Original cabinet decision on 17th March 2020 was that the suspension of charges was a temporary measure.
 - b) Government removed all COVID-19 related restrictions in on 24 February 2022.
 - c) Cabinet extended the temporary suspension period to 1 April 2023., in response to concerns raised by Councillors on behalf of businesses.

- d) Principles relating to parking management. Car park charging is often perceived as being a key determinant for changes in footfall levels in town and city centres. However, the available evidence is almost entirely anecdotal and there is very little published evidence which links changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall.
- e) The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Section 55 requires that local authority parking enforcement should be self-financing and that authorities need to bear in mind that if their scheme is not self-financing, then they need to be certain that they can afford to pay for it from within existing funding. The Secretary of State does not expect either national or local taxpayers to meet any deficit.
- f) Our Parking Strategy highlights our requirements to provide parking that is convenient, safe, and secure but that there is a balance required between maintaining the economic vitality of commercial centres and the environmental impact in providing a scheme that incentivises people to drive.
- g) Declared Climate Emergency. Transport emissions account for 33% of all emissions in County Durham. The availability of spaces, together with the price point is the major determinant of modal shift. Free or cheap parking makes car travel a more attractive option, leading to increased congestion and transport emissions.
- h) Air Quality Management Area. We are actively working towards being a net zero county by 2045 and parking management is recognised as a tool, that can, and will, be utilised to promote a shift to more sustainable modes of travel. Charging for parking will encourage people to reduce unnecessary car use where there is adequate public transport, or where walking/cycling are realistic alternatives, as is the case in the town centres where parking charges apply.
- i) Complaints received. 6 complaints received following introduction of Free After 2pm and 11 complaint received following removal.
- j) Footfall data. Reviewing the footfall data from the County Durham main centres with chargeable car parking, there is no discernible change to footfall trends that can be linked to the reintroduction charges after 2pm.
- k) Car park and Park and Ride usage data. Park and Ride usage increased when Free after 2pm on street was removed. From the data available, car park income, and therefore usage, in 2024/25 is expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels.

- l) Neighbouring authorities. No other local authorities provided any temporary free parking initiatives post Covid. Any free parking initiatives in place prior to Covid have been removed.
- m) Medium Term Financial Plan. The council would lose approximately £0.600 million income per year if Free After 2pm was re-introduced and this would increase the MTFP budget deficit / savings requirement of £64.130 million over the next four financial years.

Background papers

None

Other useful documents

“Re-Thinking Car Parking” (2020), commissioned by The Association of Town and City Management (ATCM), the British Parking Association (BPA).

Covid Recovery and Town Centre Parking Charges Cabinet 17 March 2021.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The provision of parking is a non-statutory service. Whilst the setting of charging levels requires due notice to be given, the temporary suspension of charges does not.

Income from both on and off street parking is ringfenced to provide the service and maintain facilities to a good standard. Any surplus from on street parking charges or on street and off street enforcement activities, must be used in accordance with the legislative restrictions in Section 55 of the RTRA 1984 (as amended).

Finance

The council would lose approximately £0.600 million income per year if Free After 2pm was re-introduced which would increase the MTFP budget deficit / savings requirement of £64.130 million over the next four financial years.

Consultation and Engagement

This was a temporary measure, introduced to assist town centre recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. Consultation on the reinstatement of charges, previously consulted upon and agreed, was not required. Suitable notice of the change was given prior to implementation.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

EQIA attached.

Climate Change

There is an obvious negative environmental impact in providing a scheme that incentivises people to drive.

Human Rights

Non-specific in this report.

Crime and Disorder

Non-specific in this report.

Staffing

Non-specific in this report.

Accommodation

Non-specific in this report.

Risk

There is a tension between attracting car users into our town and city centres and our climate change / environmental ambitions in terms of promoting more sustainable forms of transport and improving air quality.

Procurement

Non-specific in this report.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment Implications

Durham County Council Equality Impact Assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires Durham County Council to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different groups. Completion of this template allows us to provide a written record of our equality analysis and demonstrate due regard. It must be used as part of decision making processes with relevance to equality.

Please contact equalities@durham.gov.uk for any necessary support.

Section One: Description and Screening

Service/Team or Section	Regeneration, Economy and Growth and Neighbourhoods and Climate Change
Lead Officer name and job title	Mark Jackson Head of Transport and Contact Services
Subject of the impact assessment	Car Parking Strategy / Tariff Review
Report date (Cabinet/CMT/Mgt team etc)	23/11/2022
MTEP Reference (if relevant)	
EIA Start Date	18/11/22
EIA Review Date	

Subject of the Impact Assessment

Please give a brief description of the policy, proposal or practice which is the subject of this impact assessment.

