

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Emergency Council Meeting</b>		
<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	<b>19 October 2023</b> <b>5.30pm</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Town Hall, Bridestones</b>
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	Jackie MacArthur, Communities and Marketing Manager & Deputy Chief Officer		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>Agenda item</b> Congleton Town Council response to the Cheshire East Council Car Parking Consultation.		
<b>Background</b>	<p>Congleton Town Councillors discussed the issue of the proposed changes in price, timing and designation of parking in Cheshire East Council (CEC) run car parks at a Strategy Working Group held on the 12<sup>th</sup> October.</p> <p>This meeting was attended by 19 Councillors. Following this meeting, officers have drawn together a draft response which, if approved, will be submitted on behalf of the Town Council and shared widely. The widely held belief was that the level of parking increase proposed by Cheshire East Council would greatly damage the town centre and quality of life for those living near the town and indeed could end up with reduced revenue for Cheshire East Council.</p> <p>The response considers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Timing – CEC wishes to increase the chargeable time from 9am – 5pm to 8am – 6pm which CTC does not agree with.</li> <li>b) Designation of Car Parks – CEC is proposing to introduce charging for Roe Street and also change the designation of some car parks from long stay to short stay. CTC is suggesting some changes to this.</li> <li>c) Cost to park – CEC is proposing 100 – 267% increases in car parking charges in Congleton. This will impact town centre footfall and is mainly aimed at squeezing more funds out of town centre workers. CTC believe Congleton should not be in the highest consolidated tariff and that it is not possible to squeeze an additional £178k worth of revenue out of shoppers and town centre workers.</li> <li>d) The health and safety impact the Town Council believes these proposals will have on the town centre.</li> </ul>		
<b>Next Steps</b>	<p>Approve or amend the draft response from CTC to CEC.</p> <p>Consider actions to encourage others to give their feedback to CEC on this proposal before 1 November 2023.</p>		
<b>Financial Implications</b>	<p>There is no direct financial implication for the Town Council. There are negative financial implications for our residents and businesses who will be faced with higher charges if they need to park to work or visit the town centre. It may</p>		

	potentially lead to less funding for Cheshire East Council as we suspect that the uplift is of such an extent that people may avoid town centre car parks.
<b>Environmental Implications</b>	Although one of the aims from Cheshire East Council was to encourage people to use alternative forms of transport when visiting the town centre, as there is currently not a regular, affordable, reliable alternative, this increase in charging may well encourage people to drive to alternative shopping destinations with free parking, or double the number of trips with people dropping off and coming back to pick up so increasing the amount of miles travelled. Starting charges at 8am with curtail park and stride to Marlfields school, with implications on health and safety.
<b>Equality and Diversity Impact</b>	<p>The increased prices are likely to have the greatest impact on low paid town centre workers, many of whom travel from out of area to work in the town centre. The town centre needs both footfall (shoppers) and workers to be successful.</p> <p>The changes will impact on those living close to the town centre as we anticipate even more people using on-road parking where there are no restrictions.</p> <p>Doctors at Lawton House Surgery are concerned that the introduction of parking will have an impact on those needing regular medical care – such as those on cancer treatment or needing regular dressings.</p>
<b>Decision Required</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To authorise the Chief Officer to respond to Cheshire East Council on behalf of Congleton Town Council using the response given in Appendix A (subject to changes made at the meeting).</li> <li>2. To authorise officers to carry out actions in the communications strategy (appendix B) to share the Town Council response and encourage greater response from those living and working in Congleton.</li> </ol>

## EMERGENCY CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

### ITEM 4 – APPENDIX A

#### **Draft Response to the Cheshire East Council Consultation on Car Parking Charges**

#### **FOR APPROVAL/AMENDMENT AT THE EMERGENCY COUNCIL MEETING**

Congleton Town Councillors discussed Congleton Town Council's response to the Cheshire East Council consultation on Car Parking at a Strategy Working Group held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October. The discussions at that meeting have formed this response which was approved at an Emergency Council Meeting on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> of October.

#### **General**

Congleton Town Council **strongly objects** to several proposals raised in this consultation which it believes does not make sense for the people of Congleton, the town centre or Cheshire East Council.

