

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	25 February 2015
Subject:	Off-Street Car Parking Management Improvements		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Culture		
Wards Affected:	Westgate		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to deliver improved off-street car parking management at Kings Walk, Eastgate Centre and Longsmith Street car parks to complement the ongoing regeneration of the City and to freeze the tariff for the year ahead.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) The tariff for the 2015-16 financial year be held at 2014-15 levels.
- (2) On-going car park improvements be noted
- (3) Subject to a detailed cost analysis being undertaken, and its recommendations, that the principle of Kings Walk, Longsmith Street and the Eastgate Centre car parks changing from pay and display to a Pay on Foot system supported by Automatic Number Plate Recognition with barrier be approved; and
- (4) Authority be delegated to the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development Service, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, to implement the recommendation of the cost analysis for the three primary car parks subject to:
 - (i) A cost effective proposal being secured
 - (ii) Disabled parking accommodation being available
 - (iii) Compatibility and effective management of the remaining City Council car parks
 - (iv) Sufficient resources being available to implement and manage the preferred option

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Much has been achieved in recent years to deliver improvements at Gloucester City Council's car parks. Charging hours have been reduced to allow people greater flexibility to visit the City Centre and park free of charge after 5pm in the Kings Walk, Eastgate Centre and Longsmith Street car parks. In surface car parks the end time for charging is 6pm, brought forward from 7pm some years ago. Several car parks (Hampden Way, St Michael's Square and Station Road) operate a £1 after 4pm rate. The overall cost of parking in the City Centre has also reduced. In 2004 the all-day parking rate was £20. Currently the City Council charges a maximum of £6, without lower charges in edge of centre car parks like Great Western Road and Hare Lane North. Other rates have also been cut with, for example, the key two hour tariff being cut from £2.70 in 2004 to £2.00. In real terms this is a significant reduction and is likely to remain at this level for the foreseeable future.
- 3.2 Physical improvements are continually being undertaken with works scheduled to be implemented to address issues as a result of antisocial behaviour primarily in the stairwells. This is all part of the Council's drive to make the City Centre as accessible to as many people as possible, and to encourage dwell time in the City. Improvement works to the main car park stair wells include:
- Deep cleaning and treatment with odour neutralising agent
 - Coating of anti-chemical attack paint to prevent the stair wells smelling in future
 - Adding non slip materials to steps and painting
 - Painting of walls, balustrades and handrails to make them DDA compliant
- 3.3 All three car parks (Kings Walk, Eastgate Centre and Longsmith Street) currently operate a Pay & Display (P&D) ticket issuing system which is enforced by a roaming patrol provided by APCOA. However, whilst the trend is for increased use of the car parks, the system does not provide the flexible functionality a modern City would expect. Increased use, which is a significant success, can be attributed to the competitive pricing structure and the increase in residents' parking schemes restricting alternative City Centre parking locations. P&D does not effectively complement our objective to work more closely with our City Centre businesses, using parking as a business stimulus tool. Although the capital costs are lower than for some other methods of operations, P&D can be labour-intensive and costly to manage. Management costs, across the City's parking portfolio, for 2013/14 were in excess of £140,000 with a similar figure forecast for 2014/15.
- 3.4 As a consequence the City Council is determined to deliver car parks that operate in a manner that complements and assists City traders, offer value for money and provide the best solution for visitors. A key objective is to provide a system that encourages dwell time in the city, to provide flexibility should people wish to stay and enjoy the facilities longer. It is also important that our car parks are modern, safe and provide revenue to contribute towards their management and maintenance. To achieve this, a review of the existing P&D system has been undertaken. As part of that review, the following alternative parking management solutions were considered.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

4.1 The following parking management options were given consideration as viable alternative options.

4.2 ANPR System - Barrier Control

4.3 Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems have become widely used in recent years. ANPR systems can be categorised into two groups: barrier controlled ANPR, and non-barrier systems. Detailed below is a short synopsis of the customer journey using a barrier controlled ANPR car park:

- *As the customer approaches the car park a camera or series of cameras identifies and records the vehicle registration plate.*
- *The barrier automatically raises and admits the customer, who proceeds to park.*
- *The customer goes about their business, and when completed returns to make payment.*
- *The customer identifies their vehicle via the payment machine (typically by entering the first few characters of the registration plate before confirming by selecting an image of their vehicle), and makes payment.*
- *As the customer approaches the exit, ANPR cameras identify the vehicle and confirm that payment has been made. The barriers then raise and allow the vehicle to exit.*

