



# Congleton Town Council

Historic Market Town

Chief Officer: David McGifford CiLCA

20 October 2023

## Response from Congleton Town Council re Cheshire East Council Parking Review

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.

Our response covers our general comments before moving on to specific comments on each car park along with issues that we believe the proposals will cause for our town and our suggested solutions. A summary sheet is contained at the end of this document.

### 1. General

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

**1.2 The price increases are too large to be acceptable** We understand that prices have not been increased since 2019 and understand that CEC needs to raise funds. We were expecting an inflation increase. However these proposals see the cost to park in Congleton increase by 150% for 0-1 hours, 167% for 1-2 hours and 109% to 169% for longer periods of parking. CTC strongly believes that CEC's assumption that such substantial hikes in the hourly rates for car parking will only result in a 5% reduction in the number of people choosing to park in Congleton Town Centre is totally unrealistic and may result in less funds being raised via the car parks. 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.

**1.3 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. In reality, the only people likely to park in Congleton for more than four hours are workers. These workers are just as essential as visitors to create footfall for the success of the town centre.

We do not believe that there is a need for separate 4-6 and 6-10 hour tariffs as we are not a tourist destination or a shopping centre where people spend more than 4 hours to shop. We want to encourage local 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.

Currently across Congleton in 2022 there were only 14 quarterly permits and 29 yearly permits. We believe the permits are not fit for purpose and the increase from £82 per quarter to £195, £163 or £228 will put them even more out of reach for many workers. The permits do not suit many of our

town centre workers. Many office workers work flexibly, from the office and home. Purchasing a book of passes with day-tickets when the person adds the number plate and date of parking could prove popular (aware of schemes in other parts of the country so can be made to work here).

Alternatively parking permits based on 4 days of parking at £2 per so £104 per quarter may prove more popular and give CEC regular income.

The proposed costs of parking in the town centre may well deter businesses from locating or setting up a business in Congleton Town centre - which would have a negative impact for the town and for Cheshire East.

**1.4 Wrong tariff for the offer of the town** We do not believe that Congleton's town centre 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). Congleton Town Council believes it is a mistake from Cheshire East to move away from their previous promised approach to consider parking on a town-by-town basis. Harmonizing across the borough does not work. The towns in the South East of the borough are not the same as those in the North of the borough. The offer in the towns are less, the demand for car parking spaces is less, the affluence and spend in the towns is less and the options for residents to travel to shopping centres with free car parking is greater. Our neighbouring town of Biddulph, just two miles away in Staffordshire Moorlands offers shoppers the first hour free of charge and 60p for two hours.

If Cheshire East really wishes to help Congleton Town Centre we would like to see the car park machines programmed to enable people to opt for one hour free of charge, this would enable them to use their town centre as their key service centre. Those wanting to stay for more than an hour opt to pay for the 1-2 or 2-3 hours on the lowest consolidated tariff.

**1.5 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.

**1.6 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.

**1.7 There is 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 Marfields 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. Congleton Town Council 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.

**1.8 Problematic change of designation of Car Parks** Some of the changes in car parking designation do not make sense for our town. In particular, removing the daily long stay option from some car parks, proposing high tariff short stay parking costs onto long stay car parks, makes no sense for our town. We are a key service centre. See below for details about individual car parks.

**1.9 No Viable Alternatives** Congleton does not have low-cost viable safe and reliable alternative transport options to allow for the pricing out of cars in the Town Centre. If Cheshire East Council provided adequate bus services for example, this would be a source of revenue and would make using the car a luxury, not a necessity. It would also provide transport options for those who do not have a car. But bus services are themselves inadequate and expensive. Congleton Town Council believes the dramatically increased parking prices will 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.

## **2. 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.

### **2.1 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 for 2 hours parking likely to deter far more than 5% of drivers. This car park is also used for Readesmoor Doctors Surgery. We 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 then to put Congleton on the lower consolidated tariff and band (60p, £1 and £1.50) which increases prices and a more acceptable rate

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

Located 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- The free after 3pm offer remain on this car park to encourage parents to use the town centre after picking up from school
- Even on the lowest tariff the longer stay rate has more than doubled and is too expensive for the town's offer

## **2.3 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- Chapel Street retain a long-stay day option for town centre workers
- The car park places in the lowest tariff rate
- A scheme introduced for local workers where they can purchase a book of tickets to enable them to park all day on/ reasonably priced permit

