



Sandbach Town Council Response to Cheshire East Parking Review (All Party Agreement)

Response Deadline 1 November 2023

Sandbach Town Council position statement and supporting reasons

Sandbach Town Council strongly objects to the introduction of parking charges by Cheshire East Council, as set out in the consultation launched on 20th September 2023, in order to address the budget deficit.

The Town Council has engaged with the public through ward councillors, residents' meetings, surgeries and social media during this consultation period and is deeply concerned that the proposals will disproportionately disadvantage residents and harm businesses of the Sandbach community and potentially cause chaos in the town centre and other parking hotspots.

There has been an overwhelming reaction against the charges from Sandbach residents and businesses and the Town Council is aware of, and fully supports, the public view on this matter.

Specific Challenges in Sandbach

Notwithstanding the general and well documented impact of parking charges nationally (see Appendix), **there are some specific challenges within the Sandbach locality** that the Town Council urges Cheshire East Council to address in determining its charging policies before it is finalised as follows:

1) Scotch Common and Small Common Town Centre Car Parks

Sandbach is the **only** Cheshire East town to have two town centre car parks which are commonly owned; Scotch Common (140 spaces) and Small Common (21 spaces). This unique position means that parking is not chargeable and enforcing restrictions is problematic. The Car Parks are in a central position in the town with a number of busy junctions, local businesses, shop deliveries, main bus terminals and market traders operating. The area is already congested and presents a number of safety concerns. It is guaranteed that the introduction of on street parking charges and car park charges will exacerbate hazards to both pedestrians and road users, as the already over stretched demand for free parking will escalate and cause increased traffic, congestion and ultimately danger. The dynamics of our town, with a large free parking commons car park, mean increased traffic along the top of the high street first to the commons free car park and, if finding a place is unsuccessful, then back across the top of the high street to pay parking car parks.

2) Sandbach Schools, Middlewich Road, Crewe Road

Sandbach has two major high schools adjacent to the town centre accommodating over 3,000 students. There are already significant parking challenges due to the proximity of the schools and in particular the lack of on site parking at the High School, which currently uses the free Westfields Car Park to alleviate some of the current dangers on Platt Avenue. The Headteacher has grave concerns that the parking charges will exacerbate this situation and will put lives at risk. The High School will be making its own objection which is supported by the Town Council.

3) Ashfields Primary Care Centre, Middlewich Road

Ashfield Primary Care Centre currently has a sizable free car park which is used by users and non users of the Centre. The advent of car park and on street charges will inevitably increase use by non users of the Centre and therefore block spaces to vulnerable people in need of access to the centre for medical reasons.

4) Oasis Community Centre, Green Street

The Community Centre on Green Street has similar issues in that the imposition of residents parking and 30 minute free parking limits will seriously impact their users who are often more vulnerable groups. Free parking should be available to these Community Centre users. The Centre is making its own objection which is supported by the Town Council.

5) Inadequate Public Transport

Sandbach has recently suffered significant bus service reductions with very limited services in the evening, no service at all on Sundays and less reliable operators. In addition, the Train Station, which is located a mile from the town centre, has recently introduced car parking charges discouraging rail travel to and from the town. Accessible public transport would reduce reliance on car usage in Sandbach, and hence mitigate the impact of parking charges as well as providing a number of other benefits.

On street parking proposals

The Town Council is very concerned about the specific on street proposals particularly impacting Union Street, Green Street, Well Bank, and Welles Street, Belle Vue Terrace, Tatton Park Estate, Sunnymill Drive and Cecil Rigby Close which will displace parking activity and exacerbate current congestion, disadvantage low income groups and discourage visitors from the town. The Council again urges Cheshire East to review this approach and ensure at least 1 hour free on street parking is available as a 30 minute limit is not viable.