**Price increases beyond what is reasonable.** We understand that prices have not been increased since 2019 and would accept an inflation raise of 22% rounded up, but the proposed increases in Congleton are 100% - 150% which at a time of cost of living crisis and a struggling town centre is ridiculous and will create far more issues than it will solve.

The increases will have the biggest impact on low-paid town centre workers and are likely to lead to even greater recruitment and retention problems within the town centre. The Town Council believes these price hikes may replicate what happened at Congleton Railway Station when the parking was increased to £3 a day. The car park is now empty and the residential streets around the station are made more dangerous and a daily stress for people living on these roads.

We believe that many people would accept a slight increase (20p on an hour or two and maybe 50p on long stay hours) but for people popping into town the short stay car parks are increasing from 40p to £1 for an hour, 1-2 hours from 60p to £1.60 and 2-3 hours from £1.10 to £2.30 is not reasonable. We also believe that removing the £1.60 4-8 hour tariff and introducing a 4-6 hour tariff for £3 or 6-10 hours for £3.40 is an attack on town centre workers. These workers are just as essential as footfall for the success of the town centre.

We do not believe that Congleton's short stay car parks should be on the High Consolidated tariff and Band and would recommend the Low band would be better suited (60p, £1, £1.50, £2.10). If Cheshire East really wishes to help the Town Centre we would like to see the car park machines programmed to enable people to opt for one hour free of charge to enable them to use their town centre as their key service centre. This is the offer made in our neighbouring Staffordshire moorland towns. Those wanting to stay for more than an hour opt to pay for the 1-2 or 2-3 hour tariff.

There is no need for separate 4-6 and 6-10 hour tariff as we are not a tourist destination or a shopping centre where people spend more than 4 hours to shop. The majority of those paying for more than 4 hours will be local workers and we need to encourage town centre workers to use the car parks rather than residential roads. We would suggest that it would be reasonable to increase the long stay parking from £1.60 to £2. The proposal to charge low paid town centre workers £3.40 or £4.30 per day rather than £1.60 will turn people away from the car parks. Parking permits based on 4 days of parking at £2 per quarter (£104) may prove more popular and give CEC regular income. The

proposed increase from £82 per quarter to £195, £163 or £228 is too much and doesn't reflect working most working patterns. Two new large employers due to open shortly in Congleton Town Centre are very concerned about the impact this parking hike will have on their employees and the success of their businesses and believe these new charges may deter people from investing in the town centre.

**There are no parking supply issues in Congleton.** Our paid-for car parks are at best 50% occupied. Putting the prices up by over 100% is likely to lead to even fewer residents using the town centre – and fewer people choosing to work in the town centre. Visitors to the town may have traditionally found Congleton parking costs reasonable, but our main priority must be to our residents and workers. It may also double the number of car journeys with people being dropped off and picked up from town rather than paying to park. A lose-lose situation for the environment and Cheshire East Council.

**Town Centre First Approach ignored** Congleton has two significant shopping centres (Barn Road and West Heath shopping centre) which offer free parking to shoppers. There are also smaller shopping areas at High Town and Buglawton. Our neighbouring town of Biddulph (2 miles away) in Staffordshire Moorlands offers the first hour free. Cheshire East Council has a 'Town Centre First' policy but is putting Congleton Town Centre at a distinct disadvantage. Cheshire East Council should look at the offer and demand when setting the prices. The Congleton daytime offer is not on par with Macclesfield, Wilmslow, Nantwich and Knutsford and these new proposed car parking prices will exacerbate the problems of reduced footfall in the town centre during the day time and businesses relocating away from the centre.

**No need for the extended time** Extending the parking charge from 9am – 5pm to 8am – 6pm will have a detrimental impact on the park and stride arrangements for local schools, creating a greater health and safety issue around town centre schools, in particular Marlfields School where parents who use West Street Car Park rather than attempt to drive along the very narrow roads leading to the school.

Councillors also believe it may cost more to implement and police these additional hours than the additional funds the hours will create in Congleton. We would like to see the timing kept at 9am – 5pm. If this is not possible, as a minimum, we would like to see parents that use the car parks so that they can walk the final part of the journey with their children given a 'SCHOOL PASS' which allows them to park from 8am – 9am on West Street Car Park and again from 3pm – 3.30pm.

