

Parking Consultation
Uttlesford District Council
London Road
Saffron Walden CB11 4ER

29 January 2024

Dear Sir or Madam

In my opinion, an increase in car parking charges in Saffron Walden in order to take some account of inflationary costs borne by UDC and follow environmental good practice would be justifiable in principle.

So, too, would be an increase in chargeable hours to 6pm and an extension to cover Sundays in line with the opening hours of many shops, and the introduction of charging in the Caton's Lane and London Road car parks for the sake of consistency and environmental good practice. Benchmarking against car parking charges made by similar district councils in the East of England would not be unreasonable, either.

It is necessary both to deter unnecessary traffic in the town for environmental and safety reasons and to maintain car parks to an appropriate standard.

However, an increase in charges would obviously need to be fair to car park users, including residents, visitors, shoppers, businesses, and staff.

The current proposals have provoked discontent in the town because they are seen to be unfair and because the council does not appear to be listening. The proposals seem to be largely focused on council charges, rather than on council services, and this at a time when the value for money of council services such as bin collections is under particular scrutiny. It is to be hoped that the outcome of this consultation will demonstrate that the council has actually listened to consultees and has been flexible in response.

It is unfortunate but not the fault of car park users that UDC has not increased car parking charges for several years, is poorly supported by central government, finds itself under financial constraint, and needs to raise cash now. Not only the council but residents, visitors, shoppers, businesses, and staff are all feeling the adverse effects of inflation and other economic pressures. Therefore, the increase should not be excessive.

If UDC were to be unwise enough to raise car parking charges by an excessive amount now, the predictable effect would be that fewer drivers will park in council car parks, and accordingly anti-social car parking in residential streets will increase, causing considerable inconvenience to residents.

For the future, however, I suggest that it would be reasonable for the council to review parking charges annually but peg increases at the rate of inflation or in line with an East of England district council benchmark, whichever was lower.

The proposed abolition of the 30-minute parking slot looks perverse. It contradicts the council's stated objective to ration car parking efficiently. In particular, it would mean that all car park users would have to purchase a parking ticket for at least an hour when some do not need more than 30 minutes. Users would then be discouraged from vacating their spaces, the turnover of parking spaces would decrease, environmentally-unfriendly driving and congestion reducing the operation of the fire station would be exacerbated, and demand for more or enlarged car parks, which are also environmentally unfriendly, would be stimulated.

Combined with the expected loss of car parking in the Market Place, patients needing to collect medical prescriptions from pharmacies in the town centre would be doubly disadvantaged by having to pay for one hour's parking in the nearby Waitrose car park.

Although I am not opposed to the introduction of sensible car parking charges in the Caton's Lane car park as such, I am concerned that some drivers who need to drop off or collect children attending St Mary's CE Primary School in Castle Street will be disadvantaged by the effect of this.

In view of the above analysis, I propose that serious consideration be given to the following strategy -

- An increase in chargeable hours to 6pm and an extension to cover Sundays in line with the opening hours of many shops, and the introduction of charging in the Caton's Lane and London Road car parks for the sake of consistency and environmental good practice.
- A modest increase in car parking charges this year in order to avoid the undesirable consequence of anti-social parking in residential streets that an excessively large increase would have while acknowledging the adverse effect of inflation on both UDC and car park users, whether they be residents, visitors, shoppers, businesses or staff.
- That UDC does not abolish 30-minute parking but instead waives the 30-minute charge in order to encourage the efficient use of car parking spaces and avoid inconveniencing both patients collecting prescriptions and drivers dropping off or collecting school children attending St Mary's CE Primary School. This would be simple and straightforward for the council to introduce and operate, and for users to comprehend.
- For the future, an annual review of car parking charges with increases being pegged at the rate of inflation or in line with an East of England district council benchmark, whichever was lower.

This is an individual response; however, I should mention for completeness that I am a Saffron Walden town councillor.