
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

15 November 2022

North Ayrshire Council

Title:	Petition relating to Proposed Car Parking Charges: Saltcoats Town Centre and Surrounding Areas
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Purpose:	To advise the Committee of the terms of a petition objecting to the proposed parking charges to be introduced in Saltcoats Town Centre and surrounding areas and requesting that the Council maintain free parking in Saltcoats.
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Recommendation:	That the Committee considers the terms of the petition and agrees, or otherwise, to make a recommendation to Cabinet.
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1. Executive Summary

1.1 In terms of the Scheme of Administration, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee has a remit:

“To receive all petitions and deputations submitted to the Council except those relating to the Council’s planning functions, which shall be considered by the Planning Committee. The arrangements for receiving petitions are as set out in Appendix B to the Standing Orders relating to Meetings and Proceedings of the Council and Committees”.

1.2 This report sets out the background to a petition submitted on 9 November 2022, objecting to the proposed parking charges to be introduced in Saltcoats Town Centre and surrounding areas and requesting that the Council maintain free parking in Saltcoats.

2. Background

2.1 The petition is detailed below:

“On behalf of Little Blossoms, Pound Express, Saltcoats traders, shopkeepers and residents, we would like to hand over this covering letter along with a link to our online petition and paper copy to be handed in today to our ardent objections to the proposed car parking charges to be introduced to Saltcoats town centre and surrounding areas.

We would like to highlight paragraph 4.2 taken from North Ayrshire’s Town Centre Parking Strategy dated 2014 – 2020 which is currently available on North Ayrshire Council’s website for public viewing. With this strategy actions for Delivery 4 states the following,

<https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/Documents/PropertyServices/InfrastructureDesign/Roads/town-centre-parking-strategy.pdf>

4.2 Maintain Free Parking

North Ayrshire is one of a small number of Councils that provides free parking. This is primarily to support local businesses and maintain visitors within areas identified with high levels of deprivation and where there are a number of large shopping centres that offer free parking. Consultation has also identified that free parking is a key factor in people visiting town centres.

North Ayrshire Council clearly states, 'free parking is a key factor in people visiting town centres.' Therefore, the introduction of parking charges goes against the findings within your own strategy, which additionally highlights that Kilwinning and its surrounding areas of Irvine, the Three Towns and Garnock Valley were identified as one of the significant areas of deprivation within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

With the ongoing energy, fuel, and cost of living crisis, business owners feel that the parking charges are a travesty, and the impact will have a negative effect on keeping business open, consequently, resulting in more independent shop closures within Saltcoats town centre. Shopkeepers would rather have a guaranteed current footfall, rather than gamble on an unknown and unguaranteed future footfall.

Considering the feedback from many customers who were asked if they will pay to park, the feedback has been extremely negative, customers have stated that they will shop elsewhere that provides free parking, therefore, we must insist that this decision be reversed to ensure that local businesses remain the backbone of Saltcoats's economy, who will continue to support our local community.

We the shopkeepers fear that the proposed parking charges will significantly reduce footfall. Therefore, doing so will have a devastating impact on all small independent businesses that are already striving to compete against the giant supermarkets and large shopping centres within the surrounding area where all parking is free.

A substantial number of our customers and visitors, including tourists, many of whom are elderly, need Saltcoats town centre as a community hub. Enabling them to visit shops, and socially integrating with friends and family, helps to have a positive effect on mental health and well-being. Most importantly no one should have to pay to visit doctors, dentists and nurses within their local surgeries and other such essential healthcare amenities which many depend on for their well-being. Our on-street residents have a right to remain parking charge free, like every other area in Saltcoats relatives and friends should never have to pay to visit their family and friends, ever!

Considering the points above, surely now is not the time to introduce parking fees. May we stress nothing has changed positively since the last survey dated 2014 to 2020, current situations are now, as we are sure you will agree, worse than when the above information was first printed.

PLEASE KEEP PARKING FREE IN SALTCOATS.

Thank you for your attention to this very important issue."

- 2.2 The Head of Service (Commercial) has provided a briefing note on the background to this matter, which is detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.3 In terms of the procedure for petitions and deputations set out in Standing Orders, representatives of the petitioners have been invited to attend the meeting to address the Committee. Spokespersons should be restricted to addressing the specific points raised in their petition.
- 2.4 The spokespersons have, collectively, 10 minutes to address the Committee. This may be extended at the discretion of the Chair.
- 2.5 Once the Committee has heard from the spokespersons for the petitioners, the Chair will invite Members of the Committee to ask questions of the spokespersons.
- 2.6 While it is for the Chair to decide the stage at which officers should speak to their briefing, previous Committee practice has been for the Cabinet Member or Officer to speak to this after the Committee has heard from the petitioners. The Cabinet Member or Officer will then respond to any questions that Members of the Committee may have.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that the Committee considers the terms of the petition and agrees, or otherwise, to make a recommendation to Cabinet.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 There is £440k income per year forecast from this initiative across North Ayrshire. If the initiative does not go ahead it would need to be replaced with an alternative proposal(s) to plug the budget gap ie. other income opportunities to raise £440k or £440k of new savings.

Human Resources

- 4.2 None arising from this report.

Legal

- 4.3 None arising from this report.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 None arising from this report.

Climate Change and Carbon

- 4.5 None arising from this report.

