



REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: ELGIN PARKING REVIEW

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To set out recommendations following feedback from stakeholder engagement held on 12 April 2023 and a subsequent review of Elgin parking charges.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (17) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to traffic management functions.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) notes the summary of feedback from the Stakeholder meeting held on 12 April 2023 and the proposed measures set out in the subsequent parking review;**
- (ii) approves the approach set out in paragraph 4;**
- (ii) approves the revised parking charges as set out in Section 6 of this report, and given the budgetary impact, refers determination of the charges to the next meeting of Moray Council for a final decision with a recommendation from this committee based on its view on the charges.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A Parking Strategy for Elgin was adopted by Members in October 2017. This provided a considered approach to the future of parking provision in Elgin to best meet the varied and competing needs of different users. This strategy covered a range of parking issues, and included a review of the charges at the council's pay and display car parks in Elgin (Para 7 of the minute refers). Car park charges have not been changed since that time, as frequent changes are challenging for both users and the technology in terms of small denomination coinage, and the principle is of periodic rather than annual review.
- 3.2 In January 2023 it was proposed to increase the car park charges as part of the charges report. Following debate at Corporate Committee it was agreed to freeze parking charges to enable further discussions on parking issues within Elgin to take place between the Council and partner organisations (Para 8 of the minute refers).
- 3.3 A workshop was held with stakeholders and partner organisations on 12 April 2023. This report considers the feedback from the Elgin Parking Stakeholder meeting and makes recommendations as a result of the feedback from the meeting and information from parking surveys undertaken by officers.

4. ELGIN PARKING STAKEHOLDER MEETING

- 4.1 An Elgin Parking Stakeholder meeting was held on Wednesday 12 April 2023. A full summary of the outputs from the workshop is attached in **Appendix A** to this report.
- 4.2 Stakeholders included representatives from Elgin BID, Visit Moray Speyside, Police Scotland, Fire Scotland, UHI, Federation of Small Businesses, Moray Chamber of Commerce, Moray Transport Forum and Elgin Community Council. Local Elected Members were also invited along with colleagues from Development Services and Car Park Attendants.
- 4.3 Attendees at the workshop were split into three groups and each group was facilitated by a member of Transportation staff, following an initial short overview. Each group discussed relevant problems, opportunities and constraints followed by potential solutions.
- 4.4 **Appendix A** provides a detailed list of the wide ranging issues highlighted and potential opportunities or solutions identified by stakeholders. The issues raised included parking problems relating to specific streets including Batchen Lane and North Street, St Giles and Batchen Lane multi-storey car parks, disabled parking spaces, enforcement, potential to vary charges and the size of modern vehicles.

4.5 The Stakeholder meeting identified the following as key priorities:

- Disabled parking
- Improved signing for car parking on all key routes into Elgin
- On-street parking enforcement and policy

The following points were also prevalent in the issues raised and are addressed in the report:

- Review of car parking charging structure
- Coach Parking / pick up / drop off

4.6 **Disabled Parking** – A detailed report on disabled parking will be brought to a future meeting of this Committee. The work to be done is partly underway, but is quite wide-ranging and time consuming needing further resourcing from the transportation team, which is in the workplan for this year. This review will also consider opportunities identified in the Stakeholder workshop which included the size of parking spaces and increasing disabled parking provision at specific locations.

4.7 **Improved signing for car parking on all key approach routes** – It is recognised that current signage for off street car parking in Elgin could be improved. Some existing signage is outdated while there are opportunities to install additional signage to help direct visitors to the most appropriate off street car park for their destination. Improving advance signage of the off street car parks will help reduce unnecessary circulating of traffic, extending visitors time within the centre of Elgin and improve the utilisation of car parks. A review of existing signage will be undertaken this year and where possible funding within the car park budget identified to deliver the improvements.

4.8 **On-street parking enforcement and policy** – A number of stakeholders identified issues relating to the enforcement of on-street parking and wider parking policy.