A further impact may be on town centre safety as some town centre residents use the town centre car parks overnight due to lack of on-street parking. Moving cars before 8am may lead to more congestion and danger on narrow town centre streets.

**Problematic change of designation of Car Parks** Some of the changes in car parking designation from long stay to short stay or putting short stay parking costs onto long stay car parks make no sense for our town. We are a key service centre. The vast majority of people parking for more than 4 hours are workers, not visitors. More realistic charges could result in better use of the car parks rather than the residential side roads. – See below for details about individual car parks.

**Annual Parking Permits unrealistic** The proposed price of the annual parking permits will not help our town centre workers. Already very few people purchase a permit as the prices don't make sense. Many workers are part-time and many full-time non-shop workers will work a mix of office and home working. If permits remained at their current costs, (£82 per quarter and £307 per year) this may

help local workers and provide a regular income for Cheshire East on car parks that are already 50% empty.

**No Viable Alternatives** Congleton does not have viable safe and reliable alternative transport options to allow for the pricing out of cars in the Town Centre. Congleton Town Council believes the dramatically increased prices may lead to people travelling further to the free parking centres, or doubling their trips being dropped off and picked up rather than paying to park.

### **Individual Car Parks**

The new proposals have removed the daily long-stay option from both Chapel Street and Princess Street car parks except via expensive permits. These are both popular options for local workers. In the new proposals the long stay options are West Street (at more expensive rate), Back Park Street, the small and hardly used Park Street Car Park street and Roe Street (the Doctors car park). People pay to park for convenience and safety. Princess Street and Chapel Street offer convenience and safety more than the further out car parks on offer. If walking that distance we anticipate people will look for on-street free residential parking. This may also impact the Leisure Centre free car park – which is only another 3 minutes' walk from Park Street.

### **Antrobus Car Park Was short stay – proposed short stay**

No supply issues, 52% of people stay 1-2 hours. Rise from 60p to £1.60 likely to deter far more than 5% of drivers. This car park is also used for Readsmoor Doctors Surgery. Do not believe it is realistic that the increased charges will lead to an additional £61k in revenue from this space. The Town Council would like to see one hour free car parking on our short stay car parks. If this is not acceptable them to put Congleton on the lower consolidated tariff and band (60p, £1 and £1.50) which increases prices and a more acceptable rate.

### **Back Park Street - was long stay – proposed long stay**

Found behind Lawton Street. One of the two main 'Long Stay' car parks for Congleton, although still the most popular ticket issued is 0-2 hours for 60p. New price will be 60p for an hour or £1 for 2 hours. This has traditionally been the free after 3pm car park for Congleton – which the Town Council would like to see remain. Surprised only 4 quarterly and 0 annual permits were issued for this car park. Again would expect the elasticity to be well over 5% and it needs to stay reasonable to be used.

### **Chapel Street Car Park – was long stay – proposed short stay and permit**

The most popular ticket issued for this car park is 6-10 hours, but CEC now only want this car park to be short stay or permit. CEC is assuming that most long stay users will move to West Street Car Park (although West Street is 90p per day more expensive than Back Park Street which is on the same side of town). Workers park in the car park closest to them for safety and convenience. The permit option doesn't work for many workers who work part-time or flexibly mixing home and office work. Chapel Street should still have a long-stay option for town centre workers. CEC is expecting its changes to result in less revenue from this car park.

### **Fairground Car Park – was short stay, proposed short stay.**

For visitors to Congleton this is the main short stay car park that can be 'seen'. The almost tripling of tariffs is likely to lead to a greater elasticity of use than 5% so we believe CEC projected income is flawed. The fear is that if residents can't find a space in the free Morrison's car park they won't come

into town for small purchases which will lead to a spiral of decline. The Town Council would like to see one hour free car parking in our short-stay car parks. If this is not acceptable, Congleton should be on the lower consolidated tariff and band (60p, £1 and £1.50) which increases prices at a more acceptable rate.

#### **Park Street - was long stay – proposed long stay**

In 2011 this car park remained free of charge. A parking meter was added at a later date, and now the car park is nearly always empty. In the CEC graphs of the 37 spaces even at peak times only 5 spaces are paid for. Question if it is worth charging or whether this can be returned to a free space for town centre workers. Would someone pay £490 for an annual permit to park here when the Leisure centre has a free car park approximately 3 minutes walk from this car park?

