

Committee:	Cabinet	Date:
Title:	Car Park Ticket Machines - Consultation	Tuesday, 29 March 2022
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Richard Freeman, Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services	
Report Author:	Angela Knight, Assistant Director - Resources aknight@uttlesford.gov.uk Linda Howells, Economic Development Officer lhowells@uttlesford.gov.uk	Key decision: No

Summary

1. The District Council owns and/or manages 10 pay and display off-street car parks across the settlements of Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet, including several managed on behalf of other organisations.
2. There are a total of 37 car park ticket machines in the car parks which are a mix of cash or card, but all users can use the MiPermit app for all car parks.
3. 19 ticket machines were damaged following thefts from those machines in 2021. These have been upgraded and now only offer payment by card. Table 1 in Appendix 1 contains information about the locations of the upgraded ticket machines and when they were installed. The remaining 18 ticket machines currently only take cash payments.
4. Some residents have complained about the lack of a payment by cash option in the upgraded machines. Comments and complaints received by the Council are identified in Table 2 in Appendix 2.
5. A Ticket Machine User consultation was completed in December 2021. Full results are included in Appendix 3.
6. Ticket sales data has been analysed to understand the financial impact of the change in payment options. This is included in the text of this report.
7. A number of payment options have been considered and these are outlined with advantages and disadvantages in this report.

Recommendations

8. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the upgrade of all ticket machines to a card only payment option.

Financial Implications

9. In 2016 a capital bid was approved for £92,000 with the intention of replacing 23 old ticket machines with new machines, and to future proof the car parks credit/debit card payments / contactless payments and licence plate recognition systems would also be considered.

10. If the recommended option is approved, the cost of upgrading all 37 ticket machines would be £63,875.

Background Papers

None

Impact

11.

Communication/Consultation	Comments from residents have been collated. Ticket machine users were consulted, and the results are included in this report.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	EQHIA Appendix 5
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	Only applies to car parks in specific town and village centre wards
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

12. The District Council owns and/or manages 10 pay and display off-street car parks across the settlements of Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet, including several managed on behalf of other organisations.
13. There are a total of 37 ticket machines in the 10 car parks.
14. In 2016 a capital bid was approved for £92,000 with the intention of replacing 23 old ticket machines with new machines, and to future proof the car parks credit/debit card payments / contactless payments and licence plate recognition systems would also be considered. The MiPermit payment option was already available to car park users.
15. The technology was changing quickly, and more payment options became available. The original manufacturer merged with another company slowing down negotiations and then a new company entered the market offering a cheaper upgrade kit, rather than the replacement of the whole machine.
16. The COVID-19 pandemic then paused all work on the ticket machines, and it was 2021 before negotiations were re-started. By this time three additional ticket machines had been installed and the 11 ticket machines in Fairycroft car park were also included in the upgrade plan to convert all ticket machines so that they were providing cash and card payment options.

17. On 22nd June 2021 money was stolen from a ticket machine in Swan Meadows car park. This was followed by a regular spate of thefts, which left ticket machines damaged and unusable, car parks incurring loss of cash (£7,500), repair costs, loss of income as some car parks had to become free as no ticket machines were working.
18. The perpetrators of these thefts targeted car parks across the whole of north Essex and within weeks, every ticket machine in Great Dunmow was out of order, Swan Meadows and Rose and Crown car parks were affected in Saffron Walden and by September 2021 incidents were also occurring in Stansted Mountfitchet.
19. A decision was taken to replace the ever-growing number of damaged ticket machines with the planned upgrades but with only a card payment option and to trial the card only payment machines before reviewing the situation and making further decisions.
20. There were 21 thefts or attempted thefts with incidents continuing until 24th October 2021 and more ticket machines than planned were upgraded as part of the trial.