1 To review the current parking offer and identify opportunities.

2 To recommend measures to address availability of space and pricing to bring tariffs in line with the income levels initially required to provide the facilities and to encourage modal shift.

Who are the main people impacted and/or stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users, community representatives):

All drivers who park in County Council car parks both on and off street

Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics¹?

Protected Characteristic	Negative Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure	Positive Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure
Age	N	N
Disability	N	N
Gender reassignment	N	N
Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination')	N	N
Pregnancy and maternity	N	N
Race	N	N
Religion or Belief	N	N
Sex	N	N
Sexual orientation	N	N

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

Please provide **brief** details of any potential to cause discrimination or negative impact. Record full details and any mitigating actions in section 2 of this assessment.

Removal of free after 2pm, increase in tariffs and introduction of tariffs will impact all users of car parks equally

Please provide **brief** details of positive impact. How will this policy/proposal promote our commitment to our legal responsibilities under the public sector equality duty to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation,
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people from different groups?

Any new car parks introduced will have identified and enforceable blue badge bays. All new car parks will have Pay by Phone option and all new Pay and Display machines will have contactless card payment as a minimum. Tariffs in town centre locations will include an additional 1 hour after the paid for duration for blue badge holders. On street dedicated blue badge bays will remain free and on street pay and display bays and time limited bays will remain free of charge and without limit of stay for blue badge holders.

Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your data analysis and any findings?

Please **outline** any data you have and/or proposed sources (e.g. service user or census data, research findings). Highlight any data gaps and say whether or not you propose to carry out consultation. Record your detailed analysis, in relation to the impacted protected characteristics, in section 2 of this assessment.

Parking charges have not increased in line with inflation however operating costs of the assets have. In order to continue to provide safe facilities and better manage demand it is necessary to bring the tariffs in line with the income levels initially required to provide the facilities.

Screening Summary

On the basis of the information provided in this equality impact screening (section 1), are you proceeding to a full impact assessment (sections 2&3 of this template)?	Please confirm (Yes/No) NO
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Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Mark Jackson, HOS Transport	Date:
Equality representative sign off (where required): M C Gallagher, E&D Team Leader	Date:

If carrying out a full assessment please proceed to sections two and three.

If not proceeding to full assessment, please ensure your screening record is **attached to any relevant decision-making records or reports**, retain a copy for update where necessary, and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

If you are unsure of assessing impact please contact the corporate equalities team for further advice: equalities@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 3: Benchmarking Responses

