

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 Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic 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 working days have passed and the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

That the 4-hour free parking scheme in Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey car parks be suspended from 3 November 2025, with an estimated saving of £150,000 in 2025/2026, and an estimated full year saving of £395,000 to be factored into the 2026/2027 revenue budget.

2. Date of decision

7 October 2025

3. Reasons for decision

The Council's financial position has prompted a review of all areas of discretionary revenue expenditure.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

The alternative option, to continue with the free parking initiative, was rejected at this time for the reasons outlined above.

5. How decision is to be funded

The approved 2024/2025 revenue budget included the sum of £330,000 to enable 4-hour free car parking in Allhallows Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) for the full financial year, together with an allowance to extend the free parking initiative to Lurke Street MSCP. This followed a trial period at Allhallows MSCP from August 2023 to January 2024 (Executive Decision 1694), subsequently extended to March 2024 (Executive Decision 1724).

The extension of the initiative to Lurke Street MSCP was approved, initially for a four-month period from 1 October 2024 to 31 January 2025 (Executive Decision 1760) and then until the end of the financial year to 31 March 2025 (Executive Decision 1779). The 2025/2026 revenue budget, approved by Council on 5 February 2025, included a further sum of £220,000 for the continuation of the four-hour free car parking at Allhallows MSCP and Lurke Street MSCP.

It is estimated that the suspension of the 4-hour free parking scheme, from 3 November 2025, will result in an estimated saving of £150,000 in 2025/2026 and a full-year saving of £395,000 in 2026/2027. This is based upon the latest available financial data.

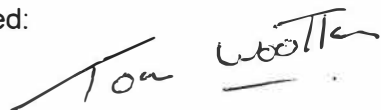
6. Conflicts of interest

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 October 2025**

Name of Decision Taker: **Mayor Tom Wootton**

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published:7October2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:16October2025.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call inNO..)

Bedford Borough Council – Report to the Mayor

Date of Report: 7 October 2025

Report by: Service Director – Public Realm, Highways & Waste Management

Subject: TOWN CENTRE 4 HOUR FREE PARKING, ALLHALLOWS AND LURKE STREET MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposal to suspend the Council's 4-hour free parking scheme in Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey car parks from 3 November 2025 with an estimated saving of £150,000 in 2025/2026 and an estimated full year saving of £395,000 in 2026/2027 (based upon the latest financial data).

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Mayor considers the report and, if satisfied, agrees to suspend the Council's current 4-hour free parking scheme in Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey Car Parks with effect from 3 November 2025, with an estimated saving of £150,000 in 2025/2026, and an estimated full year saving of £395,000 to be factored into the 2026/2027 revenue budget.**

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Council's financial position has prompted a review of all areas of discretionary revenue expenditure, and the proposed changes will assist the Council in the current financial climate.
- 3.2 The decision will provide both a saving for the financial years 2025/2026 of £150,000 and also a full-year saving from 2026/2027 of £395,000 (based upon the latest financial data) to assist the Council's financial position.

3. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Currently there is up to 4 hours free parking being offered in Bedford Town Centre at the Allhallows and Lurke Street multi-storey car park from Monday to Saturday during chargeable hours.
- 4.2 This initiative at Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey Car Parks was introduced to help boost visitors to the town centre and to increase visits to local businesses and cultural attractions. The Council's financial position has, however, prompted a review of all areas of discretionary revenue expenditure and these proposed changes to the 4-hour free parking scheme at these car parks will assist the Councils funding shortfall in 2025/2026 and in future financial years.

5. DETAILS

- 5.1 The Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning & Prosperity have been consulted on the proposal and recognise the need for the decision due to the current financial situation of the Council.
- 5.2 The overall results of the 4-hour free parking scheme have been very encouraging and increased people to come in and visit its shops, markets, events, and cultural attractions in Bedford town centre. The increased footfall and positive feedback from businesses and visitors show how important initiatives like this are for supporting the local economy.
- 5.3 The Council will monitor the impact of the proposed changes upon the town centre in regard to footfall, travel patterns, use of public transport and air quality.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 The alternative option, to continue with the free parking initiative, was rejected at this time due to the Council's financial position following a review of all areas of discretionary revenue expenditure.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Legal Issues – Relevant Legal Power:

There are no legal limits on the amount that a local authority may charge for parking but there are restrictions on the level of penalty charges that may be imposed.

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.

7.2 Policy Issues:

The Council Corporate Plan Theme “Stimulating Economic Growth in Bedford Borough” states that “we will create town centres that people are proud to live in and excited to visit”.

7.3 Resource Issues:

The suspension of the Council’s 4-hour free parking scheme in Allhallows and Lurke Street Multi-Storey car parks from 3 November 2025 to 31 March 2026 will provide an estimated saving of £150,000 in 2025/2026. Continuation of the suspension will result in a full-year estimated saving of £395,000 (based upon the latest data) that can be factored into the 2026/2027 revenue budget.

7.4 Risks

There is a risk that the estimated savings may not be fully realised as the estimates are highly dependent on users of the car parks and their behaviour and returning to paying for car parking at these two locations. Unlike other service areas across the Council who have fixed incomes that can be determined, car parking services cannot accurately predict the behaviour of their customers. To this date, the Council’s car parks are not fully back to pre-pandemic usage levels despite offering parking incentives.

There is also the risk that the footfall to the town centre will decrease, albeit the Council will explore options like encouraging more use of the public transport, car sharing and promoting the town centre and businesses will be undertaken to help mitigate any impacts of suspending the 4-hour free parking scheme.

7.5 Environmental Implications:

Changes in the use of the car parks, public transport usage will be monitored following the proposed changes if approved.

7.6 Equalities Impact:

In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Borough Council's statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

7.7 Impact on Families:

None as a consequence of this report.

7.8 Community Safety and Resilience:

None as a consequence of this report.

7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing:

Suspending the 4-hour free parking scheme may encourage more people to walk or cycle into the town centre.

8. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME

8.1 The following Councillors, Council units, Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Portfolio Holder for Environment
Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning & Prosperity
Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director of Environment
Service Director for Finance
Service Director for Governance (Monitoring Officer)

9. **WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

- 9.1 The local ward Councillor(s) for the Castle & Newnham Ward (Cllr Bywaters, Cllr Edmonds) and Greyfriars Ward (Cllr Foley) were consulted when the initial 4-hour free Town Centre Car Parking at Lurke Street Multi-Storey Car Park was introduced late last year and their views at the time were with concerns with the loss of revenue, and they would favour seeing incentives for more use and promotion of buses to get into the town centre rather than incentives to drive in, and concerns over potential impacts on congestion and air quality, this proposed change should be seen as a positive action.

10. **CONTACTS AND REFERENCES**

Report Contact Officer:	Paul Pace – Service Director - Public Realm, Highways & Waste Management paul.pace@bedford.gov.uk ext. 47275
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	None
File Reference:	I: Environment/Committees/Reports/Decisions
Previous Relevant Minutes:	<p>Trial period at Allhallows MSCP from August 2023 to January 2024 (Executive Decision 1694), subsequently extended to March 2024 (Executive Decision 1724).</p> <p>The extension of the initiative to Lurke Street MSCP was approved, initially for a four-month period from 1 October 2024 to 31 January 2025 (Executive Decision 1760) and then until the end of the financial year to 31 March 2025 (Executive Decision 1779).</p>
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	None