Residents Consultation

21. A User Consultation Survey was completed in December 2021 to evaluate the trial. This exercise was completed in all the car parks with ticket machines offering only a card payment option. It is important to note that by its definition this survey was of customers who had just used the ticket machines and those people who feel unable to use a card only ticket machine are very unlikely to have been present or interviewed. The full report and findings are included as Appendix 3.
22. The survey received 240 responses of which 60% were using the newly upgraded ticket machines for the first time. 92% of all respondents felt that the new machines were “very easy” or “OK” to use, which included those who self-certified as 71 years old or over.
23. Comments received during the consultation exercise included concerns that older residents were being discriminated against, that it was “silly” to use a card for a 40p car park ticket and that the card only payment would deter people from visiting the town centre. Some of the issues raised have been dealt with and these are outlined in Appendix 4.
24. Separately to the consultation the Council received 29 complaints or comments about the card only payment option and these have been collated in Table 2 in Appendix 2.

Financial Data

25. Ticket sales data has been analysed to provide evidence of the financial impact of the change to card only payment.
26. It is difficult to compare data for several reasons and partly owing to the unpredictable and varied changes in behaviours resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the car parks were free of charge for several weeks due to the damage to ticket machines.
27. The COVID pandemic is still impacting customers’ behaviour and many are still very cautious. 2019 is the last year before the pandemic that could be used as a baseline but the machines were very old and at times did not report consistently to the central computer. Many people are currently working from home, some with a hybrid work pattern whilst others are at home 100% of the time, possibly using their local shops more often than they used to when they commuted to their office base.

28. Data for the largest car park in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow has been collated for October, November and December 2019, and the same months in 2021. There was a Christmas car parking incentive in both years, with the period between Christmas and New Year free in both of car parks, and free Mondays in Great Dunmow and free Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons in Saffron Walden in December 2019.

29. The following sets out the number of tickets purchased (number of transactions), comparing 2019 to 2021.

Table 3						
Saffron Walden – Swan Meadows car park – Number of transactions per month						
	Cash 2019	MiPermit 2019	Total 2019	Card 2021	MiPermit 2021	Total 2021
Oct	8,595	1,717	10,312	7,107	2,555	9,662
Nov	8,162	1,870	10,032	7,231	2,577	9,808
Dec	9,096	2,136	11,332	7,375	2,897	10,272
Great Dunmow – White Street car park – Number of transactions per month						
	Cash 2019	MiPermit 2019	Total 2019	Card 2021	MiPermit 2021	Total 2021
Oct	6,257	1,134	7,391	8,908	2,720	11,628
Nov	7,233	1,210	8,443	8,475	2,677	11,152
Dec	11,5896	932	6,828	7,973	2,726	10,699

30. Considering the impact of the pandemic the data does not suggest a significant impact from the change to card only payment.

31. Ticket machine sales are slightly reduced in Swan Meadows but have increased in White Street car park while MiPermit ticket sales have increased in both car parks.

32. Table 4 shows the average cost of transactions per month. The average cost per transaction is slightly less in 2021 than in 2019 but the 2021 figures are likely to be influenced by the pandemic and the change in customers behaviours as some restrictions were still in place during 2021. It has been noted nationally that customers are making shorter trips to the shops, only doing what is essential and leaving for home as quickly as possible.

Table 4 Average value of transactions per month				
	Swan Meadows car park		White Street car park	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Oct	£1.76	£1.67	94p	83p
Nov	£1.76	£1.70	92p	85p
Dec	£1.66	£1.61	91p	83p