Authority	Scheme	Start	Finish	Comments
Darlington	2hr free in long stay car parks (1 ticket per day)	Jul-19	Jan-21	funded by the council. Decision to introduce it was made by newly elected councillor who thought it would improve footfall - it didn't.
	2hr free in short stay car parks & on street	Jan-21	Apr-24	Tees Valley Combined Authority funded across tees valley a 2hr free offer in our short stay car parks and on street locations with no stipulation of 1 ticket per day! impossible to enforce and was widely abused mainly by business owners located in the streets with the offer, TVCA stopped the funding was pulled April 24
	2hr free in short stay car parks & on street	Apr-24	Jul-24	Between April 24 to May 24 offer was funded with council monies. The offer was pulled 03/07/24 due to machine configurations and TRO's etc had to be completed.
North Tyneside	No scheme			All our car parks in town centres operate free of charge but with a restriction of 2 hours on length of stay on Monday to Friday. We only offer concessionary on-street parking in our town centres during December i.e. free on Saturdays and Sundays, to support the operation of small businesses. Free parking in the car parks was introduced pre-covid. We did close some of our car parks during covid to support social distancing, following discussions with the Police, but the charges in the charged car parked were reinstated as soon as the car parks were re-opened.
Northumberland	No scheme			we have only relaxed parking restrictions for 1 week prior to a Christmas holiday, it was pre-covid and it's never happened again .
Sunderland	Free after 3pm weekdays (pre covid)	didn't specify	Jan-24	in all city centre car parks and multistoreys, withdrawn Jan 24 from all but 5 locations (Gorse Road, West Wear St, Charles St, Tatham St & Nile St). It was found that footfall did not increase as a result of the offer.
	All day parking £5	didn't specify	ongoing	available in 5 off street car parks & 1 MSCP (Gorse Road, West Wear St, Charles St, Tatham St, Nile St & Sunnyside multistorey).
Gateshead	No scheme			Gateshead don't have any offers which are out of their usual charging structure both pre and post covid.
Middlesbrough	3hrs free parking in short stay car parks	Post covid	Feb-23	Middlesbrough Council was included in the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) initiative to off 3 hours free parking in the main short stay town centre car park to encourage people back to the Town Centre after Covid.
	£1 for 3 hrs in short stay car parks	Feb-23	Feb-24	The funding provided by TVCA ended in Feb 2023, we replaced the free parking offer with a reduced rate offer of £1 for 3hrs in April 23 and then increased this charge in March 24 to £1.50 for 3 hours, when the rest of the parking charges were increased. The reason for re-introducing a charge was to cover operating costs of the car park, as this wasn't sustainable when the funding ended.
	£1.50 for 3hrs in short stay car parks	Mar-24	ongoing	
Newcastle	Alive after 5 (MSCP's)	Pre-covid	Aug-22	Around Aug-22 we removed Alive after 5 and the fixed day Sunday charge and had the following pricing structure that is still in place now which is
	£3 all day fixed rate on Sundays	Pre-covid	Aug-22	
	Surface CP's charged until 6pm	Pre-covid		Within our Clean Air Zone all on and off charge 8am till 7pm – Mon-Sun
	On-street charged until 6:30pm	Pre-covid		Outside of Clean Air Zone, all off charge 8am till 6pm and all on street charge 8am till 6:30pm with Sundays still £3 where applicable.
	Free parking for all	during covid	6 weeks+	
	Free parking for NHS workers	during covid	sustained period	https://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=12087
Hartlepool	Free after 3pm (3 sites only)	Pre-covid	ongoing	three sites that have free after 3pm parking but we have had them in place for a number of years, well before Covid.
				The council did try to remove these free charges recently but it was rejected at committee level.

Appendix 4: Complaints

Date	Method of contact	Complaint
26/04/21	Email	General complaint. Asking for reduction in permit costs due to the scheme. Asked if a consultation or impact assessment was carried out as it directly affects city centre residents.
01/05/21	Email	Limited space in their zone for resident parking. Claims Free After 2pm has resulted in those spaces being used by visitors and residents can no longer get parked.
10/05/21	Email	Lack of consultation with residents. Free parking for all except those who live there and pay council tax. Scheme results in lack of parking for residents.
01/09/21	Phone Call	I have taken a call from Keith Bell from Crook Hall who asked to speak to Dave Wafer, but what he wants to discuss with someone is the policy of free parking after 2.00 pm in Durham City. He owns a commercial car park and feels that this has not increased footfall to the city, it is just lost a lot of revenue for the commercial car park owner.
16/01/23	Email	Long term resident of South St complaining it is nearly impossible to park in street after 2pm and asking about end date for Free After 2. States has also written to his MP and local cllrs.
26/01/23	Email	Long-term resident complains operation of Free After 2 has exacerbated what was already a sensitive situation. Residents, many elderly, infirm, or with young families are being forced to park and walk from a considerable distance.
28/10/2023	Email to her MP	I work in Durham, Monday to Friday and use the Sands multi-storey car park. This currently costs me £24 per week. With the proposed removal of the free parking after 2pm, this would increase to £37 per week. This would be an additional £52 per month!!! In a cost of living crisis, how can such an attack on hard working tax payers be justified?
13/12/2023	Email to Parking Services	Commutes to York for work. Parks in Sidegate Car Park. Thinks it is a disgrace to remove free after 2pm scheme. People clearly use Sidegate Car Park for work and thinks in the current economic climate, can you justify it? His parking will increase from £4.80 to £8.80 per day.
14/01/2024	CRM	electric vehicle bays should remain free after 2pm as he has to pay to charge his vehicle and does not think it is fair to be charged a parking charge as well.
24/01/2024	CRM	Wants to know why it is being scrapped? Why not modify it to say after 6pm? Or is it just to screw more money out of council tax payers? If it is just to raise more revenue then just say that.
25/01/2024	MP Enquiries	Removal of free after 2pm makes him not want to visit Durham at weekends. He believes it will affect those working in the city, as well as result in business failure due to a reduction of footfall.