#### **Princess Street Car Park was a long/ short stay to proposed to change to short stay and permit**

On a Saturday and Tuesday this car park is used by the market traders as it is the closest car park to the market. It is also used by many of the traders in town for safety and convenience and the Market Quarter is also aiming at people using the space for work and more traders using the area. Having a maximum stay of 3 hours will make this area unusable for the traders and will alienate the most frequent user – Almost 9,000 of the 22,000 tickets purchased in this car park in the past year were for the 6-10 hours option and over half the tickets were for 4 hours plus. The permit rate is not set at one that suits modern flexible working and the new regime will not allow people working in town to purchase long stay day tickets park in this convenient space. We do not understand the logic when most car parks are at least 50% empty of preventing those that currently choose to pay to park in this car park from continuing to do so.

We would like to see the option for long stay parking continue on this car park. The rates should be on the lowest tariff but with a reasonable permit rate that doesn't price out workers. When CEC is trying to raise more revenue from car parking, it seems incredible that they want to make changes that they predict will result in them losing £4,700 on this car park.

#### **Roe Street Car Park**

This is known locally as 'the doctors car park' and largely serves the Lawton House GP Surgery. The car park is currently free, and is meant to be limited to 3 hours. This is not well policed and all day parking does create an issue on this car park. The surgery is concerned that introducing a 60p per hour charge may have implications for health. Cancer patients may need to attend for daily treatment, others need daily dressings. People are likely to park on Bromley Road and Roe Street creating safety issues for businesses and residents. We would like to see the machine programmed to allow the option of one hour free of charge. This is done on Staffordshire Moorland car parks so is feasible. CEC is predicting that there will be 63 requests for 1 hour parking and 1243 requests for 2 hour parking on this car park. Hard to understand the logic of these projections when local people all know the vast majority using this car park will be popping into the doctors. It will not be used for people going into town. CEC also recognise in the Congleton Parking Strategy 1.2.8 that the main purpose of the car park is to serve a local GP surgery. A GP appointment lasts 10 minutes.

#### **West Street Car Park Charges was long stay - proposed as long/short stay with high tariff .**

West Street Car Park is usually at best half full. The funding formula proposed by CEC for this car park is to charge at the same rate as the short-stay town centre car parks (Fairground, Chapel, Antrobus)

for short stay. It is not that close to the town centre and for the rates on this car park be on the highest tariff and the same rate as town centre car parks in Nantwich, Knutsford and Macclesfield makes no sense. This is also the car park used by parents to drop off and collect children from school and for people using the tennis courts. The residential roads around this car park are already dangerous with cars parking wherever they can, often on both sides of the road. This price rise will further exacerbate the problem

The Tennis club is concerned that members may be discouraged from playing – or may decide to park in the surrounding roads rather than paying the increased charges.

In the justification CEC says it should be treated as a shoppers car park – and although in the details it is 54% of ticket sales for 2 hours or less, there is NO SHORTAGE of short stay spaces in the car parks closer to the town centre. Paying £1 for an hour to park this far out of town will encourage more people to park on the streets. We would like to see a reasonably priced quarterly and annual permit for town centre workers on this large and mainly empty car park. If it was based on £2 per day for an average of 4 days a week (£104 per quarter) CEC may get more people taking up the offer, giving some guaranteed income on an empty car park. There are currently 11 quarterly and 7 annual permits on this car park. Raising the cost from £82 per quarter to £195 and from £307 to £620 is an enormous hike for workers to take at any time, but especially during a cost of living crisis.

### **Free Parking**

We have noted that there is a strong demand for these spaces. There is an issue with what remains of **Royle Street Car Park**. Cheshire East state (2.11) that it is intended to serve residents, however it tends to be used by people working in town or the local businesses near the car park which causes a problem for residents as there is no parking with the flats. When the flats were built Royle Street was considerably larger. CTC would support CEC making this residential only. Plus Dane may be willing to help with the controls.