4.4 The installation costs of ANPR systems are similar to traditional ticket-operated barrier controls; although both the additional ANPR cameras and accompanying back-office technology must be purchased and maintained, less civil engineering works are required as ticket machines at the entrance and exit are not required. There are some clear advantages in using an ANPR system over a more traditional barrier controlled car park. The functionality of back-office operations varies from supplier to supplier, but additional benefits will typically include the ability for customers to subscribe. Regular customers may wish to set up an account removing the need for frequent payment. This enables them to leave the car park without using the payment machine. Their registration plate is recognised at exit and the relevant parking fee is debited from their account.

4.5 Other benefits include the ability to easily and temporarily change parking fees, thereby allowing seasonal or one-off promotions to encourage visitor numbers and encourage visits to particular locations (e.g. Gloucester Museum). Improved reporting features are also common, enabling better analysis of the car park usage. Additional options such as permit control also exist, allowing staff car parking or residents' permits to be identified by the ANPR system. Should customers subscribe to a membership then this also provides an additional communication channel to our customers, allowing us to promote services and offers through targeted marketing techniques. Blue Badge holders could also be accommodated as the system could be programmed to allow access free of charge although the badge holder would have to preregister their badge with the system. Experience from other ANPR operated systems show that, once set up, the Blue Badge holders find the system easy to use, especially those who struggle with tickets or payments in barrier operated car parks.

4.6 Another key benefit to an ANPR system that should not be overlooked is the modern, professional experience it can provide to the customer. Our city centre car parks are often one of the first impressions visitors receive of the City. Providing

them with a modern, professional welcome to the City can leave a strong first impression on visitors.

4.7 There are, however, disadvantages associated with ANPR systems. As well as barrier controlled ANPR being amongst one of the more expensive options to install, there also exist on-going operational fees associated with the accompanying back-office technology.

4.8 ANPR cameras utilise both infra-red as well as standard image cameras, but are not a perfect system. Dirt build-up or cracked registration plates can result in failure to read the plate. In response to errors it is necessary to have a remote system to override the barriers and also an SOS point where customers can make contact should they experience an issue.

4.9 **ANPR System – Without Barriers**

4.10 Installing an ANPR system without barriers has both advantages and disadvantages over a barrier-controlled version. The customer journey through a non-barrier ANPR system is outlined below:

- *As the customer approaches the car park a camera or series of cameras identifies and records the vehicle registration plate.*
- *The customer enters the car park and parks their vehicle.*
- *The customer can now either choose to pre-pay for a set period of time or pay upon exit once they have completed their business.*
- *When the customer wishes to make payment they approach a pay point and are prompted to enter the first few characters of their registration. The customer verifies their vehicle by confirming a photo taken at point of entry to the car park.*
- *Upon completion of payment the customer is provided with a 'grace period' within which they must vacate the car park.*

4.11 A non-barrier ANPR system achieves many of the benefits associated with a barrier ANPR system, however there are a number of key differences. The initial installation of a barrier-free system is cheaper due to less civil works being required; the risk of damage or vandalism to a barrier is also removed. Another key benefit to a non-barrier system is that there is no chance of customers getting stuck in the car park due to a registration plate recognition error.

4.12 There are, however, disadvantages to operating an ANPR system without barriers. The non-barrier system records number plates as they enter and leave the car park, but does not include the visual and physical deterrent of a barrier. Unlike the barrier version there still exists a requirement to issue PCNs should customers leave without making payment. Unlike P&D enforcement however, an ANPR enforcement system is able to identify close to 100% of non-paying customers as all vehicles are recorded upon entering and leaving the car park.

4.13 Many system vendors offer a service to provide the PCN enforcement required, typically charging for each PCN issued rather than a flat rate for the service. Alternatively the enforcement can be managed in-house using bespoke back-office software provided by the vendor.

4.14 Although initial installation is cheaper, as a result of the back-office software required to police non-payment, the annual management costs of a non-barrier ANPR system exceed that of a barrier version.