## **2.4 Fairground Car Park – was short stay - proposed short stay**

For visitors to Congleton this is the main short-stay car park that is the most visible from the road and obvious to shoppers. The almost tripling of tariffs is likely to lead to local people avoiding parking in CEC short stay car parks. 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

## **2.5 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- Cheshire East reconsider the future of this car park. It is highly unlikely that anyone will pay even the lowest tariff to park on this car park

- Potential to use this space for town centre workers at a reasonable rate. No one will 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

## **2.6 Princess Street Car Park - was a long/ short stay - 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- A long stay parking option remain on this car park
- One hour's free parking on this car park
- The car park should be on the lowest tariff but with a reasonable long stay and permit rate that doesn't price out workers
- Cheshire East should consider the needs of the new Congleton Market Quarter due to open soon. The company are concerned that these proposals will impact on their success

When CEC is trying to raise more revenue from car parking, it seems incredible that it wants to make changes that they predict will result in them losing £4,700 on this car park.

## **2.7 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. CEC is predicting that there will be 63 requests for 1 hour parking and 1243 requests for 2 hour parking on this car park. It is 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 for 10 minute appointments. 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. 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- The parking ticket machine programmed to allow the option of one hour free of charge for people who are visiting the doctors or pharmacy. This is done on Staffordshire Moorland car parks so is feasible

## **2.8 West Street Car Park - 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 St, Antrobus

St) for short stay. It is not that close to the town centre and for the rates on this car park to 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.

The Town Council would like to see:

- 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
- The Car Park moved from the highest tariff level to the lowest
- One hour free car parking on this car park

### 3. Free Parking Car Parks

We are pleased to see that Congleton will retain its out of town free parking spaces at Royle Street, Rood Hill, Thomas Street and Blake/Edge Street. It is not surprising that there is a strong demand for these spaces.

3.1 There is an issue with what remains of **Rope Walk Car Park**. Cheshire East states (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 Rope Walk Car Park was considerably larger.

The Town Council would like to see:

- CEC making this residential only. Plus Dane may be willing to help with the controls

3.2 **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.

The Town Council is pleased to see that this car park is being left as it is.

### 4. 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 are working hard to try and regenerate the town. These proposed increases by Cheshire East would be a barrier for 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 realistic 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 on our town centre businesses, workers and residents.

We hope you find our comments useful. If a member of the parking team would like to explore any of the ideas raised in this response we would be happy to discuss how we could make better use of this great service in our area. Please contact the Town Council on 01260 270350 ext 1 or email [info@congleton-tc.gov.uk](mailto:info@congleton-tc.gov.uk) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

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## SUMMARY SHEET

Subject	Current position	Proposed change	Issues	CTC proposal
<b>Timing</b>	9am -5pm	8am – 6pm	Residential issues Prevent Park and Stride No demand in car parks for these times	Keep to the same timing
<b>Price Hike</b>	Charging since 2011	100- 169% increase	Cost of Living Crisis Impact on low-paid workers –recruitment and retention of staff in the town Health and safety – displacement of parking.	Congleton should be on the lowest of the consolidated bands. The lowest rate is still too high for the 4+ hours parking
<b>Antrobus St</b>	Short stay 60p - £1.20	Short- stay £1 -	Doctor surgery uses this car park price increase too high	One hour free Move the low tariff
<b>Back Park St</b>	Long/permit Free after 3	Long/permit	Increase in price is unreasonable and will lead to the displacement of cars	One hour free. Cheaper worker option.
<b>Chapel St</b>	Long Stay	Short/permit	Most common use being stopped	Allow long stay Reasonable day rate
<b>Fairground Car park</b>	Short Stay	Short Stay	2 hour increase from 60p to £1.60 is too high	One hour free parking Lowest tariff
<b>Park St</b>	Long Stay	Long Stay	Car park not used now. Uplift will make it worse	Reasonable rate for workers to park
<b>Princess St</b>	Short/Long	Short/Permit	Taken away long stay day option – impact on CMQ and workers	One hour free. Lowest tariff parking. Reasonable day rate for workers
<b>Roe St</b>	Free	Short Stay	Mainly used by patients attending doctors. Impact on health	One hour free parking Deal for surgery staff - permit
<b>West St</b>	Long/Permit	Short/Long	8am start rules out park and stride to school Highest level of SS parking Medium level of LS parking Car Park 50% empty	Passes for parents until 9am One hour free and low tariff for LS and SS Better permit offer
<b>Royle St</b>	Free	Free	9 spaces left - needed for residents not businesses	CEC to speak to Plus Dane about resident only