**Thomas Street** car park is mentioned as a shoppers car park and noted that it is mainly used Monday to Thursday. This car park is a considerable distance from the town centre and mainly serves the businesses adjacent to it.

### **On Street Parking**

#### **Proposal: Limit to 30 minutes on High Street, Lawton Street, Swan Bank and West Street**

Ideally the Town Council would like to see the parking machines issue one hour free to encourage people to use their town centre. If all the car parks remain charged, it would make sense to allow 1 hour free parking on the on-street parking to enable people to have the confidence to conduct their quick town centre business.

### **Other Comments**

We were promised that this would not be about harmonization and would be a town by town approach. However in reality CEC has introduced three consolidated tariffs, a high medium and low.

Most car parks close to Congleton town centre are placed in the high tariff even though the daytime offer of the centre is not comparable with some of the other Cheshire East. In order to make the

consolidated charges work, CEC is looking to reduce the parking tariffs in some of its more popular towns with high car park occupancy, which will result in less income from these towns.

We are working hard to try and regenerate the town. These proposed increases by Cheshire East is a barrier to the town centre. It will make recruitment and retention harder for businesses as well as reducing footfall in the town centre.

We do not believe that CEC projections of being able to raise an additional £177,709.52 from car parking charges in Congleton is feasible and by keeping the charges reasonable and looking after our town centre employees and giving incentives to people to use the town centre will have the best results for business, the vitality of the town centre and revenue for Cheshire East Council.

Looking at CEC's document on car park use in Congleton we wonder if we actually have too much car parking, and rather than trying to almost double the amount of annual income from car parks from £180k to £358k by squeezing an additional £178k per year from workers and residents would it be better to sell off some of the land?

Can CEC look at more inventive ways of raising money. Can they look at renting out space for Electric Charging Points on car parks?

We would welcome a meeting with relevant CEC officers and the relevant committee chair to discuss this major issue for Congleton and maybe agree a better way of achieving the funding they are seeking without adding further jeopardy our town centre businesses, workers and residents.



**Key messages:**

Until now the key message has been make sure you have your say. This has been via Bear Necessities, Social Media, conversations/ e mails with those likely to be affected – businesses, shops, schools and doctors surgeries.

**The feedback has been a mixture of**

- a) Angry about the changes which people fear will have dire consequences for the town centre
- b) Concern that it is already a done deal and nothing they can do
- c) Apathy about yet another decision dressed up as a consultation from Cheshire East
- d) Confusion and assumption that the Town Council and Cheshire East are basically the same
- e) Bitter about the fact CEC didn't listen in 2011 and it will be the same again.

Posts about the car parking consultation have generated more views and comments than any other posts in the past 90 days. Posts have been the top, third and fifth most viewed and commented on with a total of 32,800 views and 223 comments and reactions.

**NEXT STEPS**

Once CTC comments are approved we suggest still push the have your say, but also make it clear what CTC is saying about the car parking review.

**Target audiences:** - Businesses, residents, workers, people living in the town centre, lesser extent visitors

**Call to Action:** - Make sure they are aware of the proposals, know how to comment to Cheshire East before the 1<sup>st</sup> November, knows how the Town Council is responding. Think about the consequences for themselves and their town. Aware that next week is half term so lots of action needed on Friday.

**Communications Channels** - local media, social media, email groups, what's app groups, posters, word of mouth - connect to groups that can help spread the message, U3A, schools, doctors (Lawton house has already sent to its patients), Chamber of Commerce, Chat's Back, News and Views, church groups, Partnership groups, shops, business network groups.

**Actions**

- 1. Place CTC response on the website – then send links to schools, chamber of commerce, U3A and all our prominent contacts mentioned about.
- 2. Let our MP know the views of the Town Council.
- 3. Inform Cheshire East Council of our response

**Further Options**

- 1. Do we produce posters for car parks letting people know what the charges are going up to – and ask people to have their say – QR code to the consultation?
- 2. Do we hold a public meeting to let Congleton people have their say – would Congleton Ward Councillors be prepared to front it?
- 3. Sandbach is holding a demonstration this week - would this work for Congleton?
- 4. Do we need posters for the shop windows?
- 5. Is it worth getting a petition – shops may collect signatures
- 6. Totally Locally have offered to get some video content seeking people's views/