23/02/2024	Email to Parking Services	Received fine for parking Galgate Car Park, Barnard Castle. She did not realise it was not free after 2pm anymore as she has been living away from home as a Uni Student. Believes there was lack of signage and poor communication to the public.
18/03/2024	MP Enquiries	complaining about PayByPhone charges added on to parking charge since free after 2pm finished.
03/05/2024	Email to Parking Services	Was enquiring if we offered permits for workers? Stated since stopping free after 2pm, parking is ridiculously expensive in Durham City, especially for people who work long shifts.
18/12/2023	Corporate Complaint	I just want to complain about the fact the free car parking from 2pm will be ending shortly in Co Durham areas especially Chester le Street. You should be encouraging people to go there to help local businesses. Prices everywhere are at an all time high and a little gesture such as free parking after 2pm makes a difference to lots of people. I for one will now just go to the galleries at Washington instead and I know other people who have said the same. You really need to rethink this.
08/01/2024	MP Enquiries	"The Parking scheme was extremely popular with shoppers and businesses alike and offered excellent value for money. In my view, the harm this will cause to the town centre will far outweigh the annual savings to the Council. For a council that has budgeted £600,000 per year to run a brand new art gallery in Durham City, it is difficult to believe that the authority cannot afford the £350,000 per year to continue to operate Free after 2pm Parking, not just in Chester-le-Street but right across County Durham"
29/01/2024	MP Enquiries	The removal of free parking after 2 makes me not visit Durham on weekends and seriously affects those working in the city. There will be a reduction in footfall for businesses and a corresponding increase in business failure.

Appendix 5: Press Coverage

26 October 2023

[Car parking charges could rise across Durham City car parks | The Northern Echo](#)

[Parking charges set to rise in Durham City, with new fees introduced \(sunderlandecho.com\)](#)

16 December 2023

[End of County Durham free parking scheme 'could deter shoppers' - BBC News](#)

23 December 2023

[Free car parking in County Durham council car parks to end | The Northern Echo](#)

28 December 2023

[All the County Durham car parks where free parking after 2pm will end | The Northern Echo](#)

30 December 2023

[Full list of County Durham car parks where free scheme will end as new all-day charges come into force in 2024 - Chronicle Live](#)

25 January 2024

[Seaham parking charge plans set to press ahead, despite furious row \(sunderlandecho.com\)](#)

26 January 2024

[Durham County Council to rethink end of free parking after outcry - BBC News](#)

28 January 2024

[Removal of free County Durham parking scheme to be reconsidered - Chronicle Live](#)

16 February 2024

[Rethink over free parking scheme - News - Teesdale Mercury](#)

20 March 2024

Teesdale Mercury story (pages 1 and 4) – story not online

3 April 2024

[Durham council decision on free parking after 2pm due in 'months' | The Northern Echo](#)

Appendix 6: Footfall Data

Town	Month	Year on Year Footfall change	Comparable NE footfall change	Comparable UK footfall change	Comments
Barnard Castle	Jan-24	-2.60%	-2.40%	-0.50%	Afternoon footfall increased by 4.97% with reductions in evening / nighttime o/s charging period
	Apr-24	-3.60%	0.50%	2.00%	Afternoon footfall down 7.7% compared to 2023 across the afternoon period
	Jul-24	0.20%	2.20%	1.30%	Afternoon footfall -7.17%
Bishop Auckland	Jan-24	-1.50%	-2.40%	-0.50%	Afternoon footfall up by 0.48% with 5.5% reduction in Mornings compared to 2023
	Apr-24	-0.50%	0.50%	2.00%	Afternoon footfall down by 5.15% with Evening footfall down by 6.22%
	Jul-24	-1.7	2.20%	1.30%	Afternoon footfall down by 6.7% year on year
Chester Le Street	Jan-24	-2.80%	-2.40%	-0.50%	Comparable afternoon footfall with reduced footfall in Mornings(-2.43%) and evenings (-.86%)
	Apr-24	1.20%	0.50%	2.00%	Afternoon footfall down by 1.3% with more pronounced reductions in Evening (-7.03%) and Night(-8.07%)
	Jul-24	2.60%	2.20%	1.30%	Afternoon footfall down by 4.04% with increases at all other points in the day.
Consett	Jan-24	-0.90%	-2.40%	-0.50%	Afternoon footfall shows +4.09% increase with largest reduction in footfall -8.3% in evenings o/s charging period
	Apr-24	-0.90%	0.50%	2.00%	Afternoon footfall shows 2.5% increase over previous year with most footfall decrease in evenings o/s charging period
	Jul-24	2.20%	2.20%	1.30%	-1.7% footfall in afternoons with increases mornings, evening and night time.

Source: Placeinformatix August 2022

Durham City Data not shown due to majority car parking privately managed and outside of free after 2 policy