

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	3rd October 2024 7 pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Deputy Chief Officer Marketing and Communications		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	15 Response to CEC Car Park Variation Consultation		
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	<p>On 28 August Cheshire East Council launched a 6-week consultation into a variation on the car parking charges which the Borough Council approved on 24 January 2024 and implemented in July 2024. This variation consultation closes on 9 October 2024.</p> <p>The two main changes in the new consultation are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To start charging on Sundays – this is proposed at the same rate as the Monday to Saturday charges. 2. To increase the chargeable parking hours from 8am – 6pm to 8am – 10pm. Again the additional hours are at the same rates as day-time parking. <p>This paper is designed to raise awareness of the consultation and pull together a potential response for the Town Council. The points raised in this draft response are based on the Town Council’s response to the Autumn 2023 consultation.</p> <p>In the statement of reasons, Cheshire East Council says the proposals will generally assist to secure the safer movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic and help with climate change by influencing travel choices and encouraging more short trips to be completed by walking, cycling and public transport.</p> <p>In Cheshire East Council’s press release about the variation consultation, it states the Council believes these new charges could potentially generate up to £2 million in revenue for the Council over the next four years.</p>		
THE DECISION	<p>For Council to agree on whether or not they wish to respond to the consultation. If the Council agrees to respond, do they want to use some or all of the arguments below? Are there further comments that the Council wishes to include in its response.</p>		
Potential statements for the CTC Response	<p>General</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Congleton Town Council objects strongly to the proposals to introduce Sunday and Evening charges at the standard rate. We believe these increases do not make sense for residents, businesses or Cheshire East Council. 2. If Cheshire East Council is minded to introduce Sunday and Evening Charges, they should be at a lower flat rate. 		

3. Traders in Congleton town centre are already reporting a drop in footfall based on the drastic rise in parking charges experienced in Congleton in July 2024. Some traders tell us that they have noticed a drop in sales and footfall in the town centre.
4. The increases introduced in July 2024 were largely a cost for people who work in the town centre and do not live within walking distance. Paying £4.30 rather than £1.60 per day to park is having an impact on where people are choosing to work as well as shop.
5. Extending parking charges into the evening will impact most on those living in the Town Centre. They are less likely to be able to find on-street parking as visitors will opt to park on side roads. This is likely to be repeated on Sundays. The medieval street pattern of much of Congleton was not designed for cars. Cars parking on the side roads to avoid car parking charges is causing a problem for delivery drivers, emergency services, care workers and refuse collections.
6. Congleton Town Centre car parks are nearly all short-stay on the medium tariff. There is no demand problem day or night, with the exception of Back Park Street. If parking charges are to be extended it would make sense to have a flat rate and allow people to stay beyond the 3-hour maximum e.g. flat rate of £1 after 6 pm.
7. Residents returning from home used to park in town centre car parks overnight. Parking charges used to finish at 5pm, and were extended to 6pm in July. If they are further extended to 10pm, with a 3-hour maximum stay, it means that even if residents are prepared to pay the £2.30 for up to 3 hours, if they parked at 6pm they would have to move by 9pm.
8. Congleton is not a tourist town. We believe introducing a new 10-14 hour parking fee is purely about trying to extract more funds out of residents living in the town centre. The ticket should remain at 6 – 14 hours to cover all-day parking.
9. As stated in the previous consultation, there is not a supply and demand issue in Congleton. The only car park that consistently looks busy is Back Park Street Car Park. We believe this is because CEC has reduced the number of long-stay car parks in Congleton and Back Park Street is the only one on the Low Tariff Rate (£3.40 per 6-10 hours as opposed to £4.30 in Princess Street and West Street).
10. Most of the businesses in Congleton Town Centre close on a Sunday. There is little demand from the car parks except for people attending church. Introducing Sunday Parking Charges is likely to have a negative rather than positive impact on the notion of allowing for safer vehicle and passenger movement as more people are dropped off and picked up outside of the town's churches rather than waiting in the car parks.

	<p>11. We believe it may cost more for CEC to implement these parking charges than the revenue raised by introducing them.</p> <p>12. The changes in car parking charges would be easier to accept if there were a viable alternative to the car in Congleton. There are very few bus services in and around Congleton. The steep gradient of many of the hills around the town can make walking and cycling difficult for residents.</p> <p>Changes that we would like to see:</p> <p>While Cheshire East is planning to make variations to the car parking orders we would recommend:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making Chapel Street Car Park long stay. CEC’s own research revealed that most popular ticket issued for the car park before the changes was a 6-10 hour tic. Councillors have been made aware of town centre workers who are leaving their employment because they don’t feel safe walking to West Street Car Park. It would be worth checking ticket sales, but the impression is that this car park is now usually empty. 2. Back Park Street Car Park is now the busiest car park as it is the cheapest of the three long-stay car parks. It is also the town’s free after-free car park – which is not beneficial as it is usually full. We would like CEC to consider moving the Free After Free to another less popular town centre car park in order to encourage more people to come into town to shop. 3. We believe it is short-sighted to see the town centre car parks as money-raising opportunities to the detriment of the town centre and its businesses. We are aware that the Leisure Centre is losing bookings because people visiting the centre can’t park there as the car park and all around the edges is full or blocked. 4. Introducing car parking charges in the evening is likely to make the town less rather than safer, with cars parking in all the residential streets and single yellow line areas. 5. Many shop owners have told the Town Council that there is no point responding to this consultation as Cheshire East did not take any notice of the 96% of responses that were against the previous car park changes.
<p>Environmental Considerations</p>	<p>In CEC statement of reasons, CEC says that the proposed changes are to encourage more sustainable travel and encourage more people to walk, cycle or take public transport. CTC believes that the increase in car parking is actually increasing the number of car journeys and cars idling whilst waiting to pick up and drop people off.</p>
<p>Equality Considerations</p>	<p>The cost of parking is creating a problem for people living in the town centre, with double parking on side streets leading to a problem with getting emergency services, deliveries, care support and bin collection. This is having the biggest impact on some of the most vulnerable members of our society.</p>

Financial Considerations	There is not a financial cost to the Town Council, but there is for our shops, businesses and residents.
PROPOSAL	To respond to CEC Car Parking Variation Consultation strategy strongly opposing the proposal to introduce Sunday and Evening Charges based on the points raised in this paper, plus anything the committee want added/removed.