Issues to be addressed in this proposal

Car park and on street parking charges in Sandbach are therefore against the advice of the Town Council, and the following issues should be addressed in any form of implementation:

- Retention of free residential parking - the age of most town centre housing stock means only street parking is possible
- Concessions for businesses located in the town to encourage and support the economics of both non retail and retail businesses staying in the town centre
- A scheme for reduction or free concession in charges for low income groups (including those in employment in the town centre where a business will not fund the space)
- Reduced pricing for regular users of the town and free concession for essential workers (including teachers)
- Negotiation and agreement with residents, council and business on traffic restriction changes and associated parking and traffic enforcement on roads close by to the town centre but not covered by current proposals and resources to enforce any changes
- Increased provision for parking and traffic enforcement on roads to ease the anticipated traffic chaos
- A practical free short stay car parking arrangement at the very least the first hour free
- Retaining provision to not discourage the practical and realistic school drop off and pick up arrangements currently practiced in Westfields and Chapel Street car parks. These are critical and strategic safe drop off points that greatly alleviate parking pressure and local congestion reducing the danger to children around Sandbach High School.
- Free parking periods should be provided as a fall back to protect residents and businesses where other rules can not apply
- Parking charges should not apply on town event days. These days are critical to the social identity regionally of the town and critical to businesses in the town especially those in hospitality

Essential Mitigations

Should car park and on street parking charges be imposed in Sandbach against this advice, the Town Council **expects** the following types of mitigations **to be implemented and enforced as part of the scheme** for its residents and visitors:

- A comprehensive, free residential parking permit scheme
- A comprehensive, low cost business parking permit scheme
- A scheme for reduction in charges for low income groups (including those in employment in the town centre)
- A season ticket parking scheme made available
- Off street parking controls in place and enforced
- Increased provision for effective CEC enforcement
- Short stay car parking charging includes the first hour free
- Exploration of practical and realistic school drop off arrangements including 30 minutes free parking around school pickup and drop off in Westfields and Chapel Street car parks to alleviate parking pressure and subsequent danger to children around Sandbach High School
- Consideration of a 'free after 3pm' parking scheme

- Consideration of a scheme where parking charges will not apply for 4 days per year to be nominated by the Town Council annually based on popular town events

Summary Town Council Position:

- 1. We object to car park and on street parking charges in Sandbach due to its unique features as a locality;***
- 2. If charges are imposed this will cause economic damage and safety hazards requiring significant mitigations which must be implemented within the same timescale;***
- 3. We urge Cheshire East to find an alternative approach to addressing £260K pa budget deficit given the scale of damage this will cause to our community.***

APPENDIX

General Impact of Parking Charges on Localities

Reduced Footfall: The introduction of parking charges can discourage people from visiting town centres, leading to reduced footfall for businesses. Shoppers may choose to go to out-of-town shopping centres or make online purchases to avoid paying for parking.

Negative Impact on Businesses: Retail businesses, especially small and local shops, can suffer as a result of decreased foot traffic. They may experience a drop in sales, which can affect their viability and potentially lead to closures.

Traffic Congestion: Ironically, parking charges can lead to increased traffic congestion as people may circle town centres looking for free parking or short-term spaces to avoid paying for long-term parking.

Cost of Living: For residents who rely on town centre amenities, the cost of parking can be an additional financial burden, particularly if they need to visit the town centre regularly for work, shopping, or leisure activities.

Impact on Low-Income Workers: Low-wage workers in town centres may be disproportionately affected, as parking charges can represent a significant portion of their income.

Pressure on On-Street Parking: The introduction of parking charges can lead to increased demand for on-street parking, which can make it more difficult for residents to find convenient parking near their homes.

Reduced Community Engagement: Parking charges can deter people from participating in community events, which can affect community engagement and cohesion.

Environmental Impact: Parking charges can discourage car-sharing and the use of public transportation, which can have environmental implications, such as increased traffic and carbon emissions.

Impact on Tourism: Towns with parking charges may become less attractive to tourists, affecting the local tourism industry and the overall economy.

Challenges for Vulnerable Populations: Elderly and disabled residents may find it more difficult to access town centres when faced with parking charges, potentially leading to social isolation.

Inequities: Parking charges may disproportionately affect those who cannot afford them, creating social and economic inequities.

Shift to Online Shopping: The inconvenience and cost of parking charges can lead people to prefer online shopping, further impacting local businesses.

It's important to note that the specific impact of parking charges can vary depending on factors like the level of charges, the availability of alternative transportation options, the local economy, and the behaviour of residents and visitors. Some towns have successfully implemented parking charges while mitigating negative effects through strategies like reduced charges for short stays or promotions to encourage local shopping.