

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Full Council meeting 21 November 2024

Parking Charges for Midsomer Norton & Radstock

To be proposed by Councillor Shaun Hughes

Seconded by Councillor Tim Warren

Background:

1. The introduction of parking charges in both Midsomer Norton and Radstock was first proposed at the February budget meeting with the objective of raising £195,000 for the Council.
2. Following a public consultation the decision is to introduce emission-based charges in January 2025.
3. The decision made is now 2 hours free car parking with a reduced hourly rate.
4. Justification is now to improve air quality.

To Note:

1. **PARKING SURVEYS** - No parking surveys have been undertaken within the towns to understand demand and usage patterns, equally no figures have been produced for the implementation, management, maintenance and enforcement costs therefore profit or loss to the local taxpayers cannot be established.
 2. **FINANCIAL VIABILITY** - No financial viability reports are available and no financial benefits to BANES Council, Midsomer Norton businesses or residents can be identified. With the amendment to 2 hours free parking the budget target of £195k cannot be achieved and could result in the scheme losing money.
 3. **IMPACT ASSESSEMENT** - No impact assessment has been undertaken to understand the harm to local businesses, sustainability, footfall and effect on the local workforce. No analysis has been undertaken to understand the potential negative impact created by vehicle displacement to air quality and residential developments close to the high street.
 4. **EFFECT ON LOW INCOME FAMILIES** - The charges unfairly discriminate against low-income families and residents on minimum wage. Many currently employed within retail and hospitality sectors, emission-based charges further penalise those on low incomes that are car dependent but cannot afford the latest fuel efficient or electric vehicles.
- *Unless where specifically set out in the statute, motions approved at Council do not bind the Executive (Cabinet) but may influence their future decisions.*
 - *Councillors are reminded of their public sector equality duty which requires the Council to consider or think about how their policies or decisions may affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.*

5. PUBLIC TRANSPORT – As we are all very aware our public transport in North East Somerset is abysmal, lacking funding and investment. Without a car many residents would be stranded and without access to council offices, libraries, banks, pharmacies or professional services, facilities that residents in Bath can take for granted.
6. AIR QUALITY - No Air Quality studies have been undertaken to establish current levels in relation to government standards, therefore it is not possible to set targets for air quality improvements as current levels are unknown. There is no evidence of any issues with current Air Quality levels within our towns. Claims made of 77% support through the public consultation are flawed due to the multiple-choice question pre-determining the response.
7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION - There is evidence to indicate that the public consultation multiple choice questionnaire was designed to provide a pre-determined outcome in favour of the parking proposal. The objections received from 4000 residents through the public consultation have not been given sufficient weight contrary to the core policy “giving people a bigger say”.
8. HIGH STREET REGENERATION – Midsomer Norton High Street is struggling for survival through years of neglect and lack of investment and our businesses are in genuine fear of losing their livelihoods, this decision completely undermines all of the regeneration projects and shop local initiatives.
9. OLD BREWERY MASTERPLAN – South Road car park is currently part of the WECA funded review of Midsomer Norton town centre, this includes South Road car park and is reviewing the regeneration options for Midsomer Norton.
10. SUMMARY – All council decisions must be evidence based however no evidence has been produced to demonstrate any benefits whatsoever in Council income or Air Quality. It fails to provide any improvements for businesses or residents and creates an irreversible risk to a fragile local economy and a potential Council income net loss at a time when the Council is making £8.41 millions of savings in the budget.

Council therefore requests the Cabinet to:

1. Suspend the introduction of parking charges in Midsomer Norton and Radstock until an informed decision can be evidenced and implement only if a positive outcome for residents and businesses can be justified.
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