



CABINET:

8 SEPTEMBER 2020

Report of: Corporate Director of Place and Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Evans

**Contact for further information: Mr Peter Richards (Extn. 5046)
(E-mail: peter.richards@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: Ormskirk Market and Pay & Display Car Parks

Wards affected: Derby, Knowsley and Scott

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek authorisation to re-commence charging on Pay & Display Car Parks in Ormskirk and to implement a reduced Ormskirk Market capacity (compared to pre-COVID expectations) for a temporary period until 31st March 2021 or the end of social distancing restrictions due to COVID-19 (whichever occurs first).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

2.1 That a reduced capacity, and therefore income, for Ormskirk Market of 95 stall pitches be approved until 31st March 2021 or the end of social distancing restrictions due to COVID-19 (whichever occurs first), as per the layout provided at Appendix A.

2.2 That it be agreed to re-commence charging on Pay & Display Car Parks in Ormskirk from 5th October 2020.

3.0 BACKGROUND & PROPOSALS

Ormskirk Market

3.1 Ormskirk Market usually operates on a Thursday and Saturday throughout the year and can accommodate up to 103 stall pitches. When the COVID pandemic

struck the UK, the market was closed from 23rd March until 18th June. Initially, the re-opened market was much reduced (only a dozen stalls at first) but has gradually expanded as restrictions have eased and traders and shoppers have become more confident following the lockdown. However, the decision by the Council to re-open the market was predicated on a maximum capacity of 75 stall pitches until the end of August.

3.2 Since the market has re-opened, officers have trialled various layouts to the market to find the right balance between:

- helping traders, businesses, shoppers and visitors to maintain social distancing restrictions;
- supporting hospitality businesses in the town centre by enabling appropriate outdoor pavement cafes;
- maximising the number of traders returning to the market; and
- helping to ensure businesses are as visible as possible on market days.

3.3 As a result, officers consider that the proposed layout set out in the plan at Appendix A provides the best balance of the above considerations and allows the capacity of the market to increase slightly to 95 stall pitches whilst COVID restrictions are still in place. This increase is compared to the recent capacity since lockdown as eased, but this capacity is of course lower than the pre-COVID capacity. This capacity will allow the Council to accommodate all the permanent traders and most of the casual traders that were on the market pre-COVID and that wish to return at this time.

3.4 In addition, the management of the market since it re-opened has been much more intense than usual given the need to adapt week by week as restrictions have changed, town centre businesses have re-opened, footfall has increased and more traders have sought to return. As such, it is proposed that the new layout at Appendix A be agreed as the new temporary layout for the foreseeable future until 31st March 2021 or social distancing restrictions are removed (whichever happens first) in order to provide stability for the market traders and their customers and ease the workload involved in managing the market. In the event that social distancing restrictions are removed the market would return, as soon as possible, to full capacity.

Pay & Display Car Parks

3.5 Charges on the Council's pay & display car parks have been suspended since 23rd March, initially due to the need to reduce opportunities for transmission of COVID-19 on the ticketing machines and then, as the town centre re-opened, to ensure that visitors to the town centre were not discouraged by the need to use the ticketing machines.

3.6 As the town centre has re-opened, the lack of charges on the car parks have had certain unintended consequences centred around users of the car parks staying far more than 3 hours (in some cases all day, and even overnight). Where shoppers and visitors to the town centre struggle to find a parking space we risk them choosing to take their custom elsewhere, where parking is not so difficult, including to centres outside West Lancashire and out-of-centre retail parks. If car

parks continue to be free, this situation may even get worse as students return to Edge Hill University in late September for the new academic year, as there are a significant number of students who live in the town centre and so the number of town centre residents who may be tempted to park in the Council's car parks over-night and throughout the day, because there is no charge, may increase.

