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Subject to approval at the next Free Parking Scheme Review Working Party meeting

1

FREE PARKING SCHEME REVIEW WORKING PARTY

5 February 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Wallsgrove and Wiltshire

Councillor Francis Oppler (nominated representative from Bognor Regis Town Council), Councillor Bob Waterhouse (nominated representative from Bognor Regis Town Council), Councillor Freddie Tandy (nominated representative from Littlehampton Town Council), Councillor Alan Butcher (nominated representative from Littlehampton Town Council), Heather Allen (nominated representative from Bognor Regis BID), Mike La Traille (nominated representative of Littlehampton traders)

Councillors Brooks and Pendleton were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Group Head of Technical Services opened the meeting, and welcomed Members, nominated representatives, Officers and other Councillors in attendance to the meeting.

Introductions were made, and it was confirmed the membership of the Working Party would be made up of the following:

Councillor Sue Wallsgrove	Arun District Council Environment Committee Member
Councillor Amanda Worne	Arun District Council Environment Committee Member
Councillor Keir Greenway	Arun District Council Environment Committee Member
Councillor Christine Wiltshire	Arun District Council Environment Committee Member
Councillor Francis Oppler	Bognor Regis Town Council
Councillor Bob Waterhouse	Bognor Regis Town Council
Councillor Freddie Tandy	Littlehampton Town Council
Councillor Alan Butcher	Littlehampton Town Council
Heather Allen	Bognor Regis BID
Mike La Traille	Littlehampton Trader

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The Working Party

RESOLVED that

- 1) Councillor Wallsgrove be appointed as Chair
- 2) Councillor Wiltshire be appointed as Vice-Chair.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Worne and Greenway.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Heather Allen, from Bognor Regis Business Improvement District (BID) wished it to be recorded that the Bognor Regis BID were in receipt of payment for services in distribution.

Councillor Wiltshire declared a Personal Interest in all items of the meeting as a Member of Littlehampton Town Council.

5. START TIMES

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That its Start Times be 6.00 pm.

6. WORKING PARTY TERMS OF REFERENCE

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Technical Services presented the report. He reminded attendees that at the Environment Committee meeting on 07 September 2023, a decision was made to establish a Working Party to 'comprehensively review the free parking scheme and report its recommendations to the Committee as soon as possible. The membership of the Working Party shall be made up of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Environment Committee plus three other Committee Members, two named representatives from each of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton Town Councils, a named representative of the Bognor Regis Business Improvement District and a named representative of Littlehampton traders.'

The Group Head of Technical Services then detailed the Terms of Reference in Appendix A, explaining that the shaded text were areas that had been determined by the Arun District Council (ADC) Environment Committee, and the unshaded text could be determined by the Working Party. He also went through Appendix B, which was the suggested timetable for the Working Party, highlighting that members of the Working Party were encouraged to assist in gathering suggestions and evidence, and asked for this to be sent to Officers in advance of the next meeting.

The Chair invited questions and it was asked whether the focus of the Working Party was restricted solely to the free parking schemes. The Group Head of Technical Services explained that the Environment Committee had established the Working Party to comprehensively review the free parking scheme and make recommendations to the Environment Committee. However, if an alternative model was suggested, this would also fall under the remit of the Working Party and could form the basis of those recommendations.

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That the Terms of Reference (as below) and Timetable in Appendix B be agreed.