4.9 Moray Council's adopted parking strategy established the following key objectives:

- Increase satisfaction in parking provision from users and businesses
- Maximise use of all off-street parking (car parks)
- Increase the use of multi-storey car parks

4.10 The Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy and Climate Change Plan places an increasing emphasis on the need to reduce unnecessary car use. Transport Scotland have subsequently published a draft document 'Reducing car use for a healthier, fairer and greener Scotland' which sets out a route map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030.

- 4.11 The Scottish Government and COSLA have co-developed the route map in recognition of the need for joint ambition and action at both a national and local level. The draft route map recognises the challenges for journeys undertaken by disabled people or in rural areas where sustainable travel options may not always be available or practical. However, it is seeking to encourage all of us to reduce our overreliance on cars wherever possible and the route map sets out the interventions that the Scottish Government are proposing to support this 20% reduction target.
- 4.12 The proposed charging structure set out in Section 6 of this report aims to provide a balance between some of these competing policy objectives that parking policy is developed around.
- 4.13 The enforcement of on-street parking is the responsibility of Police Scotland. Council Officers meet regularly with colleagues in Police Scotland to discuss priorities and issues relating to enforcement. Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) is where a local authority takes on the responsibility of administering its own parking penalties – so stationary traffic offences cease to be criminal offences enforced by the police and become civil penalties enforced by the local authority.
- 4.14 The legislative process that enables this is provided through the 1991 Road Traffic Act. Considering DPE is both a policy and a financial matter, however following previous consideration it was decided that Moray Council would not pursue this in common with a number of rural and island local authorities where establishing the business case on the basis that expected ongoing income from parking charges and penalty charge notices is unlikely to cover the increased resourcing to enforce and maintain including additional back office costs. It is recognised that the business case for this needs to be regularly reviewed. It is estimated that the investigation of the business case for DPE is likely to cost in the region of £50-80,000. It is also a requirement to review all road traffic regulation orders relating to parking restrictions, and it is estimated that this would cost in the region of £200–300,000. When previously considered by this Committee it was agreed that detailed consideration of DPE would only be undertaken following specific Committee request, and potentially in tandem with any proposals for on-street parking charges (meeting of this Committee 31 October 2017, paragraph 7 of the minute refers). Approximately one third of Scottish local authorities have not taken on parking enforcement powers, these are principally rural authorities, where – like Moray – a positive sustainable financial case has not been identified.
- 4.15 In the stakeholder consultation it was clearly acknowledged by all parties that the pedestrianised areas of the Plainstones and Batchen Street are being misused for access and parking by drivers on an increasing basis. The ability to put in any specific controls is limited by the current closure of North Street for the rebuilding of Poundland which necessitates the use of Batchen Street for through traffic. Whilst some innovative ideas were discussed at the stakeholder meeting, it is recommended that this aspect is considered again further when the Poundland work is complete (anticipated around March

2024). There is also potential for some infrastructure improvements, such as traffic control bollards, should the council apply and be successful in the third round of the Levelling Up Fund which would consider the town centre as a whole.

- 4.16 **On Street parking charges** - Further on-street parking restrictions or the introduction of charges have been considered. Representations were made at the Stakeholder workshop to address illegal parking or overstaying at some specific locations such as High Street, Batchen Lane and South Street. The introduction of short stay on-street charging measures could incentivise the use of off-street car parks and transfer on-street demand to underutilised spaces in off-street car parks, helping to reduce circulation of town centre streets where motorists currently circulate looking for spaces. If progressed, the rights of enforcement would remain with Police Scotland in the first instance. It would also require significant resource to develop and promote the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders and then implement on-street. Before any measure is pursued a full assessment would need to be undertaken and a report taken to a future Committee. It should be noted that without rigorous enforcement the parking management and income generation effects of any on-street parking charges would be diminished. At present, whilst there is evidence that some drivers do not comply with the short stay on-street parking restrictions, the arrangements do provide a measure of uncharged short stay parking – for example at the west of the High Street near Marks & Spencers.
- 4.17 **Review of off street car parking charging structure** - as detailed in paragraph 3.2 above on 31 January 2023 Corporate Committee agreed to freeze parking charges pending further engagement on parking issues within Elgin to take place between the Council and partner organisations (para 8 of the minute refers). At the Stakeholder workshop a number of proposals were made. Section 6 of this report considers these proposals and outlines proposed changes to off-street car parking charges within Elgin.
- 4.18 **Coach Parking** - The Cultural Quarter project which is part of the Moray Growth Deal is considering how the space at Lossie Green and Cooper Park is best utilised. This project offers an opportunity to review parking arrangements within the area and also how access may be improved between the area and the High Street. Options for improving coach parking and pick-up and drop-off facilities are being considered as part of the initial feasibility work being undertaken.
- 4.19 **Signposting to alternative parking** - The Council's website provides detailed information of the charging structure for each car park within Elgin and all car parks maintained by the Council within Moray www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_58746.html

