

**RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER**

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).  
 The form must be completed and passed to the Head of Members' Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 days have passed and the Head of Members' Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

**1. Description of decision**

To agree to the implementation of a six-month trial of 4 hours free parking in Allhallows Multi-Storey Car Park and the extension of overnight parking from 06.00 – 08.30 at both Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey Car Parks.

**2. Date of decision**

7 July 2023

**3. Reasons for decision**

The aim of offering 4-hours free parking is to encourage more customers into the town centre to use the local shops and businesses. This trial is to determine the likely impact of offering 4 hours free parking in the town centre.

**4. Alternatives considered and rejected**

None

**5. How decision is to be funded**

An allocation from the contingency allocation to the Highways Revenue Budget.

**6. Conflicts of interest**

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision:

Not Applicable

Signed  .....

Date 7 July 2023

Name of Decision Taker TOM WOOTTON

**This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Head of Members' Services as soon as it is completed.**

Date decision published: ....7July2023.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in: ....19July2023.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

**Bedford Borough Council – REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS (TOWN CENTRE AND HIGHWAYS)**

**Date – 7 July 2023**

**Report by: Chief Officer Transport, Highways and Engineering**

**Subject: Trial of 4hr Free Town Centre Car Parking**

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The Executive wishes to revive Bedford's town centre by encouraging more customers to the town. One way of doing so could be by opening some Multi Storey Car Parks to 4 hours free parking every day and extending overnight free parking.
- 1.2. Due to the unquantified impact on a number of areas from car park income to network operation, the concept is to be tested in the form of a trial. The trial will be for four hours free parking at a single multi storey car park (AllHallows) and the extension of overnight free parking to 08.30 (from 06.00) at both Allhallows and Lurke Street for the period of six months duration shortly following the decision has been ratified.
- 1.3. Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected during this period to allow a consensus to be reached on the viability of extending the scheme(s) permanently and to all multi storey car parks in Bedford.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. **To agree to the implementation of a six-month trial of 4 hours free parking in Allhallows Multi-Storey Car Park and the extension of overnight parking from 06.00 – 08.30 at both Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey Car Parks.**

**3. Reason for Recommendation**

- 3.1. To provide a suitable evidence base from which to make an informed decision on the permanent application of 4 hours free parking at all multi storey car parks in Bedford town centre.

## 4. Implications

### Legal

- 4.1. There are no legal limits on the amount that a local authority may charge for the provision of off-street parking but there are restrictions on the level of penalty charges that may be imposed.
- 4.2. The local authority may keep the money raised from parking charges including the penalty charges for infringing parking restrictions. If the amount raised exceeds the cost of administration of the current or previous years, the local authority may either roll the surplus forward to cover the costs of future parking controls or it may use the surplus for approved purposes.

### Policy

- 4.3. Bedford's Parking Strategy (2011 - 2021) provides a comprehensive framework for determining parking provision in Bedford to '*effectively use parking controls and resources to stimulate regeneration and local economic activity*'.

### Resources

- 4.4. Whilst it is not clear how this trial will affect the level of projected income generated, estimates suggest income could reduce by approximately £95,000 for the period encompassing the trial. This is based on current usage and average stay times for Allhallows car park (More information provided in section 5).
- 4.5. The Revenue Budget includes a contingency of £0.500 million for one-off items. It is proposed to fund the expected loss of car parking income from the contingency. Any additional shortfall would need to be managed within the service. In the event that a decision were made to continue the trial then an alternative source of funding would need to be found from within the existing budget.
- 4.6. To complete this trial will cost approximately £4,800 principally to recalibrate parking ticket machines to reflect the trial-charging regime for both 4 hours free parking (at Allhallows) and extended overnight parking (at both Allhallows and Lurke Street) and to install additional O2 small cell pedestrian count equipment. This is made available through existing revenue budgets.

### Risk Implications

- Reduction in parking income of approximate £95,000;
- Increase in cars and associated factors such as congestion and detrimental impacts on air quality;

- Reduction in use of alternative modes of travel into Bedford (public transport, walking and cycling); and
- Increased security costs associated with more vehicles parked in Borough car parks overnight leading to an increase in vandalism and or theft.

Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030

- 4.7. Air quality in Bedford Borough is mostly very good, however, there are locations where pollutants build up and are slow to disperse due to traffic volumes and road traffic routes with unfavourable layouts/local geography.
- 4.8. Allhallows car park is located within the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) designated across much of Bedford’s town centre. An AQMA is declared for an area where the local air quality is unlikely to meet the Government’s national air quality objectives. An increase in vehicles using the Allhallows car park could have an impact on local air quality. Air quality will be monitored as part of the trial and be a factor in determining any potential next steps.

Equalities Impact

- 4.6 The Council has considered whether this report has any equalities impact and determined that the activity has no relevance to Bedford Borough Council’s statutory equalities duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relation and therefore an equality analysis is not needed.