Purpose	<p>To comprehensively review the two free town centre parking schemes and make recommendations to ADC Environment Committee on what should follow the existing schemes.</p> <p>Proposed objectives of a future scheme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports footfall in the town centres of Bognor Regis & Littlehampton• Makes use of appropriate technology• Minimises administration costs• Ensures accessibility• Prevents misuse• Obtains usage and foregone parking revenue data to allow cost benefit to be evaluated• Attenuates ADC parking revenue losses having regard to the Council's financial position. <p>Proposed matters to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Duration• Method of delivery: cardboard disc, scratch cards, app, phone call activation, ANPR.• Eligibility• Accessibility
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Reporting	<p>The Working Party to make recommendations to the Environment Committee of Arun District Council. The Working Party will have no decision-making authority.</p> <p>The Chair to provide verbal updates to the Environment Committee on progress after each Working Party meeting to the ADC Environment Committee.</p>
Nominations to seats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADC Environment Committee Chair • ADC Environment Committee Vice Chair • 3 additional Members of the ADC Environment Committee, to be agreed by Group Leaders • Littlehampton Town Council to appoint 2 named representatives • Littlehampton trader representative • Bognor Regis Town Council to appoint 2 named representatives • The Bognor Regis Business Improvement District to appoint 1 named representative • No substitutions are permissible.
Chair and Vice-Chair of the Working Party	<p>To be elected by the voting Members of the Working Party (Chair and Vice-Chair must be ADC Environment Committee nominees/Members)</p>
Process	<p>The 5 ADC Environment Committee nominees/Members (only) have voting rights</p> <p>The Working Party to meet on three occasions (February, May & July) at Arun Civic Centre.</p> <p>Meetings will be held in private</p> <p>Will receive, gather and consider information.</p> <p>Begin to formulate recommendations at the second meeting.</p> <p>Finalise recommendations to Environment Committee at the third meeting.</p>

7. PRESENTATION FROM THE GROUP HEAD OF TECHNICAL SERVICES AND NEXT STEPS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Technical Services, Parking Service Manager and Principal Parking Services Officer gave their presentation to the Working Party, a copy of which was handed out to all attendees of the meeting.

The presentation covered:

- Aim of the Scheme
- History of the Scheme in Littlehampton
- History of the Scheme in Bognor Regis
- Why Changes Were Needed
- The 2024 Littlehampton Disc Scheme (including virtual discs)

- The 2024 Bognor Regis Disc Scheme (including virtual discs)
- Comparison of the Disc Schemes
- Limitations of the 2024 Schemes
- How to Purchase and Use the 2024 Parking Discs (including a video showing how customers activated a virtual parking disc stay via the MiPermit App).
- Communications Regarding the Scheme
- 2024 Scheme – Financial Overview
- Question and Next Steps.

During the 'Questions and Next Steps' section of the presentation, the Working Party took part in a discussion and the following points/suggestions were raised:

- Some felt the 2024 Bognor Regis scheme was not working as well as the previous schemes had. The Group Head of Technical Services explained customers wishing to buy cardboard discs still did this in the same way, with the only difference being these were now at a cost of £3 instead of £2.
- Some noted that introducing a £3 annual fee for the 2 hour free parking disc in Littlehampton had not caused the upset that had been anticipated.
- The app was difficult to use, and cardboard discs should be retained.
- Bognor Regis BID had sold out of the first batch of discs and one Councillor was unhappy as he was concerned printing additional discs would be at greater cost. It was confirmed these had been re-ordered quickly by Arun Officers, and were due to arrive shortly.
- There was concern there would be a loss of income to retailers. The Group Head of Technical Services confirmed the pence per disc margins remained the same for retailers, so there was no revenue lost to them during the sale of the discs, however it was acknowledged people buying virtual discs would not be purchasing cardboard discs from a shop.
- It was felt there was a split between people that would find the app easy to use, and those that would not try using it and would always want to purchase cardboard discs.
- A suggestion was put forward that the cardboard discs should cost more to purchase than a virtual disc. An example given was that the cardboard discs could cost £4.50, with virtual discs costing just £1. It was felt this would encourage more people to use the app, which was cheaper for the Council to operate, but retailers would still benefit from a large number of people purchasing cardboard discs. Another member of the Working Party thought this approach would reduce new footfall into shops from those people looking to purchase cardboard discs. He had recently seen 30-40 new customers visiting his shop looking to purchase discs and making other purchases whilst they were there.
- Most members of the public were not unhappy about the new £3 charge, and some had said they would be happy to pay £5.
- Further information on the sales of the discs was requested, which was provided by Officers as follows:
 - Littlehampton – 9203 cardboard discs, 649 virtual discs sold

