



Congleton Town Council

Historic Market Town

Chief Officer: David McGifford CiLCA

4 October 2024

Cheshire East Council Car Park Consultation – variation of parking charges Comments from Congleton Town Council

Members of Congleton Town Council considered its response to Cheshire East Council's consultation on varying the car parking charging hours at its Council meeting on Thursday 3 October. The Committee resolved to write to Cheshire East and raise the points below.

General

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. Extending parking charges into the evening will mainly effect those living in the Town Centre. These residents 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.
3. Many of Congleton's town centre car parks short-stay on the medium tariff. There is no demand for parking in the evening except from residents without adequate road space near their homes. 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 6pm. It makes no sense for someone coming home at 6pm to be forced to move the car at 9pm because the maximum stay is 3 hours.
4. The maximum stay in the town's short stay car parks should be extended both in the evening and on Sundays when there is little demand for the car parks. Again on a Sunday it makes no sense that residents can only park their cars for three hours. This is particularly true of Antrobus Street, Chapel Street, Roe Street and Park Street.
5. 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. Introducing a charge for parking in the evenings and Sundays appears to be trying to put people off living in the town as well as working and shopping!

6. 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 car parks should either remain free after 6pm or the upper ticket band extended to cover 6 – 14 hours.
7. 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).
8. Most of the businesses in Congleton Town Centre close on a Sunday. There is little demand for the car parks except for people attending church. Introducing Sunday Parking Charge is likely to have a negative rather than positive impact on the objective of creating safer vehicle and passenger movement as more people are likely to be dropped off and picked up outside of the town's churches rather than waiting in the car parks.
9. We believe it may cost more for CEC to implement these parking charges than the revenue raised by introducing them.
10. 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.

Ideas that we would like Cheshire East Council to consider:

While Cheshire East is planning to make variations to the car parking orders we would recommend:

1. If Cheshire East Council is minded to introduce Sunday and Evening Charges, they should be at a lower flat rate eg/ £1 from 6pm until 8am and the same flat rate on Sunday.
2. Cheshire East Council needs to urgently address the parking mitigation measures around the side roads as the increased parking hours and charges is having a detrimental impact on the quality of life of residents.
3. Think about managing evening and Sunday parking in the short stay (max 3 hour) car parks and how to make them attractive and usable for residents without the luxury of off-road parking.

While Cheshire East is planning to make variations to the car parking orders we would recommend that the Council considers:

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 ticket. Congleton Town 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 Chapel Street 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 its residents 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.

If you require clarification about any of the issues raised in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me on jackie.macarthur@congleton-tc.gov.uk or tel 01260 270350 ext 3

Yours sincerely



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On behalf of Congleton Town Council's Community Committee.



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