



**REPORT of
RE-SET AND RECOVERY WORKING GROUP**

**to
ANNUAL COUNCIL
5 NOVEMBER 2020**

COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY - CAR PARKING

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Council has formed a Member officer Re-Set and Recovery Working Group (RRWG) to oversee activities relating to the ongoing Government guidance and legislation relating to business activity. Minutes of individual meetings are available to Members via Mod.Gov, if required.
- 1.2 The RRWG has considered supporting the economic recovery of local businesses through the provision of a limited number of free parking days (or equivalent part days) before Christmas and approve engagement with local businesses on potential amendments to charging times in Maldon High Street car parks. Members are reminded parking is only charged for in Maldon Town so Burnham-on-Crouch for example is not affected. The RRWG asks that the Council supports and approves the recommendations set out below.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That delegated authority be reinstated for three free 'Christmas' parking days (or equivalent part days) in Maldon High Street Car Parks to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Leader of the Council to support high street businesses;
- (ii) That Members consider whether the afternoon of Christmas Eve be added to the free parking dates in 2020 as requested by the Maldon Business Board;
- (iii) That Officers engage with businesses relating to a potential change to the start of the evening charging period to stimulate high street footfall and economic recovery;
- (iv) That the Reset and Recovery Working Group considers the results of the engagement before reporting with any recommendations to the Council for consideration related to changes to car park tariffs.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Free ‘Christmas’ Parking Days

3.1.1 Until 2019 the Director of Service Delivery was granted delegated authority to allocate three free parking days in Maldon High Street car parks around Christmas. The free parking days were very well received by businesses and residents although they often resulted in parking capacity for shoppers being very limited, and the shopping days were generally very close to Christmas

3.1.2 It is proposed to reinstate three free days parking (or equivalent) from 2020 and to continue this annually. For 2020 it is proposed that free parking will be offered over six half days, creating free parking periods from 2pm onwards. The proposed dates for 2020 are 12, 19 and 26 November, 3, 10 and 17 December. This proposal will support retail shopping, hospitality and the evening economy but spaced over several days; reducing the risks of encouraging crowds and limited parking capacity for customers.

3.1.3 For future years the exact dates and times of the three free days (or equivalent) car parking will be determined by the Director of Service Delivery, in consultation with the Leader of the Council. The proposal to reinstate Christmas free parking on a permanent basis is to allow local business to be able to plan ahead with certainty for the Christmas period.

3.1.4 As the Council has historically offered three days free parking there is no loss of budgeted income, however it is estimated that we are notionally forfeiting income of £6,000 during these six half days.

3.2 Engagement with businesses on a change to evening charging period

3.2.1 Informal limited discussions with businesses have indicated a desire to explore an adjustment of the evening charging period through bringing forward the start time of evening charges from 6pm to 3pm. The proposal is intended to stimulate the late afternoon / early evening period (traditionally a quieter period) in the Town and it is envisaged that this will support both retail and hospitality sector.

3.2.2 It is hoped that this proposal will help bridge the early evening ‘gap’ between the day-time retail offer and the evening hospitality offer progressing the vision of an improved evening economy and ‘café culture’ from the Central Area Master Plan.

3.2.3 Given only limited discussions have been held with local businesses, Officers are seeking agreement to consult on the following two options;

- Option One - the evening charge period be brought forward to 3pm Monday to Friday;
- Option Two - the evening charge period be brought forward to one afternoon per week.

3.3 Clearly for the proposal to succeed local businesses would need to embrace and adapt to benefit from the changes by ensuring they remained open during the late afternoon and early evening. The proposed engagement will gauge the level of support from

businesses to adapt their opening times to ensure that the maximum opportunities are derived from the proposals.

- 3.4 It is estimated that Option One (as detailed in paragraph 3.2.3 above) will result in a possible loss of £1,500 income to the Council over the year, and Option two will potentially cost £500. The estimated figures are based on pre-Covid-19 historic income and based on a typical sample month and take no account of reduced use during the pandemic. There is also a potential for a greater financial impact should there be a change in the use of the carparks as a result of the change to afternoon car park tariffs.
- 3.5 Both parking proposals have been designed to deliver significant benefits to local businesses without reducing parking capacity for shoppers and to enable clarity of communications to the public.
- 3.6 The engagement with local businesses is intended to be undertaken during November, with the outcomes of this to be brought forward to the earliest Reset and Recovery Working Group, which currently would be 4 January 2021, and for the proposals to be brought forward to the Council on 4 February 2021. If it is possible to bring these proposals forward earlier then Officers will do so.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council has been working to support the business community in Maldon throughout the Pandemic. The High Street adaptations being progressed are being done so to provide a Covid safe environment for shoppers to encourage a safe return to the High Street. Reinstatement of the free 'Christmas' parking days and exploring options to bring forward the evening charging period will support the recovery of all business on Maldon High Street.
- 4.2 The Reset and Recovery Working Group fully support the recommendations at section 2 above.
- 4.3 Initial feedback from the Maldon Business Board (**APPENDIX 1**) supports the proposals in this report, including the proposed dates (12 November to 17 December 2020 inclusive) but have asked for consideration of an additional parking date on 24 December 2020.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 The proposals support the Council's Prosperity objectives to support local business.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Supporting the post Covid economic recovery of Maldon High Street Businesses is a central part of the Council Covid-19 response. By offering free car parking before Christmas gives shoppers greater choice and might encourage local shopping. Reduced afternoon

charges again may encourage more use of our car parks at a traditionally quieter period. This measure however will only work with the support of local businesses in commitment to open later or longer and therefore consultation is recommended before implementing any change.

- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None identified.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – None identified.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The Council has an opportunity to support local business through adapting parking charges but it must consider the financial cost of the proposals through loss of income. Officers are looking at how to reduce fixed costs but any proposals will not be ready to present concurrently with this report so the financial loss should be considered now before proceeding. The estimated direct income loss would be up to £1,500 per year, but changes in use of the car parks (such as shoppers moving to a later time in the day to shop as a result of these changes) may have a much greater financial impact. There are some costs associated with amending parking machines, advertising changes, amending the parking order and signage but these costs can be met from existing revenue budgets.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The proposed changes will require Officer time to undertake the proposed engagement and if agreed implement the changes.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – The Council is aware stimulating the use of car parking could put additional pressure on the environment through increased traffic movement. However, at the moment living in a rural district with limited public transport options this is the reality. In mitigation the Council is developing environmental strategies to mitigate pollution and shoppers will be encouraged to walk, cycle and use public transport as an alternative to the car, particularly if living within a 2-mile radius of the High Street. The environmental considerations should be considered by Members in deciding on the proposals.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – None.

Background Papers: None.

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