- Bognor Regis – 21092 cardboard discs, 409 virtual discs sold
- It was asked whether flexibility could be given to parents whilst dropping off and picking up from schools, which was an issue now the discs could only be used once per day. Officers were working closely with West Sussex County Council around safe travel to and from schools.
- Were Arun using both Ringo and MiPermit apps? Officers confirmed this was the case. Many residents of Bognor Regis were already familiar with MiPermit which was used for resident parking permits. Ringo was widely used nationally, so Officers had wanted to ensure customers had a choice of which app to use. 49% of people paying for parking in Arun car parks were paying by phone (including use of the apps) even though this incurred additional costs. As well as the apps, there was also an option to call a phone number to pay, and for an additional cost a reminder could be requested.
- It was noted there were less retailers selling the cardboard discs in Littlehampton than Bognor Regis. Officers updated that since the launch, more retailers had expressed an interest in selling discs, however as publicity material had already been printed, it had not been possible to include them. It was hoped the cardboard discs would be available in more locations in Littlehampton next year.
- It was noted that the wishes of the businesses in Bognor Regis Town Centre were that cardboard discs continued to be sold through retailers in the town centre.
- A suggestion was offered that the free parking scheme be removed entirely, and the money spent on this be used to encourage people into the town centres in other ways, such as wayfaring, promoting, showcasing businesses and holding events. It was stated that during a survey in 2021, when asked what was off-putting about visiting the town centre, although parking was not a direct question, only one person commented that parking was a barrier to them. More people said the quality of shops, attractiveness of the town centre, and things to do were a barrier for them. Others agreed that more needed to be done to get people into the town centre, including events, which was something the Town Councils would look at, however they felt the free parking scheme was necessary.
- Another suggestion was to look at offering 2 hours car parking for £1 across all town centre car parks.
- As the nature of businesses in the town centres had changed and many now offered services instead of retail, it was suggested that the Working Party look at whether 2 hours free parking was enough, or whether this should be increased to 3 hours. The Group Head of Technical Services explained that if the duration of free parking was extended to 3 hours, this would mean less income was generated, further reducing capacity to support other initiatives that support town centres.
- Littlehampton Town Centre and Bognor Regis Town Centre were very different, and it may be that the scheme should look different in each of these.

- It was asked whether the ticket machines could issue 2 hours free parking, and whether other similar ideas could be looked into or whether the Working Party could only look at the disc scheme. The Group Head of Technical Services explained the role of the Working Party was to review the town centre free parking schemes, however it may be that their final recommendation was, for example, not to continue with this and look at the Council providing contributions to other initiatives to increase footfall into the town centres. At present there was no way of knowing how often people were using the cardboard discs, and therefore the amount of savings that would be made by discontinuing the scheme. A wholly app-based 2 hour free parking permit scheme would identify how much foregone parking revenue the scheme caused, and the importance of data to enable the Council to make informed decisions was stressed.
- It was thought some people found the parking discs to be very cheap, while others refused to purchase them as found them too expensive.
- It was thought some people had bought virtual discs, but found them too difficult to use, so had also bought cardboard discs.
- It was suggested that town centre car parks could be made much cheaper than seafront car parks, which would encourage visitors to park in the town centres, and hopefully use the businesses.
- Events like Armed Forces Day and fireworks were great, but they should be moved more towards the town centres to encourage people to use town centre businesses.
- It was felt that better signage could be used to signpost visitors to the town centres.

The Group Head of Technical Services asked that ideas or suggestions gathered by the Working Party be sent to Officers in advance of the next meeting. The Chair emphasised that the Working Party should carry out work on this, and it should not just be completed by Officers.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Free Parking Scheme Review Working Party would take on place on Monday 13 May 2024 at 6.00pm.

(The meeting concluded at 7.44 pm)

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