

Report to Cabinet

29 September 2022

By the Cabinet Member for Finance and Parking



**Horsham
District
Council**

DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt

Decommissioning - London Road Car Park

Executive Summary

In 2020, London Road surface car park in Horsham was closed to public users and the site was used as an NHS Covid-19 testing centre. The previous users of the London Road car park were accommodated elsewhere in the town.

There has been a sizeable shift towards more flexible parking habits from season ticket holders under hybrid working which are served by the remaining town centre car parks. In addition, since 2018, a growing number of customers have parked at the brand-new facilities at Piries Place carpark, enjoying the modern, clean environment and wider parking spaces. This also means season ticket spaces at Swan Walk are available.

Whilst some previous users have expressed a desire for the car park at London Road to return to its former use as it is convenient for them, the Council must take a strategic approach in reviewing all its parking assets and it is recommended to decommission the London Road Car Park and investigate alternative uses for the land.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Approve the decommissioning of the London Road Car Park and investigate alternative uses/options for the land.

Reasons for Recommendations

- To ensure best possible use is made of council assets whilst meeting the needs of the public.

Background papers - none

Wards affected: Denne ward

Contact: Marc Rankin, Interim Head of Parking 01403 215178

Background Information

1 Introduction and background

- 1.1 London Road car park is a surface car park with 36 spaces for season ticket holders Monday to Friday and pay and display maximum stay of up to 2 hours on a Saturday and a pay and display £1.70 all day charge on a Sunday.
- 1.2 The car park was closed in 2020 so that the NHS could use the site for Covid-19 testing. Season ticket holders were offered spaces in other car parks, with many using Swan Walk. Across the urban car parking portfolio, there is plenty of capacity for car parking spaces, with a very small pinch point just before Christmas which happens annually.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 The Council continues to provide quality, value for money services that people need throughout the 2020s and continues to manage our finances and assets prudently.

3 Details

- 3.1 In the period since February 2022 when any remaining Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, the number of users parking in Horsham urban car parks has increased and now plateaued, averaging a utilisation rate of 26% in car parks with Automatic Number Plate Recognition and 83% for Season Tickets. These figures are averaged over a 24-hour period. Utilisation during chargeable hours is significantly higher, for example Swan walk has reached approximately 48% peak occupancy during the last three months, with peaks of up to 55% to 60% at pinch points such as Easter. It should be remembered that these peaks are transitory and there is still adequate capacity across the town centre carparks even at these times. Across the portfolio of urban car parks, there are approximately 55% vacant spaces at any one time on an average day.
- 3.2 In previous years, there is usually one significant pinch point in the year which occurs in December. The highest occupancy rate rises to around 92% at the highest point in the two weeks before Christmas.
- 3.3 Since 2020, the number of season ticket holders in the urban car parks has changed, as hybrid working changed some parking habits. The number of season tickets has decreased by 27% which is likely to be the result of office demand for nine to five Monday to Friday working changing. There is therefore adequate space available for the old users at London Road to relocate.
- 3.4 The strategic view across the entire urban car parking portfolio is that the London Road car park is surplus to requirements as the car parking spaces are not needed and therefore the car park does not need to re-open and can therefore be decommissioned.

4 Next steps

- 4.1 Once the car park is decommissioned, officers will work on the options for alternative use of the land, bringing back a report to a subsequent Cabinet and Council meeting for any required decision making and budgets.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and outcome of consultations

- 5.1 The proposal was considered by the Finance and Parking PDAG on 12 September.
- 5.2 The comments of the Head of Property and Facilities, the Monitoring Officer and the Interim Director of Resources have been included in this report.
- 5.3 A number of previous season ticket users of the London Road car park fed back that they find the car park very convenient for popping in and out of the office.
- 5.4 The Methodist Church were consulted. They highlighted operational challenges, especially for people who are mobility impaired, who need to park close to the church to attend events. This problem is exacerbated by day-to-day unauthorised parking on their forecourt. Further discussions with the church and other stakeholders in London Road will continue as options are considered for an alternative use of the site.

6 Other courses of action considered but rejected

- 6.1 London Road car park could re-open as a car park. However, this was rejected as there are other car parks in close proximity, including the three multi-storeys; Swan Walk, Piries Place, and the Forum, and the surface carparks of Jubilee, Pavilions, Parkside, North Street and BT exchange, which offer a variety of alternatives with enough capacity to accommodate those still wishing to park at London Road.

7 Resource consequences

- 7.1 In 2019/20, the last full year it operated as a car park, the car park generated approximately £53k of income and £6k of costs, resulting in £47k net income. During 2020/21 and 201/22 and 22/23, the car park has not operated as a car park.
- 7.2 The decommissioning of the car park will not significantly affect the current budget however, as users have been parking elsewhere since 2020. There may be a small cost in securing the site so that people cannot use the site whilst an alternative use is identified and implemented. Decommissioning the car park may alter the business rates, which are approximately £7k per annum.
- 7.2 Decommissioning the car park in itself should not affect officer time, but officer time will then be spent investigating alternative uses for the car park, though this will be done out of existing staffing levels and budgets.

8 Legal consequences

- 8.1 Parking in Horsham is regulated by the West Sussex County Council ((Horsham District) (Parking Places and Traffic Regulation) (Consolidation No. 2) Order 2006) (Civil Enforcement Regulations Consolidation) Order 2022 and The Horsham District Council (Off Street Parking Places) General Order 2006 (As amended).

- 8.2 The proposed car park closure will need to be advertised in the press and on-site pursuant to the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 and will constitute a variation to the West Sussex County Council ((Horsham District) (Parking Places and Traffic Regulation) (Consolidation No. 2) Order 2006) (Civil Enforcement Regulations Consolidation) Order 2022 and The Horsham District Council (Off Street Parking Places) General Order 2006 (As amended).
- 8.3 Such variation requires a minimum 21 days' public notice before bringing the changes into effect. The specifics of the variation come into effect at the determination of the notice period set out in the Notice of Variation. Subject to no objections being received, the car park closures will be reflected in the Car Parking Places Order by way of formal variation. In the event of objections being received these shall be considered.

9 Risk assessment

- 9.1 There is a risk that no alternative use for the car park can be identified. In this case, the car park could be re-opened as a car park to prevent it from being an unused or derelict space.
- 9.2 There is a risk that Horsham may require more car parking spaces in the future. However, when a new Piries Car Park was being evaluated and built in 2017, an external consultant reported that capacity in Horsham was likely to be sufficient well into the 2030s, absorbing the predicted growth in housing and car usage habits of the time, and further development in the town centre attracting more vehicles into Horsham.

10 Procurement implications

- 10.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

- 11.1 There is no adverse impact on human rights or disability access in relation to these proposals and these proposals are considered to be consistent with the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equalities Act 2010 and the relevant Council policies related to them.

12 Environmental Implications

- 12.1 No environmental implications are anticipated from the decision to decommission the car park.

13 Other Considerations

- 13.1 There are no GDPR/Data Protection or Crime & Disorder consequences arising from this report.