Key Priorities

4.6 None arising from this report.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 None arising from this report.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Head of Service (Commercial) has been consulted and made aware of the terms of the petition and has provided a briefing note which is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Aileen Craig
Head of Service (Democratic)

For further information please contact **Diane McCaw, Committee Services Officer**, on **01294 324132**

Background Papers

N/A

Briefing Note: DPE and Car Parking Charges

Background

On 11 June 2019 Cabinet recommended that DPE be introduced across North Ayrshire and that car park charges should apply in Irvine, Kilwinning, Saltcoats, Largs and Brodick.

Charges were set at:

Proposed Tariff	
Time (Mins)	Short Stay
60	£1.00
120	£1.50
240	£3.00
All Day	Not Permitted

However, following a call in to Audit and Scrutiny the matter was referred back to Cabinet to reconsider the previous decision in relation to the introduction of car parking charges in Brodick and in the inclusion of Arran in DPE.

On 25 September 2019 full Council backed DPE for the entire Council area but not to implement car parking charges on Arran.

In 2020, a global pandemic emerged, and the introduction of the proposals was put on hold due to this.

On 2 March 2022, at its budget setting meeting full Council approved an increase in charges, as follows.

Proposed Tariff	
Time (Mins)	Short stay
60	£1.50
120	£2.00
240	£3.50
All Day	Not permitted

A motion was proposed at the Full Council Meeting on 21 September 2022 that in view of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, the introduction of these measures should be paused and a further review of the impact of these measures on residents and local businesses should be undertaken.

However, following a division and a roll call vote, Council agreed that, 'in light of the deepening financial crisis, a proposal be brought to Cabinet to reconsider the level of charges proposed in the 2022/23 budget.'

Key Outcomes of DPE

Traffic Management

A key desired outcome of introducing DPE and parking charges is an improved regulation of traffic in our town centres, by directing long stay patrons to free parking slightly further out whilst providing chargeable and short stay parking close to retail and other town centre services.

Sustainable Transport/Climate Change

The introduction of these measures also aligns with National Transport Policy by encouraging more active and sustainable modes of transport. The Scottish Government has a target to reduce car usage by 20% by 2030 and car parking charges will help contribute to this target by shifting people towards using alternative and sustainable modes of transport.

The introduction of DPE and car parking charges aims to support sustainable and active travel and reduce the impact of transport on our communities. This also aims to reduce the volume of traffic travelling through our towns and to facilitate public transport to support a shift towards more sustainable travel behaviour. This aligns with the Council's agreed Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and furthermore, it aligns with the Council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions through our declaration of a Climate Emergency and will contribute to the ambition to achieve net zero by 2030.

The Town Centre Parking Strategy 2014-20, referred to by the petitioner did state that parking would be free, at the time of publishing the report in 2014, however the new Local Transport Strategy will cover this. Since 2014 much change has taken place particularly around Climate Change and the declaration of a Climate Emergency.

DPE powers and charges

Process to enact DPE

To obtain DPE powers an application has been submitted to Scottish Government to transfer the enforcement powers from Police Scotland to North Ayrshire Council and the statutory process is underway with implementation now expected on 1 July 2023.

DPE powers are currently held by 21 Local Authorities including all our neighbouring local authorities.

Charges

It is important to note that Decriminalised Parking is not sustainable without the income generated from parking charges.

Transport Scotland recommends that DPE should be financially sustainable as far as possible. It states, 'if a strong financial case cannot be made the Local Authority needs to explain how it would meet any shortfall before Transport Scotland could make a decision on the application.'

It is recommended that when considering taking on DPE powers a robust Business Case outlining how DPE will be funded is required. North Ayrshire Council commissioned robust Feasibility Studies in 2019 which helped inform the Car Parking charges model.

A Financial Assessment was submitted as part of the application to the Scottish Ministers.

Parking for disabled badge holders/poor parking behaviour

Disabled badge holders will be able to park free of charge in the car parks where charges apply.

A significant problem is that disabled parking bays are being abused with able bodied drivers parking in them preventing disabled badge holders from parking.

There are also issues with inconsiderate drivers parking on double yellow lines, bus stops, 'keep clear' areas near schools etc and DPE powers will help us act on this.

Pavement Parking Ban

The Scottish Government is introducing a ban on pavement parking in late 2023 and without car park wardens we will be unable to enforce this legislation.

Car parks where charges will apply

- Irvine – Kirkgate, West Road and East Road
- Kilwinning – Almswell Road and Oxenward
- Saltcoats – Vernon Street, Bradshaw Street, Windmill Street and Kirkgate.
- Largs – Gateside Street.

There is already charging in place at Bellmans Close in Largs.

North Ayrshire Council currently has 55 car parks and 44 will remain free of charge to use, the exceptions being the 10 named above plus Bellman's Close, Largs.

There is free parking available nearby the locations where charges will apply.

In Kilwinning, the Woodwynd Car Park will remain free of charge and there is also on street free parking.

Implementation Plan

Ongoing engagement

Engagement sessions have been arranged with local elected members and will take place between 5 and 8 December 2022.

These engagement sessions offer the opportunity to discuss concerns and issues around the proposals.

Residents parking permits

The Service are considering the introduction of resident parking bays to address resident's concerns.

Level of Charges

In accordance with the Council's decision on 21 September 2022, a report will be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 24 January 2023 on charges.

Financial Implications

Car Parking charges were agreed as part of the Council's budget setting process and an income of £440,000 per annum is included in the budget.

Any proposal to review or abolish car parking charges will require details on how the £440,000 funding gap will be met through increased charges/income or new savings.

There is also a cost in providing and maintaining car parks and in the current financial climate this is difficult to sustain without some sort of charge.