4.15 A lack of barriers may also mean that not all ANPR errors are resolved before the customer leaves; this could result in an increased number of PCNs being issued, with the potential for the customer to enter into a protracted and expensive-to-administer challenge procedure. This would not meet the objective of improving our customer experience

4.16 **Seek Improved Management of existing P&D through increased Patrols**

4.17 Another option considered was to seek improved management of the existing P&D system in operation. Whilst this may increase revenue to the City Council, it would not address the issue of increased functionality, improved dwell time or support our local businesses. Increasing the number of enforcement patrols also increases the cost to administer the car parks.

4.18 **Pay on Exit**

4.19 There are two types of Pay on Exit enforcement options. One utilises a payment machine located at the exit barrier. However this can often present traffic flow issues should a customer have difficulty making payment, and as such is usually only recommended for car parks with a low level of traffic. The alternative employs an onsite attendant to receive payment at exit. It is this latter option that is explored in more detail, with the customer journey outlined below:

- *As the customer enters the car park they are issued with a time-coded ticket which raises the barrier and permits them entry.*
- *The customer enters the car park, parks their vehicle and goes about their business.*
- *When the customer returns to their vehicle they drive to the exit and return the parking ticket.*
- *The customer then makes payment to the parking attendant who raises the barrier and allows the vehicle to exit.*

4.20 One of the primary benefits, but also one of the disadvantages of this type of Pay on Exit system, is that it requires a permanent attendant presence. One benefit of this is that there is an on-site presence to resolve any issues experienced by customers. A permanent attendant also allows the system to become far more flexible. The introduction of season permits or special promotions can all be accommodated simply by briefing the attendant. A permanent on-site presence also provides a continual security presence and improves the customer's perception of security and safety. Pay on Exit systems also address one of the major drawbacks to the existing P&D system which is the requirement to issue PCNs for non-payment.

4.21 A permanent staff presence at each site does, however, result in the most expensive operating costs of any of the options considered. It is chiefly for this reason that it is not recommended that the Council adopts a Pay on Exit system.

4.22 **Pay on Foot**

4.23 Pay on Foot (without the provision of an onsite attendant) is one of the recommended options to be considered at all three car parks. The typical customer journey through a Pay on Foot system is outlined below:

- *As the customer approaches the car park they are issued with a time-coded ticket.*

- *Accepting the ticket will raise the barrier and allow the vehicle to enter the car park.*
- *The customer then parks their car and goes about their business.*
- *Upon returning to the car park the customer takes their ticket to a payment machine and makes payment for their stay.*
- *Upon payment the customer is allotted a grace period within which they must vacate the car park.*
- *As the customer approaches the exit barrier they return their ticket, the barrier raises and allows the customer to leave.*

4.24 Pay on Foot provides a fully automated service, thereby allowing the extension of operating hours without significant additional costs.

4.25 However Pay on Foot, with the introduction of physical barriers to exiting a car park, as is the norm in “Pay on Foot” scheme, presents difficulties for Blue Badge holders. Although a combination of Pay on Foot and ANPR can address the disabled access issue and allow greater flexibility.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 The proposed solution is a combination of Pay on Foot and ANPR which would provide a powerful and positive parking management system. Pay on Foot provides the most flexible barrier-supported enforcement option; the inclusion of staff permits, ability to use card payments, seasonal promotions or any other changes in requirements can easily be accommodated. A Pay on Foot system does have advantages over an ANPR standalone alternative in that the number plate recognition errors associated with ANPR is removed and replaced with a far lower percentage of customers who lose or damage their parking ticket. The issue of lost tickets can also be easily overcome by providing an option for customers to pay a flat rate at the payment machine to be issued with an exit ticket.

5.2 ANPR systems are continually improving and provide a modern, professional experience for users. The system has added benefits in terms of providing a channel of direct communication to the considerable number of car park users enabling targeted marketing. It can also readily accommodate the needs of disabled users.

5.3 An ANPR system allows the creation of a “white list” of subscribed users who can pre-register their car registration numbers. On entry the ANPR system can scan the number plate and allow entry without the need for a ticket; like-wise for exit subscribers can just drive to the barrier and be allowed out automatically.

5.4 ANPR represents a step forward. The ability to allow customers to pre-register, pay for parking via a “parking account” allow for easy ingress and egress of permit holders should not be discounted.