Any regular commuter or visitor to Elgin can use the information on this page to help decide on the best value option depending on their journey purpose and destination. It would not be practical to provide physical signposting to all alternative car parks within Elgin.

- 4.20 **Increase size of parking bays** - Some users have indicated they find it difficult to safely fit their vehicle and easily get in and out of parking spaces due to the increased size of modern vehicles. In order to help address this issue, the dimensions of all disabled parking spaces are greater than for general parking spaces. In addition, the number of parent and child spaces has been increased in some car parks. Officers will continue to review provision and look to increase the number of these spaces whenever they are re-lining car parks as appropriate. Similarly, should national guidance on the requirements for standard off street parking spaces be amended, revising the layout of car parks will be considered when re-lining.
- 4.21 **Free After 3 for Christmas Shopping** – Since 2015 Committee has approved a ‘free after 3’ scheme whereby parking in St Giles multi-storey car park was uncharged after 3pm for around 5 weeks over the festive period from the date when the Christmas lights are switched on through to the first Saturday in January. Following some representations at the Stakeholder meeting consideration has been given to extending the period where the St Giles car park is ‘Free after 3’ or to implement it year round. However, given the evidence of footfall impacts from this scheme in previous years, officers consider that any wider economic benefits are limited while any extension would be difficult to support in terms of wider Council and national policy to reduce unnecessary car travel and the financial impact from lost revenue. This position remains in line with the authority delegated to officers in relation to Free After 3.
- 4.22 Officers will continue to explore a number of other opportunities raised at the Stakeholder meeting and pursue these subject to the business case and/ or the availability of external funding including Coach parking, wider measures to help reduce car use and demand for parking including Park and Ride and continuing to improve walking and cycling routes as set out the Moray Council Active Travel Strategy which was adopted by members of this Committee in November 2022 (para 5 of the minute refers).

5. ELGIN CAR PARK SURVEY

- 5.1 Across central Elgin there are just over 3,000 public parking places on street, and just under 1400 car park spaces – a total capacity for more than 4,300 cars.
- 5.2 Surveys show that the total quantum of available spaces exceeds the daily use. A summary of the results from the most recent occupancy survey (Monday 15 – Saturday 27 May 2023) of Elgin’s off street car parks that have a charging structure in place is contained in **Appendix B** to this report.

- 5.3 Car Park attendants undertake regular morning (circa 1100h) and afternoon (circa 1500h) occupancy surveys of all off-street car parks in Elgin. Surveys are undertaken on a daily basis for two weeks (Monday-Saturday) over the same four periods of the year in February, May, August and November.
- 5.4 The survey undertaken in May 2023 highlights that overall occupancy in the morning was 53%. The results of the afternoon survey shows overall occupancy levels were under 50% of available capacity.
- 5.5 This represents a slight increase from the survey undertaken during the same period in May last year – AM (48% occupancy) and PM (45% occupancy). This reflects wider data that illustrates an increase in vehicular traffic following the impacts of Covid.
- 5.6 It is recognised that the occupancy for specific car parks will vary from day to day. The occupancy survey highlights the variation between different car parks with Greyfriars Street (88%) and the HQ annexe (75%) having the highest average occupancy levels when surveyed in the morning while the car park at Hall Place was never more than at one third of capacity.
- 5.7 The car parks with the highest average occupancy levels when surveyed in the afternoon were Cooper Park and Moray Street. The lowest overall occupancy levels observed were at St Giles Car Park which averaged only at 22% of its capacity.

