

Agenda Item IMD21

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2023/21

TITLE	Suspension of parking fees for the Christmas Extravaganza event held in Woodley Precinct and Wokingham Winter Carnival.
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick, Executive Member for Business and Economic Development - Clive Jones
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	31 October 2023 LGF4, Shute End, 12.30pm
WARD	Bulmershe and Whitegates; Emmbrook; Wescott;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to suspend off-street parking charges for these Christmas one day events being held in Wokingham Town Centre and Woodley Precinct.

The decision is being treated as urgent due to the pending request for this year's events being run on Sunday 26th November in Wokingham and Sunday 3rd December 2023 in Woodley.

RECOMMENDATION

That the **Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways – approves** to suspend parking charges across all car parks within the respective event areas in Wokingham and Woodley for these annual events this year only.

That the **Executive Member for Business and Economic Development – approves** with the use of funds provided to offset the parking fees from the economic development grant funding.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

In past years the council has suspended parking fees for up to three Saturdays in December to support traders. There is a wish to continue to support traders in our towns at Christmas, despite the council's financial situation, particularly with the two Christmas events, to be held on Sunday 26th November in Wokingham and Sunday 3rd December 2023 in Woodley.

It has been agreed that only these two specific events will be supported this year, having gained funding from the economic development grant. To ensure parity, consistency, and equality in parking management across the Borough, all other requests for support for other events should be subject to the same criteria.

This, then does not prevent the Council from providing economic development grant support to town centres to assist with the cost of delivering specific events where justified.

Background

In past years the council has suspended parking fees for up to three Saturdays in December to support traders. There is a wish to continue to support traders in our towns at Christmas, despite the council's financial situation, particularly with the two Christmas events, to be held on Sunday 26th November in Wokingham and Sunday 3rd December 2023 in Woodley.

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Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

- Both of these events would likely generate income for local businesses and for the stall holders attending and the event organisers in the pitch fees they charge.
- While the event could still operate without suspending parking fees, free off-street parking on these specific Sundays would provide a boost to the local events at a vital time of the year for businesses and traders. Given the limited economic grant available this is seen as a special and unique case and should not be seen as a precedent for further free off-street parking events.
- Footfall at large events over the Christmas period would benefit local businesses as well as event organisers.
- Whilst economic development grant funding will cover the loss of revenue estimated at £12,000 for both events. The council will incur additional costs to instigate free parking across its off-street car parks.
- Reconfiguration of the ticket machines to cover these events are in the region of £5,000-£7,000 per event. Providing appropriate machine covers for all machines would be in the region of £10,000 - £18,000.
- We therefore recommend that we leave the machines operational with signs informing customers that parking will be free, and **no refunds** will be provided if they use the machines or RINGO.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£12,000	Yes, from economic development grant funding. 1 year only.	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	To be considered annually.	There is no budget in place for this.	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The parking budget was set based on the assumption car parking income would be received for the dates that this report proposes to now not charge. This will leave a gap in the council's income for 2023/24, however, one-off Economic Development grant funding has been identified to cover the loss of parking income resulting from this proposal. The funding solution is however one-off and should a similar decision be made in future years suitable funding would need to be identified before any proposal to provide free parking is agreed.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including property and priorities?)

The council could provide economic development grant funding support to the town centres to assist with the costs of delivering specific events where justified.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

This request supported by funding does meet with the council's equality duties and responsibilities to ensure social inclusion of vulnerable members of the community

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Resources and Assets	No further comments
Monitoring Officer	No further comments
Leader / Deputy of the Council	Happy with the report

For Highways use only

If your item is not about a highways matter you do not need to complete the Town and Parish Council information or the Local Ward Member information

Town and Parish Councils

Woodley Town Council.	No further comments
Wokingham Town Council	Empathised the need to make sure appropriate promotion in run-up to the event; not to rely on social media as not all residents use this medium

Local Ward Members

Bulmershe and Whitegates	
Andy Croy	No further comments

Tony Skuse	No further comments
Shahid Younis	No further comments
Emmbrook	
Rachel Bishop-Firth	No further comments
Morag Malvern	No further comments
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	No further comments
Westcott	
Jane Ainslie	No further comments
Peter Dennis	Happy with the proposal, expressed that we should ensure that there is appropriate communication via social media, town councils to ensure that people are aware there is no need to pay for parking on those days.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

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