5.5 Contact was made with Disabled Motoring UK (DMUK) and proved helpful. DMUK sighted any pay on foot systems where paper thin tickets needed insertion into slim slots or buttons needed to be pressed on terminals of various heights can cause barriers to disabled users ranging from mildly problematic to virtually impossible. DMUK expressed a preference towards ANPR systems that allowed pre-paying online or by personal mobile phone as much better for disabled users.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 Prior to selecting a vendor to provide an appropriate management system at the three car parks, consideration must be given to integration with the remaining car parks and any additional functionality requirements. If it is desirable to include the ability to easily and temporarily vary parking rates to provide promotional or seasonal offers, a payment system that provides this functionality must be specified.
- 6.2 As previously discussed, any barrier-supported parking system requires either an on-site presence or SOS telecom point staffed during all operational hours of the car park. All three car parks currently operate 7 days a week and it would be difficult to provide a full SOS response service from within the Council. An out-of-hours style emergency response provided via mobile phone is not recommended, as the SOS respondent should also have the ability to override either the payment system or barrier – provided via the supporting operational software.
- 6.3 Instead, it is recommended that it be explored whether an appropriate supplier can provide the SOS remote support for the system. Organisations exist and are already set up to provide 7 days a week service. It is expected that the SOS response will only be required on rare occasions, but it is important that a response can be provided when called upon.
- 6.4 The installation and operational costs quoted within this report are only indicative. A detailed specification would need to be developed, within a competitive process in order to determine actual site specific costs.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Indicative costs show that the recommended Pay on Foot with ANPR option could be implemented at all three car parks for an initial outlay of approximately £300,000 excluding civils works. Ongoing operational costs will be incurred in order to deliver the SOS response. It is believed this service could be contracted out and provided for all three car parks for approximately £12,000/year per car park. Many suppliers of payment machines offer fully comprehensive maintenance packages as part of the ongoing support. Inclusion of this option would raise ongoing operational costs to around £36,000 annually, including the SOS function.
- 7.2 Whilst ANPR represents a high initial outlay, the on-going operational costs are anticipated to be lower due to the removal of the need for patrols for enforcement. However this can only be quantified following a competitive tendering process and the determination of the interface with the remaining P&D car parks. An outcome will be that these are more effectively patrolled as enforcement will not be spread thinly across the city.
- 7.3 Furthermore the elimination of the ability to park without paying should increase revenue generation as the ability of users to avoid paying will be removed through the provision of barriers. Again this is difficult to quantify as evasion by its very nature is about being undetected.
- 7.4 There are also other non-financial benefits which are significant and complement the economic development of the city. These include the modern, professional design, the customer experience, the ability to register regular permit users and pre-pay users and the ease of use of an ANPR system for disabled users are all non-financial but important factors to take into consideration. The pay and display machines installed at the multi-storey car parks a few years ago can be put into

storage and used when older machines in the surface car parks come to the end of their life.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 Sections 32 – 35 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 empower the Council to provide off-street parking places and to make orders setting out matters such as the charges for use of the parking, the conditions of use for the parking and provisions for the removal of vehicles left in contravention of the relevant parking place order.
- 8.2 A change to the method of payment for these off-street parking places would amount to a minor amendment to the relevant off street parking order(s) and would not therefore need to be advertised and objections invited from the public before the change could be made. However, the Council would still need to advertise that the change to payment method had been made by way of a public notice in a local newspaper. This is likely to cost up to £1,000.00. One amendment order could cover the changes to payment method for each of the three car parks.
- 8.3 There may also be a need to change signage within the car parks to make clear that payment of parking charges is required before leaving the car park and to amend the method of payment, if this is set out on any signs. This may carry an additional cost.
- 8.4 The Council's procurement rules would apply to the procurement of any goods, works or services required to implement any change to a 'Pay on Foot' or ANPR with barrier system.

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 There exists a significant opportunity to improve the management of the three City Centre car parks identified within this report. The most significant risk to exist is that the required functionality of the implemented system is not fully explored as part of the procurement process and an enforcement solution is selected that does not have the flexibility or functionality that is required, considering both the Council's existing requirements and expected future ones.

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 10.1 A PIA was carried out and a number of groups will be impacted by the proposal, positively, including the elderly and disabled.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

- 11.1 None.

Background Documents: None