6. REVIEW OF ELGIN CAR PARK CHARGES

- 6.1 Officers have undertaken a review of parking charges in Elgin Car Parks including a benchmarking exercise against parking charges in other local authorities.
- 6.2 As outlined in Section 4, the setting of car parking charges involves a balance between competing policy objectives. Following opportunities identified at the Stakeholder meeting in April, officers have considered a number of changes to the off-street car park structure, recognising the financial challenges facing the local authority and the saving hierarchy where income generation has been agreed as preferable to any reduction in service provision

Table A below sets out the current charging structure which has been in place since 2018.

TABLE A: CURRENT CHARGES - 2022/23	
Period	Charge
Medium & High Turnover	
0-30 mins	£0.50*
31-60 mins	£1.50
61-120 mins	£2.00
2-3 hours	£2.50
3-4 hours	£3.00
4 - 10 hours	£5.00
Low Turnover Car Parks	
Daily	£1.00
Weekly	£5.00
Railway Station Daily	
	£2.00
Railway Station Weekly	
	£10.00

*except Cooper Park which is free for the first 30 minutes

- 6.3 Feedback from stakeholders particularly related to the cost of short stay parking – and whilst the 50p parking for 30 minutes was broadly considered a positive introduction from the last revision of charges, it was believed that a charge for the first hour would be preferable. There was some desire to see this first hour be uncharged, but generally an overall acceptance of the position that this would be financially unviable for the council. While all users are encouraged to book via the parking app, feedback has indicated that users who pay with cash dislike charges that require small change. It is proposed that the existing charges for up to 30min (£0.50p) and up to 1hour (£1.50) is replaced with a single standardised charge of £1.00 for the first hour of parking.
- 6.4 It is not proposed to change the charge for parking up to 2 hours, 2-3 hours or 4-10 hours respectively.
- 6.5 It is proposed that those car parks which offer a daily parking ticket be increased from the current £1.00 to £2.00 per day with corresponding increases for weekly and monthly tickets.
- 6.6 It is proposed that the daily charge for parking at the Railway Station car park will remain the same (£2.00 per day), bringing it into line with other car parks offering a daily rate. While recent surveys indicate that there has been some growth in the use of this car park around a third of the existing capacity is used on an average day. By retaining the daily charge at its current level it is hoped that more people may be encouraged to use it as a park and ride option for undertaking onward journeys.

- 6.7 Any increase in charges carries the risk that vehicle users will seek to park elsewhere or travel by other means, and this has been experienced previously in Elgin with changes to car park charges. There is no comprehensive model to inform the impact of changes to charges (both increases and decreases) – the studies that do exist state the range of variable factors (location, local customs, availability of free parking, quantum of spaces v number of vehicles, destination types, perceived quality etc.) mean that independent modelling the anticipated impact of any changes in parking charges on the occupancy and income within individual car parks or even overall is difficult. Therefore the proposals are based on officer experience.
- 6.8 It is proposed that the revised charges are introduced following approvals in 2023/24 financial year. It is not proposed to consider a further increase in 2024/25, as experience indicates that it is more beneficial to have periodic reviews of charges rather than smaller annual increases which can create the need for small loose change in relation to cash payments (5p etc.) and a tariff range which is not as simple to navigate with confusing differentials.
- 6.9 It is estimated that the proposed changes if approved will lead to an overall increase in net income of £414,000. However, the impact of the changes will be closely monitored by officers through the quarterly parking occupancy surveys and monthly monitoring of the tickets issued for each car park.
- 6.10 An allowance will need to be made for the cost of updating signage within each of the car parks impacted by the proposed changes or the cost of updating the software supporting the charging infrastructure.
- 6.11 Benchmarking indicates that the proposed charges are both consistent with parking charging structures in comparable authorities and local economic and administrative centres similar to Elgin.
- 6.12 Table B shows the proposed charging structure recommended following the review by officers.

