

APPENDIX 3A (i) - RESPONSE - LABOUR CALL-IN

CABINET APPROVAL FOR INCREASES TO PARKING CHARGES AND RELATED MATTERS

Town economy and attractiveness (response to the introduction section and Section 1, 5)

The Movement Strategy is examining how people access the town centre, with improvements to highways infrastructure, public transport, and active travel. However, restricting change until this longer-term project is implemented will curtail Parking Services' ability to influence motorists' use of the town in the short term.

Though the Movement Strategy may enhance matters, it is already possible to use a bus or cycle to the town, and if the intended incentive to move vehicles from the town centre is successful, it will reduce stress on the existing highway infrastructure. The alternative of waiting for the 10 year long Shrewsbury Moves Strategy to be implemented in a phased manner is not considered reasonable, as this could lead to stagnation of the service for perhaps 5 years or more. Expanding the Park and Ride service is discussed below.

Parking ticket sales in Shrewsbury have returned to pre-Covid levels, indicating that visitor numbers have recovered, though how they use their time is not available to Parking Services.

An increase limited to inflation will achieve none of the objectives: if the endpoint of a car journey is only available to the first to arrive (typically commuters/staff), then connectivity for others (customers/visitors) becomes limited; the local economy will suffer if customers are unable to find available space; deterioration of car park infrastructure will be perpetuated; parking service staff will be unable to address many important operational processes and the development of new resident zones, for instance; funding of public transport, particularly Park and Ride, will be limited.

Park and Ride (in response to Section 5)

As noted in the report, an extra evening Park and Ride service would be helpful in creating a 'commuter' alternative. However, there is a financial chicken-and-egg situation here. Investigations should take place in the short term into the ability to use some of the additional parking revenue to specifically fund a late Park and Ride service (and maybe even an early morning service). This investigation will need to research the financial viability of this proposal, the practical delivery implications for the service, any legal restraints and other demands on the parking revenue. In the meantime, the increase in car park charges will make the Park and Ride service comparatively even cheaper for those who can work within its limitations or adapt their arrangements to do so.

Displacement (in response to Section 6)

It is acknowledged that displacement parking is a possibility, though modelling estimates the numbers will be very small (less than 50 per day throughout

Shrewsbury) and as such will be addressed when the Parking Team has sufficient resources and when other displacement effects from the Shrewsbury Moves Strategy are understood. It is considered extremely unlikely that any new area will suffer immediate, unsustainable displacement, but if it does, it will be prioritized. The alternative of consulting on something which has not happened, might not happen, and is likely to have a very small impact is not considered useful.

Shropshire Led Consultation Prior to presentation of the report, several people/groups were consulted, including the Informal Cabinet, Mark Barrow, Executive Director, Place, Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways, and Seb Slater, Shrewsbury BID. A wider consultation of individual councillors was not considered necessary as the report was not focused on a local area but countywide. Public consultation was also not considered appropriate as, due to the nature of the report, only objections would be received, suggesting inflation-based increases, no increases, free parking, effects on town centre economies, etc. These are all factors that have been considered but work against the stated objectives that are the reason for the increases.

Legally Led Consultations (in response to Sections 1, 3)

The requirements are set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.: Alterations to charges can be carried out by means of a 'notice of variation' which is published 21 days prior to changes being implemented. There is no provision for objection. Alterations to conditions are carried out by means of a 'notice of proposals' which gives 21 days in which to object, followed by consideration and approval, modification, or rejection of the proposals before implementation. A more comprehensive explanation of the legal provisions is attached as Appendix 3b.

Full public consultation (in response to sections 1, 2, 3, 6)

The meaning of a 'full public consultation' is not detailed in the call-in notice but is presumed to involve a longer timescale. To put it into context, the 21-day consultation process would in practice take 2 to 3 committee cycles depending on timing.

Further delays from an extended consultation process will entail significant delays to the policy objectives, costs in such an extensive exercise, and significant lost revenue. This revenue is needed to support the necessary changes to maintain the parking estate, improve parking operations, potentially increase the Park and Ride services, and if previous practice is followed, maintain or improve scheduled bus services.

The source of a '7-day' notice is not clear but is not in the proposals. A Notice of Variation is published 21 days before the changes are introduced and a Notice of Proposals involves a 21-day consultation/objection period.

