

CABINET (TRAFFIC AND PARKING) COMMITTEE

17 NOVEMBER 2008

PAY ON FOOT PAYMENT SYSTEMS, WINCHESTER TOWN CENTRE

REPORT OF HEAD OF ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 1566 – Car Parking pay on foot systems, 12 December 2007

CAB 1635 – Pay on Foot car park payment systems Winchester Town Centre,
19 February 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report considers the implications of conversion of Tower Street and Colebrook Street car parks from pay on foot/pay on exit to pay and display for a temporary period and the impact on service users and the requirements to report findings back to Cabinet for review in Autumn 2008 with further recommendations.

The conversion of Tower Street and Colebrook Street car parks to pay and display payment systems has generally been well accepted and has removed queuing at these car parks.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the current arrangements for payment of parking at Tower Street and Colebrook Street car parks, be extended until the completion of refurbishment works at Tower Street car park and the new proposed CCTV centre at Winnall is up and running (likely to be 2010).
2. That a further review be undertaken once the CCTV control room has been relocated.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In April of this year, due to extensive reconstruction works and following Cabinet approval, Tower Street car park was converted from pay on foot to pay and display. Once the pay on foot system was taken out of the equation with the various links back to the parking back office and control room, links to other car parks became more stable and civil enforcement officers (formerly parking attendants) were released from being "tied" to the car park due to the reliability of the installed equipment. This also freed up circulation of vehicles in the surrounding entry areas.
- 1.2 Due to the unreliability of the pay on exit equipment at Colebrook car park, this car park was also converted to pay and display in the Spring of 2008 and existing pay on exit equipment was removed.

2 Options to Make Payments:

- 2.1 Conversion to pay and display from pay on foot may be considered in some quarters to be a backward step, with loss of flexibility for a customer to only pay for the time used rather than pre-paying and having to return at the end of their paid period or risk incurring a penalty charge.
- 2.2 In the case of Tower Street, shortly after conversion took place, pay by phone parking was introduced into the car park; this enabled customers to extend their parking period without having to return to their vehicle and not have to carry large numbers of coins to make payment. This system has been very successful in Tower Street: 9255 pay by phone transactions took place between 7 April 2008 and 30 September 2008. After VAT was deducted this generated over £41,000. The pay by phone system was installed into Colebrook Street on 14 July 2008, 245 transactions took place between its inception and 30 September 2008. Customer numbers and transaction levels have increased steadily since its installation as customers begin to appreciate the convenience of the scheme.
- 2.3 Several chip and pin machines are soon to be installed in Tower Street car park to offer additional payment options.

3 Costing to Re-install Pay on Foot and Pay on Exit

- 3.1 As previously mentioned when the new Parkeon barrier controlled parking systems were introduced into Winchester car parks, the new laser communication systems were in their infancy. Car parking communication systems here suffered accordingly, resulting in high levels of breakdowns, poor customer service, loss of income and enforcement staff being often confined to areas near to car parks as a “rapid response” to rectify faults instead of carrying out their designed job roles.
- 3.2 Once Tower Street was taken “offline” the system has show a degree of stabilisation. Staff are now undertaking more comprehensive patrols district wide providing a service to residents and business’s alike.
- 3.3 If Tower Street was linked back into the parking grid it is likely that the same problems will reoccur. The parking system cannot be upgraded as a “stand alone” solely for Tower Street. As such all Parkeon controlled car parks will need to be upgraded at a Capital cost of £158,543 (price quoted on 18 March 2008). This would upgrade the current flexio pay on foot system to the latest varioflex operating system. This would be the most cost effective solution.
- 3.4 To add Colebrook Street into this same operating system would add on additional capital outlay of £48,574.

4 Advantages of Maintaining the Current System

- No capital outlay.
- Pay and display allows for additional parking provision for blue badge holders at a time when some free provision will be lost at Upper Brook Street car park on its disposal (Summer 2009) and Friarsgate car park when this car park is demolished as part of the Silver Hill redevelopment.
- Free flow of traffic. Having non barrier controlled car parks assists with vehicles entering and leaving a car park in not having lengthy queues on the approach to have to stop, obtain a ticket and raise the barrier. This is particularly important on some approach roads to both Tower and Colebrook Street.
- Season ticket holders are able to simply park and not negotiate the barrier system; this causes particular difficulties at times of machine failure.
- Pay and display machines are simpler in their operations and are therefore easier to maintain in working order.
- No remote barrier control is required.
- Most motorists will pay as they may consider the risk high as the car park is more regularly patrolled, this also has a security aspect as staff can be more readily seen.