- 3.7 Furthermore, having surveyed other Lancashire and Merseyside authorities, West Lancashire is now the only authority locally who has not re-introduced their parking charges after the lockdown.
- 3.8 Based on the above, it is now considered the right time to start charging again on Ormskirk's pay & display car parks in order to be able to manage the use of the car parks better, especially as more and more shoppers and visitors are returning to the town centre and as we get closer to the busy pre-Christmas period. The proposal to recommence charges from 5th October will allow time to put up notices at the car parks warning users of the forthcoming re-introduction of charges.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Ormskirk Market helps make the town a better, richer, more diverse place and also attracts more visitors to both Ormskirk and the West Lancashire Borough. As well as providing employment opportunities and livelihoods for traders, markets have the potential to evolve as dynamic, entertaining places at the heart of local communities, making the most of regeneration opportunities and strengthening the economic health and social fabric of local communities.
- 4.2 Markets are the original business incubators and as accessible open workspaces they offer a unique, low-risk opportunity for people to test business ideas and learn new skills. For many people they provide the initial step into self-employment and open up routes to different types of work. The Council needs to be seen to be fully supporting the market and assisting in developing it further into becoming a "destination" market to draw visitors in from further afield.
- 4.3 However, the Council also has to ensure that the market can operate safely and in a way that enables social distancing while the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic remain in place. As such, the recommendation in this report seeks to strike the appropriate balance that supports the market but ensures that people will be able to use it in a safe manner. Also, the recommendation will allow the arrangements and layout for the market to settle down and stabilise after a period of frequent change since the Market re-opened, and this will be beneficial for traders and customers alike.
- 4.4 Car Parking is key to the sustainability of Ormskirk Town Centre and the Council must strike a balance that encourages use of public transport, cycling and walking ahead of the private vehicle but ensures sufficient parking spaces are available at an affordable cost for those who have to use a private vehicle in order to enable and encourage shoppers and visitors to use Ormskirk Town Centre over other, competing centres outside the borough or to out-of-town retail parks.

- 4.5 Since the town centre re-opened (and there has been a suspension of parking charges on the Council's pay & display car parks), some of the car parks have been much busier than normal because, anecdotally, it appears that people have started parking on the car parks all day because there is no charge and no reliable way (through ticketing) of monitoring how long a car has been on the car park. This has had the impact of reducing availability of parking spaces for shoppers and visitors, and so runs the risk of those shoppers and visitors choosing to take their custom elsewhere because they cannot get a parking space. By re-introducing the very reasonable £1 for three hours parking charges, this issue will be removed instantly, and shoppers and visitors will be able to easily find parking spaces, as they were able to pre-COVID.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In relation to the market, compared to the income anticipated pre-COVID, the proposed temporary capacity will see a reduction of 8 stall pitches, and so an 8% reduction in income from the market compared to what would have been expected from now until the end of the financial year pre-COVID. However, compared to the income that has been generated from the pitch rents since the market re-opened at a reduced capacity (and, for a short period, reduced rent), the income should the recommendation at 2.1 be agreed will be 25-30% higher given that the maximum number of pitches the market has been able to accommodate since it re-opened has only been 75 pitches (and significantly lower than this maximum on some market days).
- 5.2 With regard the pay & display car parking, since the decision was taken to suspend parking charges in March, the loss of income to the Council from parking charges has been approximately £300,000, while the cost of the contracts with external suppliers for managing the car parks have still had to be paid (£27,000 since parking charges were suspended), and a further month's income will be lost in September (together with a further month's costs being incurred with external suppliers).
- 5.3 If car parking charges were not re-introduced in October as proposed, the Council would be losing on average over £50,000 per month while still incurring the monthly costs required to pay the external suppliers (£5,400 per month). By re-introducing the car parking charges, the Council will minimise any further loss of income from this source over the rest of the financial year, which is particularly significant given that the next quarter will include the period running up to Christmas, when visits to the town centre typically increase.

6.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 In relation to the market, the continued reduced income from the market is a clear risk of the recommendation at paragraph 2.1, although this should be tempered with the fact that we would see more income each market day than we have since the market re-opened after lockdown. However, the health and safety risk and risk to the image of the Council if the market were to be returned to full

capacity while social distancing restrictions are still in place is greater, and so it is appropriate that the capacity of the market be capped until such time as COVID-related restrictions are eased or the matter can be reviewed in time for the new financial year if COVID-related restrictions are still in place.

- 6.2 With regard the car parking charges, there is no real risk to the Council from re-introducing car parking charges, as it will not "put-off" shoppers and visitors because of cost, and may even encourage more shoppers and visitors because parking spaces will be easier to find. However, given that users of the car park will now have to use the pay & display machines, there is a slight increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 through touching the machines, but the machines will be disinfected every hour during the day on Monday-Saturday (when parking charges apply) and officers are exploring the possibility of introducing a pay-by-phone option as soon as possible (which will incur an additional cost to the Council).

7.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Aside from the COVID-19 related considerations discussed in this report, there are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. Proposed Market layout plan
2. Equality Impact Assessment