

## PROPOSED EXTENSION BY T.D.C. OF PAID FOR PARKING AREAS

On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Council Officers presented to the Council Cabinet details of a scheme to extend the areas of paid for car parking across numerous sites within Thanet. This wide ranging proposal would affect large numbers of residents and visitors to Thanet. It would have a detrimental impact on those areas within the scheme which contain shops and business's and which service tourism to Thanet. The Cabinet agreed despite opposition to the proposal from a number of Councillors who spoke out against the scheme, to put the proposal out for public consultation before a decision to accept or reject the scheme is finally made. The time for public consultation is short – just 28 days from 27<sup>th</sup> April. If implemented the scheme will be completed in three phases within the next 18 months. The details of the proposal can be found on the T.D.C. website.

### A REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL

The Executive Summary makes the contentious and unproven claim, that imposing parking charges will “benefit residents and local business”. It provides no evidence to substantiate this claim and it goes on to say that the income “could be used to invest into further parking schemes”. It is clear from this statement that this scheme if implemented will lead to even further extensions of paid for parking within Thanet in the near future. If this proposal is given the green light by the Council Cabinet and Councillors it will have the effect of giving “carte blanche” to further paid for parking extensions to be imposed. The proposal makes no reference to any proper assessment of there being any desire or necessity for changes to the present scope of paid for parking. Under the Department of Transport Traffic Management Act 2004 Operational Guidance to Local Authorities – Parking Policy and Enforcement, there are numerous references to the Council's obligations on parking matters. This document is available on the internet. The intention of this Guidance is to provide help to local authorities on how to approach parking issues. On page 14, para. 4.3 it says “the Secretary of State recommends that Enforcement Authorities consult locally on their parking policies when they appraise them. They should seek the views of people and businesses” On page 21 at para. 5.3 It says “Authorities should consider setting up their own user group for wider stakeholders such as businesses, representative organizations and the public. This should comprise representatives of motoring organizations, local residents and traders, socially excluded groups and others with an interest in parking policies. This group can be used to test proposals to ensure they meet the needs of road users”. If these recommendations had been followed, a consultation taken place or a consultative group formed, which had indicated a genuine and substantive desire for acceptance of this proposal, you can be sure that it would have been included within the proposal as evidence, but there is not mention of such an exercise taking place. The conclusion can only be that the Council have taken no heed whatsoever of the Government Recommendations and that their anti-democratic conduct is therefore if not illegal, certainly is unethical. Putting this scheme out for public consultation at such short notice for only 28 days from 27<sup>th</sup> April does not provide sufficient time for a proper and reasonable impact assessment to be made by all those affected by the scheme. The view of the few who have seen the proposal is that the Council are attempting to rush through this scheme before objections can be effectively mobilized. At the very least, if the Council expect to retain any integrity of action at all they should extend the public consultative period. Recent significant hikes in the already established paid for parking areas have attracted considerable public criticism with the setting up of a petition to be presented to the Council and some people particularly Westgate on Sea business owners and Westgate Town Councillors along with Westgate TDC Ward Councillors, have already made public their opposition to this scheme. In the case of Westgate, what particularly drives their opposition is that the proposal claims “charging at some on-street locations will help encourage drivers to park within the off-street car parks”. There are no off-street car parks close to central Westgate.

## THE IMPERATIVE BEHIND THE PROPOSAL

“Money is the root of all evil”. A sentiment not strictly true as we live in a world where evil exists without financial dimensions, but it is true in this context. The proposal makes it clear that the sole reason for its existence is to raise income for the Council. In fact it is stated that an expected income of £90,000 in the first year of operation has already been written into the Council Accounts Estimate in a breathtaking display of corporate arrogant assumption. The need for the Council to raise funds has been driven largely by reckless spending, incompetent financial decisions and severe corporate maladministration in recent years which has reduced the Council’s contingency capability to about 25% of what it should be. None of this is the fault of the motorists who are being expected to help make up the Councils shortfall. The motives of the Council are in direct conflict with the advice given in the Traffic Act Operational Guidance where on page 106 it states unequivocally:-

**“AUTHORITIES SHOULD NEVER USE PARKING CHARGES JUST TO RAISE REVENUE OR AS A LOCAL TAX.”** The Council are deliberately ignoring the Government advice available to them on this issue in their desperation to satisfy a short term problem, but the consequences of which would put in place restrictions and charges which would never be removed and which would undoubtedly expand in scope and rise in price in the future whenever the Council feels the pinch. There would be no going back, if you are a motorist and live in Thanet this proposal would affect you even if you do not live directly or close to the areas presently targeted.

## WHAT TO DO?

To project your opinion either in support or opposition to this proposal in an effective way you should put your views preferably in written form to your TDC Ward Councillor – they seek office on the promise that they will represent your views in Council and will reflect those views when it comes to accepting or rejecting proposed changes to local legislation. Doing nothing is not an option. If the Councillors do not receive sufficient weight of objections to the proposed scheme they may consider that they have no mandate for opposition. You can access the TDC website to get contact details of your Ward Councillor or simply phone TDC and ask “who is the Councillor for my area?”

## SPREAD THE WORD

With such a short period of consultation it is vital that organisations throughout Thanet who represent resident’s views should bring this matter before its members for discussion as soon as possible. Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations should be at the forefront, but any organisation should get involved as this proposal is likely to affect so many Thanet residents. Tell your Councillor what you think and make it plain if you supported them at the last Council Election, that now you expect their support in return.

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The views and comments expressed here are entirely my own and have no political intent or effect other than to support true democratic process.