- Tower Street car park in particular was never designed as a pay on foot car park, it has insufficient exits and entries. The Sussex Street entrance is especially set in a poor location for barrier control.
- At times it may be difficult for a person with a physical impairment to be able to reach to operate the barrier system, in the case of foreign visitors they may have to leave the car to obtain a ticket.
- Damaged/unreadable tickets can cause additional difficulties at pay stations.
- Staff have to constantly be on hand or in the near vicinity in case of equipment failure. This causes operational difficulties and a loss of flexibility to respond to complaints about illegal or dangerous parking.

5 Disadvantages of Maintaining the Current System

- Customers need to have money available at the time of parking, however chip and pin and the ability to pay by phone largely diminish this aspect
- Customers have to pre-pay for their parking time, hence may cut short their visits.
- A customer may receive a penalty charge if they overstay or do not pay; since conversion took place 315 tickets have been issued in Colebrook Street and 505 in Tower car park the majority for being staying over time or non payment.
- Some people will take a chance on not paying and not be issued with a penalty charge notice as not seen therefore resulting in loss of income.
- The retail trade often generally prefers a pay on exit system to be in place as they feel this encourages extended visits.

6 Income

- 6.1 A direct comparison of income between April and September this year and last Colebrook Street car park shows increased income of £7,718 (including income from pay by phone)
- 6.2 For Tower Street the same comparison shows a decrease in income over the period of £41,563.85
- 6.3 In respect of Tower Street it is unlikely that the difference is mainly attributable to conversion of pay on foot to pay and display. The refurbishment of Tower Street and its associated problems with flooding coupled with the impact of economic factors on long term parking and expansion of the national concessionary fares scheme will also have contributed to a marked degree. Other car parks apart from Chesil MSCP seem to be holding customer numbers and achieving budget forecasts, but the picture nationally is of a 5% and 10% drop in customer numbers.

7 Consideration of Current Arrangements in other Barrier Controlled Car Parks

7.1 Previous reports have made reference to options relating to other barrier controlled car parks, these are:

Middlebrook Street

The Brooks

Chesil Street MSCP

7.2 Since Tower Street has been taken out of the barrier network system, the situation of equipment malfunction in other car parks has been less of an issue. Whilst breakdowns do occur on occasions, there does not seem to be a direct link with the communication systems.

7.3 Chesil Street MSCP does not appear to have any issues and remains relatively stable, there do not appear to be any queuing issues that have an impact of either air quality or of vehicles backing up causing congestion in the surrounding roads.

7.4 The same cannot be said however of either The Brooks or Middlebrook Street car parks, where frequent queuing and therefore other related problems are regular features. This can impact on both air quality and an impact in the City Centre which may be a deterrent for customers and cause frustrations for those trying to pass through the centre of the City.

7.5 All 3 car parks are linked to the VMS (variable message system) which give information on parking availability.

7.6 The Brooks car park has to have a barrier control system to prevent circulation of vehicles looking for a space in this underground facility causing a dangerous level of exhaust fumes. Therefore the recommendation is that it remains in place for the foreseeable future until other options can be explored.

7.7 Middlebrook Street could have the barriers removed and converted to pay and display. This would remove the queuing issue, however an underground loop would need to be put in place at the entrance to measure user numbers and the car park is likely to become full which will cause problems in itself of slow moving vehicles circulating the car park. Vehicles are likely to still back onto the highway.

7.8 Therefore for the current time the sensible solution may be to maintain current arrangements in all 3 areas pending a further review in the future.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Advantages of maintaining the current arrangements seem to out way disadvantages.

8.2 Reverting back to pay on foot comes with inherent risks and a significant capital outlay, it may be sensible to delay any decisions until all office moves and relocation of the CCTV control room have taken place.

8.3 A further report can be produced to Cabinet in Spring of 2010.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

9 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

9.1 These proposals contribute towards safeguarding our High Quality Environment and Safer and Secure Communities.

10 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

10.1 There are no resource implications arising from the recommendations in the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

APPENDICES

None