**5. Detail**

- 5.1. The Executive wishes to revive Bedford’s town centre by encouraging more customers to the town. One way of doing so could be by opening some Multi Storey Car Parks (MSCPs) to 4 hours free parking every day and extending overnight free parking.
- 5.2. The total current annual car parking income anticipated in the budget for town centre car parks for the financial year 2023/24 is £2,071,480.
- 5.3. Over 50% of this income is expected to be generated from the four MSCPs:

MSCP	Queen Street	All Hallows	Lurke Street	River Street
Annual budgeted income 2023/24 (£ 000)	£110,010	£293,640	£437,720	£483,240

5.4. Whilst car park usage and income has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, income and usage remains down in the order of 40%.

5.5. There are several reasons for this:

- Many town centre businesses continue to have staff working at home, meaning less people using the car parks on a daily basis.
- The closure of major stores (i.e. M&S, Beales, and Debenhams) has meant that the large branded “anchor” stores are no longer in town. Generally, visitors come into town to visit one of these “anchor” stores and then visit other stores whilst there.
- The conversion of many offices into residential properties in the town centre means that less people are visiting the town for work and using the car parks.

5.6. With the factors above and the financial pressures currently affecting the authority it is difficult to easily or robustly quantify how 4 hours free and extended overnight car parking across the town centre MSCPs can support and facilitate reviving the town centre. It is also not easy to quantify any changes in parking habits or predict factors such as parking space turnover. Therefore, a trial of 4 hours free parking at a single MSCP would allow data on its impact to be collected and reviewed so an informed decision is made.

5.7. Of the four town centre MSCPs, Allhallows is the most appropriate test location. This is due to its centralised location and median ranking in terms of car parking income generation and conversely potential lost income during the trial period:

MSCP	Queen Street	All Hallows	Lurke Street	River Street
Total Spaces*	510	440	790	465
Number of visitors **	10,413	11,869	21,774	32,249
%age use 0-4hrs**	63.4%	89.9%	84.2%	92.8%

\*does not take into account turnover in parking. \*\*using data obtained March & April 2023

5.8. Car Park charging machines for both Lurke Street and Allhallows will be programmed to begin from 0830 (from 0600) for the trial period.

5.9. Allhallows MSCP users will only pay for any parking taken beyond four hours should they wish to stay longer. For example, a five-hour stay would only incur a charge for one hours parking, six hours would incur a two-hour charge and so forth.

5.10. Data on the trials impact to be collected is expected to cover:

- Impact on MSCP with 4 hours free parking and extended overnight parking – principally in terms of positive or negative increases or decreases in usage compared to the same period in 2022;
- Town centre footfall and dwell and trip times to understand a positive or negative impact on both numbers of visitors and time and locations spent in the town centre.

As part of the Town Deal programme, new pedestrian count equipment has been introduced in partnership with O2 to gain a richer set of usage data of the town centre to underpin the obligation to provide a monitoring and evaluation strategy as part of the £22.3 million Town Deal funding.

O2 Micro cells (the new pedestrian count equipment) give detailed insights on people visiting a particular location. The cell detects the presence of all O2 4G handsets within range. This presence data is then combined with O2's customer data to provide anonymised demographic information e.g., age and gender, home location, spending power, and interests. The extrapolated customer data is then viewed through an online dashboard.

- Impact on parking income and the usage of town centre car-parking stock to understand a cumulative positive or negative impact on parking numbers as a whole. This is principally to determine if there are more people parking or whether parking is displaced from on street or off-street paying car parks into the free 4-hour MSCP.
- positive or negative impact on air quality
- positive or negative impact on congestion and journey times into and out of Bedford town centre
- positive or negative impact on the use of public transport or walking and cycling during the trial period

5.11. These data points will be collected and reported monthly at the town centre and environment portfolio holder meetings. This will allow progress to be tracked and changes or amendments made to the trial as appropriate.

5.12. At the conclusion of the trial, a final report will be presented detailing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of introducing 4 hours free car parking at all of the MSCPs so an informed decision can be made.

## 6. Summary of Consultations and Outcome

6.1. Report circulated to Chief Officers for:

- Environment.
- Planning and Economic Development.
- Regulatory Services.
- Commercial Services & Business Transformation.
- Finance; and
- Legal, Performance and Democratic Services.

## 7. Ward Councillor Views

7.1. Ward members have not been approached for comment at this point. However, a full report on the outcome of the trial will be published at the end of the trial period.

*Report Contact Officer:* *Matthew D'Archambaud,*  
*Chief Officer Transport, Highways and Engineering*  
*[matthew.Darchambaud@Bedford.gov.uk](mailto:matthew.Darchambaud@Bedford.gov.uk)*

*File Reference:* *None*

*Previous Relevant Minutes:* *N/A*

*Background Papers:* *N/A*

*Appendices:* *None*