The Parking Strategy (in response to Section 3)

The Parking Strategy is a local (Shropshire) policy document which addresses principles, procedures, and guidance for the operation of the parking service and its development.

Last time it was comprehensively reviewed in 2017 the document set out some guidance on how to create a charging structure which was widely consulted upon alongside all the other principles and procedures. It incorporated the separate issue of the actual charges to be adopted.

This combination of two issues into one document has possibly created a mistaken expectation that the issues have to be considered as one, with extensive consultation on the charge levels. The increases in 2022/23 did not involve the level of consultation afforded the Parking Strategy and the report wording did not refer to changing the Parking Strategy. In this case, it is proposed to follow the procedures in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, without changing the Parking Strategy, subject to the paragraph below.

Guidance in the Parking Strategy related to the basic charge structure was that there should be 7 tariff Bands and each car park would be slotted into one of these Bands. Parking in Shropshire has become more complicated with changes required in Shrewsbury that are not required elsewhere. There is no reason, policy procedure or strategy why the guidance of 7 Bands in 2017 should not be altered to 11 Bands in 2024, reflecting changes in circumstances over the last seven years.

Without this change, Shrewsbury's modern traffic conditions and development of the town centre could not be accommodated without inappropriate increases elsewhere. It is this change from 7 to 11 tariff bands which in the context of the principles and even the detail of the Strategy is considered 'minor'.

Charge Level Proposals – General (in response to Section 4)

The Movement Strategy principle of a graduated system of parking charges becoming cheaper as you move further from the town centre is completely compatible with the changes proposed.

- £3.60 On-street bays are the closest to the town centre,
- £2.80 Bridge Street, St Austins Street,
- £2.00 Raven Meadows,
- £1.60 St Julians Friars,
- £1.20 Frankwell,
- £1.00 Abbey Foregate, the furthest away.

Charge increases of 80p in the centre, 40p on the fringes and 20p elsewhere have enabled this to happen, but given the different starting points have led to different percentage increases for the same value increase. These charges conform to the transport hierarchy and parking strategy.

Raven Meadows is not increasing due to its lower quality and without its 'intermediate' level, it is possible Frankwell may not cope with more transferred vehicles.

It will also enable motorists to retain easy access to the Darwin Centre and the town centre beyond, without adding to the town centre traffic as well as serving as an accessible option for those with limited means or for those with children or mobility issues where Frankwell would be a deterrent to visitors,

In comparison with Hereford these charges are comparable at the level of St Julians Friars and below but Shrewsbury's on-street and town centre car parks are somewhat higher with their top car park being over a pound cheaper. This is reflective of the desire to move traffic from inside the loop.

The tariff structure in Chester is fairly difficult to define. It appears that Shrewsbury will remain slightly cheaper for short term stays, but the use of irregular tariffs makes longer stays cheaper in Chester. This is possibly due to the much higher level of commercial competition and availability of spaces in Chester.

Telford parking for £2/day appears to apply only to Sunday, ie the identical charge proposed at Raven Meadows, providing access to all the facilities, attractions, and businesses that are unique to Shrewsbury.

Charge Level Proposals – Sunday (in response to Section 2)

It is not uncommon for towns and cities to charge full rate. For instance, Hereford charges full price up to 3 hours, whereafter it is free, whilst their private/commercial counterparts charge full price for all periods. Chester charges full price apart from some quite distant car parks whilst their private/commercial counterparts also charge full price, apart from one 'flat rate' of £5 per day.

Sunday parking inside the Shrewsbury River loop is currently half the normal price whilst elsewhere it is free of charge. Moving the inside river loop car parks to full rate with the introduction of a half rate everywhere else is still less than these two comparator towns. (Note Raven Meadows will retain its flat rate of £2 per day maintaining a 'cheaper' option which will support Sunday shopping in the Darwin Centre and beyond)

It should be noted that at certain times of the year, the use of car parks on Sunday can be almost the same as weekdays, though only 10% stay more than 4 hours, which would cost £2.00 at Abbey Foregate.

The alternative of a full consultation will entail significant delays to the policy objectives, costs in such an extensive exercise, and lost revenue that is needed to support the necessary changes to the parking estate and parking operations staff.

