

Policy & Resources Committee

Date:	30 October 2018
Title:	Parking Enforcement Extension
Contact Officer:	Graham Hunt, Town Clerk

Purpose of Report

1. To provide background information on a proposal (in principle) to extend the current Thame Town Council Parking Enforcement operation to include 2 hour on-street free parking within Thame Town Centre subject to legal feasibility and cost neutrality.

Background

2. Thame Town Council currently employs 3 Car Park Attendants (1.2 FTE for 6 days Mon-Sat) to monitor parking in the 1 hour and 3 hour free car parks within Thame, under an Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council since July 1995. This is supported by full processes in place to manage appeals, receive fines and follow up, via Magistrates Court if necessary, for any unpaid fines. It is all carried out very efficiently on a cost neutral basis. Businesses and residents of the town are appreciative of the service supplied in helping to ensure the vitality and vibrancy of Thame Town Centre through the constant availability of free parking.
3. It is understood that in the past, Thame Town Council has expressed an interest in taking on the same monitoring / control / enforcement of the various 2 hour time limited on-street free parking areas in Thame Town Centre, but that there was no legal way for it to do so. It could apparently only be in the domain of the Police / or an "other tier" Council.
4. Unfortunately the police do not have the resources to enforce it and it appears that Oxfordshire County Council have chosen not to.
5. The Town Council receives constant resident / business complaints on the lack of enforcement of the 2 hour time limited on-street free parking. For a period of time (in 2016), in agreement with the police, the Town Council did monitor infringements, with the Car Park Attendants acting as witnesses, for the police to then send warning letters to persistent offenders. The police no longer have the resources to execute that function, which had some impact, but was not as effective as full parking enforcement.
6. Recent discussions with the police, as work has been carried out in the latest attempt for South Oxfordshire District Council to take on district-wide civil enforcement, has suggested that there may be a legal way for the Town Council to take on the role, at least in the meantime.
7. It is thought that Henley Town Council have executed similar parking enforcement on 27 separate streets, apparently since 1991.
8. A legal query has been submitted to establish the latest advice on the legal possibility of Thame Town Council taking on the function, preferably to operate identically to the 1 hour / 3 hour enforcement as currently in place. And if so, what legal actions would be required. The current Car Park fund could be a source for any legal costs required.

Proposal

9. If it were legally possible, then it would be a fairly simple function to extend the current operation to also monitor the various blocks of 2 hour free parking, with the current resources, in a way that is beneficial to the town. It would mean occasional less monitoring of 1 hour and 3 hour free parking, and not full monitoring of the 2 hour free parking, but the random nature would still ensure vehicle co-operation. It may be that the Car Park Attendants would initially concentrate on persistent offenders only, as when they were witnesses in 2016.
10. It may also allow some kind of localised permit operation at some point in the future for the edge of town parking areas, where the restrictions are more aimed at ensuring parking for residents than shoppers.
11. Whatever is put in place, it is to remain cost neutral to the Town Council, in the same way that the existing 1 hour / 3 hour enforcement is, via the Car Park Fund reserve.

Resource Appraisal

12. Some limited time would be spent to extend the legal agreement, update rotas, add to existing templates and execute trialling / training.
13. Any direct cost could be met from the existing (and continually growing) ring fenced Car Park Fund reserve which at 30/9/18 stands at £56,670.

Risk Assessment

14. There is some risk of increased error in covering additional areas, but we are already used to dealing with two separate areas, one of which has a variant on Market Day.

Legal Powers

We would only proceed if the same legal powers as already in existence can be used.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee consider whether to authorise officers (subject to legal feasibility and cost neutrality) to extend the current car parking enforcement operation to include enforcement of 2 hour on-street free parking within Thame Town Centre in a way that is beneficial to the town.