



ALSAGER TOWN COUNCIL

Response to Cheshire East Parking Review Statutory Consultation 2023

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST CAR PARKING CHARGES FOR ALSAGER

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THE ARGUMENT AGAINST CAR PARKING CHARGES FOR ALSAGER

Introduction

The movement from free parking to charging for most people is an emotive issue even when the charge seems to some not to be onerous. As a result, many people vote with their feet and drive elsewhere to free parking retail outlets, forgetting or not bothered by the extra cost of fuel. It becomes a matter of principal which is the assumption in the strategy document. Once charging is established the issue of inflationary raising of charges is not a big issue to those who have accepted the change from free to charging such as Crewe Nantwich etc

The vitality plan for Alsager Town

- The Cheshire East Alsager Town vitality plan published 2021 stated that free parking is integral to the vitality of Alsager.
- The car parking charging strategy states that
 - In reviewing parking charges, CEC will need to balance the overall financial situation which is currently faced alongside long held commitments to ensure that the economic viability and vitality of town centres is preserved. The provision of well-planned and managed parking both on and off-street plays a key role in achieving this.
 - An appropriate parking regime in each locality will therefore be sought to help meet the financial needs of the council whilst supporting regeneration, vitality of town centres and encouraging people to think more about when and how to travel.

Negative impacts of car parking charges

Economy and Growth Impact

- Annual foot fall has dropped by 29% between 2019 and 2022 and continues to fall.
 - Strategy documents assume a decrease in use of 20%, this could possibly equate to a further loss of foot fall to business of up to 20% on top of the current decline.
 - Concern from businesses about decline in turnover with possible closures as a result, recorded in survey conducted by Town Council of all businesses on Crewe Road and Lawton Road. This is backed up by Alsager businesses which have outlets in other location with paid car parks in Cheshire East who have seen their businesses affected negatively by charging for parking.

- Major recipient of free car parking is ASDA, shoppers have alternative free supermarket shopping in Kildersgreen (Tesco, Lidl, Aldi). 10% decline in footfall for ASDA is equal to £1 million reduction in turnover
- Smaller businesses, coffee shops bars and restaurants could lose daytime trade, with residents shopping and pursuing leisure activities at retail parks.
- Alsager is a key service centre and charging will significantly impact on the local economy and lead to a further decline in the vitality of the town centre.
- The Parking strategy plan for Alsager does not: -
 - Ensure that the economic viability and vitality of town centres is preserved.
 - It fails to support the regeneration of Alsager.
- Fairview car park is assessed at Level 1 charge (the highest), and this is not equitable when looking at other car parks across CE which have been assessed at Level 2. For example, Nantwich Civic Hall and Macclesfield Jordangate Multi storey are both lower at level 2. These towns support a much larger population than Alsager and offer multiple retail offerings and high street named stores, which do not exist in Alsager. Assessing Fairview car park at level 1 charging band is neither fair nor equitable.
- Recommendation, Review the parking charging strategy for Alsager to reduce the negative impact on the economy and growth of the town.

Residential Parking

- Well Lane and Fanny's Croft and Station Road car parks were developed as residential car parks. The introduction of charging and or/annual permit parking is a further tax on residents and will lead to on street parking on nearby roads.
- Well Lane is already used for on street parking by those residents who have no off-street parking available. This is an extremely narrow road with known traffic problems as it is the main route in/out, to St Gabriels school. The implementation of Double yellow lines on the West side for the whole length up to school keep clear signage will cause significant additional problems to the residents in this area. It will force residents to park on the East side which has a steep bank which makes on street parking difficult or force them to park further into Cedar Avenue which also has major parking issues as this is used by the residents in the supported bungalows, the guides and the scouts and their building hirers.
- Fanny's croft was created as a residential car park to reduce on street parking on Audley Rd and reduce the risk of accidents. This road is a known accident black spot, already congested by resident parking. Charging for this car park will only increase the problems and potential accidents as more cars park on the road to avoid parking charges.
- Recommendation: - keep these 3 car parks as free parking

Fairview car park

- Charging on Fairview Car Park during the day will impact on the community activities which support social care and the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable of our residents. Relatives need to park short term while they drop of and escort elderly people to a community activity such as the lunch club. They then return a few hours later to park, pick up their relative and escort them back to the car to take them home. A cost-effective wellbeing event will become uneconomic to support.