TABLE B: PROPOSED CHARGES - 2023/24	
Period	Charge
<u>High & Medium Turnover</u>	
0-60 mins	£1.00*
61-120 mins	£2.00
2-3 hours	£2.50
3-4 hours	£3.00
4 - 10 hours	£5.00
<u>Low Turnover Car Parks inc. Railway Station</u>	
Daily	£2.00
Weekly	£10.00

*Cooper Park would remain free for the first 30 minutes

- 6.13 While these charges would normally, if approved, be referred onto the Corporate Committee for endorsement, given the scale and thus financial impact of the charges in the context of the wider budget process being progressed through Full Council, it is recommended that the position of the Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee is referred onto Full Council for a final decision as this committee has an overview of and authority in respect of the wider budgetary position of the Council.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The proposals in this report contribute to Priority 1 of Moray 2026 in delivering a growing and diverse economy through the provision of appropriate parking infrastructure for businesses, shoppers, workers, leisure users and residents. The proposals also deliver the Corporate Plan priority of Sustainable Economic Development by promoting and developing infrastructure.

(b) Policy and Legal

The proposals do not require the revocation of existing traffic regulation orders or the implementation of new orders.

(c) Financial implications

The proposals outlined in the report generate additional revenue income for the council in line with the council's savings hierarchy, income generation is considered a priority over service reductions and other savings when considering the overall financial position of the council.

This Committee has the authority in terms of the Scheme of Administration to determine traffic orders and traffic management schemes, which includes the off-street car park orders. However, as the matter also relates to the setting of charges, the potential annual income generated is significant for the council and in light of the budget gap, Committee is invited to approve the charges then refer the matter on to Full Council with a recommendation as to its position. This also allows time for officers to cost any amendments proposed and for the implications of those changes to be considered in the context of the current budget gap.

(d) Risk Implications

Whilst there has been Member and stakeholder consultation through internal and external meetings, and there are some reductions in charges / low cost parking, any rise in car park charges carries the risk of adverse public reaction, and potential reduction in car park use.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no current staffing implications from the report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications arising from the report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

A wide range of key stakeholders were consulted. The parking review and proposed new charging structure aims to strike a balance between the, sometimes conflicting, needs of various groups including those of people with a disability, the elderly and families with young children. There will be a review of disabled persons parking as outlined in 4.6. The effectiveness of the measures will be monitored and evaluated.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

The Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy and Climate Change Plan place an increasing emphasis on the need to reduce unnecessary car use. Transport Scotland have subsequently published a draft document 'Reducing car use for a healthier, fairer and greener Scotland' which sets out a route map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030. The route map which has been co-developed by the Scottish Government and COSLA in recognition of the need for joint ambition and action at both a national and local level. Measures proposed in this report seek to reduce unnecessary car mileage through the proposed charging structure and by improving signage. Complimentary measures and actions identified in the Councils Active Travel Strategy will encourage all of us to reduce our overreliance on cars wherever possible especially for those shorter journeys that can be made by walking or cycling.

(i) Consultations

The Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment & Finance), Head of Environmental and Commercial Services, Chief Financial Officer, Legal Services Manager, Equal Opportunities Officer and Committee Services Officer have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This report sets out recommendations relating to parking in Elgin following feedback from stakeholder engagement held on 12 April 2023 and a subsequent review of Elgin parking occupancy levels and charging structure.

These include additional actions relative to:

- A Disabled Persons Parking Review
- Improving signing for off-street car parking on key approach routes to Elgin
- Revised off-street parking charging structure

Author of Report: Neil MacRae, Transportation Manager

Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-524642768-961