33. There are currently 18 ticket machines that still need to be replaced or upgraded.
34. A range of options have been considered. The recommended option is to complete the upgrade of all ticket machines so that they are offering card only payment. The costs would be £63,875.
35. The advantages would include a consistent approach across the district reducing customer confusion, reduced risk of future thefts as cash would not be stored in the machines, no cash collection fees and no risk of coin jams in the machines which make the machine unusable until repaired.
36. The disadvantages would include difficulty for some customers to pay for their car parking as they do not have a credit/debit card, or they do not want to use a card for a payment of under £1. It should be noted that these disadvantages affect a very minimal number of residents.
37. There could be multiple options where all ticket machines offered card payment and some of the machines also offered cash payment. Perhaps one ticket machine in each car park, or each small car park, with more than one in the larger car parks.
38. This would offer cash payment option in some or all ticket machines, some or all car parks or some or all town / village centres.
39. Disadvantages would include the risk that thefts from ticket machines would continue with lost income, repair costs and inconvenience for customers. There would also continue to be cash collection fees and the risk of coin jams. There could also be confusion as to which car parks or which ticket machines accepted cash. If there was only one ticket machine storing cash in each car park it would present a high risk of theft.
40. The suppliers of the upgrade kits of the ticket machines have advised that they have produced an ultra-secure ticket machine which reduces the risk of future thefts although would not remove the risk completely.
41. Each ultra-secure machines would cost in the region of £6k and would require the existing machine to be removed, ground works to be completed and the installation of the new machines. If all 37 ticket machines were replaced with the ultra-secure machines the costs would be in the region of £222k.

Risk Analysis

42.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Not upgrading to card only and loss of cash from theft continues	3	3	Upgrade all machines to card only
Using cashless systems reduces income and footfall due to reduced usage	1	2	Work with local residents and Businesses to address issues being encountered. Parking incentives and promotion of MiPermit

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

APPENDIX 1 – UPGRADED TICKET MACHINES

TABLE 1

TOWN / SETTLEMENT	CAR PARK	No. ticket machines	No. card only ticket machines as at 31/12/2021	Date new card only machines installed
Saffron Walden	Rose and Crown	1	1	15.9.21
	Swan Meadows	9	9	16.9.21
	The Common	3	2	10.11.21
	Fairycroft	11	0	N/A
Great Dunmow	Angel Lane	1	1	15.9.21
	Chequers Lane	2	1	10.11.21 (remaining 1 cash machine not working)
	New Street	1	1	14.12.21
	White Street	3	2	15.9.21 (remaining 1 cash machine not working)
Stansted Mountfitchet	Crafton Green	1	1	10.11.21
	Lower Street	5	1	10.11.21
TOTAL		37	19	

APPENDIX 2 – CONSULTATION FEEDBACK SUMMARY

A total of 29 comments were received either by e-mail (23), letter (1) or telephone (5) during the period 31.8.21 (after the initial press release) to 7.12.21.

4 people commented about the inability to pay when the car park was free, and two reported being happy to use a card.

The concerns of the remaining 23 people are identified in Table 1 below.

Table 2 – Feedback Summary	Feedback Summary		
	Great Dunmow	Saffron Walden	Unknown
Concern about discrimination against older people who are unable to use the card only ticket machine	2		3
Had no cash when parking		1	
Unable to use cards/phone App	1 *		
Doesn't want to use card/wants cash option	6	2	
Problems with using machine		2	
Wants instructions on notice board / attendant at machine (temporary)	2		1
Adverse impact on business	2		
Unhappy with card but used	1		
Totals	14	5	4

There was only 1 case (*) where a customer was unable to use the machines for specific individual health and welfare reasons, and in this case, a free 12 month season ticket was sent to the customer to allow them to continue to use the car parks.

Appendix 3 is attached as a separate document.

APPENDIX 4 – Action taken following comments made during the User Consultation

Several comments recorded during the consultation exercise have been addressed. These include:

- Time taken to produce the ticket is too long – the manufacturers have made some technical changes to the programming which has shortened the time to a maximum 25 seconds to produce the ticket.
- Tickets fly out of the machine before customer able to get hold of them – the manufacturers have identified the problem and the NEPP technical Team have made minor adjustments to the flap that holds the ticket in place.
- Some customers complained that the ticket machines do not accept payment by digital wallet. The manufacturers (IPS UK Ltd) are working on a upgrade which should be available by the end of March 2022.
- Some customers complained that the machine would not accept any of their cards. The instructions on the screen have been amended to ask customers to hold the card in front of the reader until the instructions on the screen change as some customers were tapping the reader rather than holding the card in place.