- Charging on Fairview Car Park from 8am will impact on parents dropping off and picking up their children to and from Highfields school. There are no alternative locations for a safe drop off and pick up especially on dark mornings and nights.
- Stated earlier charging could have a major negative impact on ASDA, the largest business in Alsager.
- There are a significant number of car parking spaces that are reserved for car parking on a Wednesday market day. This is an agreed ATC lease and charging would not be appropriate on Wednesdays. The question is -
 - Consultation should take place with Alsager Town Council to explain how this would be managed on market days.
 - Has this been considered and factored into the expected revenue figures?
 - How would the few spaces owned by ASDA be managed?

Infrastructure

- Transport infrastructure within Alsager is poor.
 - Limited public transport.
 - Good if travelling out or into of Alsager from or to Crewe by bus or train.
 - Non existent if travelling within Alsager.
 - Extremely poor if travelling from the semi-rural villages and towns outside Alsager. Alsager does attract many visitors from outside.
 - Very few people will walk a 2-to-4-mile round trip to do a weekly shop and carry it home or pop to the shop for bread and milk for example. The choice will be the car and go to the nearest free parking in Kidsgrove.
 - No cycle lanes, and no infrastructure to support cyclists. Cycling is quite dangerous currently.
 - Pavements badly maintained and dangerous for disabled people which discourages walking.
 - No long stay facilities for workers/commuters on the edge of town
 - No alternative to on/off street parking, for example large retail car parks
 - Recommendation: - Substantial improvement in Infrastructure required to achieve strategy aims if implemented

Conclusion

- Charging will have a visible damaging effect on the local economy, especially the high street and potentially the biggest business and employer in the town currently.
- Charging will bring a short-term gain to the council to help with balancing the budget. However, the consequences should be carefully considered, and risk assessed. Businesses over a period, it won't be immediate, could close, with loss of business rate income and the town centre follows other high streets with closures. It's a vicious circle as businesses and shops close less people come to town, with resulting more closures, parking revenue declines charges go up etc. The town becomes dead and becomes a pure commuter town with no community spirit.
- Alsager is facing a disproportionate level of charges anticipated to be 46% of the total expected net revenue towards the 55 MTF target 108 for parking. The assessment for charges does not appear to be fair in relation to other Towns.

- Fairview carpark should be reassessed as Level 2
- Fanny Croft, Well Street and Station Road car parks as a minimum should be kept free. The assumption of 20% reduction in use could be optimistic, could well be more as residents revert to street parking.
- 30 minutes free car parking at Fairview car park and Station Rd car park (As below)

Additional Mitigation Measures required as part of the Cheshire East Alsager Parking Strategy

There is no information on timeframes to implement the mitigation, when will actions in the plan be implemented as these are critical to be implemented simultaneously when parking charges are brought in.

- The first 30 minutes should be free on Fairview and Station Rd Car Parks
- If CEC implement the charges and raise £552k then this should be ringfenced to benefit Alsager with a phased plan for highways improvements in addition to the current budget
- Alsager has low visibility of any enforcement officers. Additional enforcement officer provision would be required to support the current mitigation proposals.
- Mitigation for the Alsager roads is shown as a RAG rating of amber. The assessment of these is challenged and these should be Red.
- Implement the recommendation contained in the consultant's report of the Alsager Public Realm, which informed the Town Centre Vitality plan, i.e., a one-way system on the top part of Station Road with no entry to Station Road from Crewe Road and a reversal of the one-way system in place on Cross Street.
- Implement 20mph on key roads including Station Road, Lawton Road, and Crewe Road full length.

How to respond to the proposals

You can make a representation to Cheshire East until 1 November 2023 by emailing: carparksreview2023@cheshireeast.gov.uk

or by sending a letter to:

Parking Services Manager
Parking Services Department
c/o Delamere House
Delamere Street
Crewe
CW1 2LL.

All objections/ representations must specify the grounds on which they are made.

Representations made by other methods/ media **will not** be accepted by Cheshire East.