Charge Level Proposals – Evenings (in response to section 2)

Chester extensively uses evening charges. On-street has a flat rate charge up to 9 pm, Car Parks have overnight charges which have to be paid after typically 6 pm

using flat rates ranging from £1.50 to £4. In Shrewsbury, it is not proposed to have evening charges in all car parks. St Julians Friars and Abbey Foregate will remain free of charge. The alternative of a full consultation will entail significant delays to the policy objectives, costs in such an extensive exercise, and lost revenue that is needed to support the necessary changes to the parking estate and parking operations staff.

Data Use/Modelling (in response to Section 6)

Modelling was conducted in a detailed manner using data available from:

- counters that feed the Variable Message Signing which shows the car park capacity in Shrewsbury car parks only.
- Pay and Display data from the Council's PowerBI data visualisation tool provided the parking period purchased as well as the time of purchase for car parks and on-street across the County.
- The permit database provided a snapshot of active permits their location and period purchased for car parks and on-street.
- Benchmarking data collected from various Council websites.

Data is not available on motorists' reactions such as:

- whether they will change their parking location and where they will go,
- whether they will use Park and Ride, or
- whether they will stop or reduce their visits to Shrewsbury.

In the first two cases, there is experience from a wide variety of locations, though Shrewsbury, as is any town, is unique and motorists may react differently. This has been applied as the best forecast/estimate, taking into account local or specific conditions where possible. Permit changes are less well documented, and the benchmarking data is subject to the other Council's keeping their websites up to date.

The Shrewsbury Moves Parking Plus Strategy will be considering if and how motorists' intentions can be surveyed but this is not yet available and is many months or even a year away.

Use of Income (in response to Section 7)

Firstly, it must be stated that the statement 'these measures aim to generate over £2 million in income' is completely false and illegal.

The Cabinet report actually says the exact opposite and gives a conditional estimate of income, which is legal:

at 7.26 "*charges cannot be set with the aim of generating a surplus*" and

at 5.1 "*If all proposals within the report are approved, it is estimated that an additional income of £1.76 m per annum will be achieved*".

It has been confirmed in court before Mr. Justice McCullough in 1995 that the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Act is not a fiscal measure for the generation of income. However, where effective traffic or parking management needs higher charges to discourage the use of the facilities then a surplus is acceptable. This matches the intention of this report to ensure availability of parking space and re-distribute traffic.

The surplus on parking operations is not generated as a means of raising revenue but arises 'naturally', because of implementing charges which are a sufficient deterrent to balance supply and demand for parking space usage and to limit obstructions arising from traffic searching for on-street parking places.

Setting charges solely for the Parking Service to be self-sufficient would result in an excessive demand for parking spaces in the town centre such that queuing and congestion inside the car parks would spill over to the highway, with a large contribution to congestion, traffic, and pollution.

All Councils in England and Wales are legally required to publish an Annual Parking Report within six months of the end of a financial year. According to Shropshire's report for 2022-23, parking generated around £5.8m whilst costs amounted to £3.4m. It concludes as follows –

“In 2022/23 the parking account (on-street and off-street combined) had a net surplus of £2,409,531.27, this surplus was used to fund costs incurred by the local authority in the provision, operation of, or facilities for public passenger transport services.”

Similar statements of surplus usage have been made for the 5 years prior to this

The current proposals are intended to re-balance the supply/demand whilst also meeting policy objectives to further limit the amount of traffic in the town centre. It is estimated that following the introduction of the report measures the income will be £7.5m with expenditure of £4.1m, leaving a surplus of £3.4m, which could also fund public passenger transport services or be used for other defined purposes.

Strictly speaking only on-street and enforcement surpluses are restricted to particular purposes including repaying any previous deficits, providing additional car parks, public passenger transport services (often used for Senior or Disabled bus passes) or improvements to the highway or environment. However, in Shropshire off-street surpluses have in practice been used in the same way as on-street for many years.

The existing surpluses are used to support public transport. Use of future surpluses is not in the purview of Parking Services and will ultimately be a decision made by the councillors in control of budget expenditure. Cabinet reports are reviewed by legal colleagues before being published.

Parking Services are not in a position to answer the final two alternative suggestions.