

## Proposal to charge on Sunday Parking

Further to the proposal by SDC to introduce parking charges in Westerham on Sundays, the Westerham Town Partnership (WTP) would like to make the following comments.

This proposal has received a resoundingly negative response from businesses, residents and visitors to Westerham. WTP has studied the minutes of the SDC Cabinet meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> Oct 2023 and press releases that were published online and the Parking Accounts for the last four years.

It is evident that income from parking charges and fines together not only covers the cost of providing parking but regularly generates an income that is three times the cost. In the year before Covid it was nearly 5 times.

In the last financial year (2022/23) the report shows the overall cost of providing parking in the Sevenoaks District was £776,064 and the income was £2,333,405, thus generating a surplus of £1,557,341.

We are therefore puzzled to read in the KM website (our comments are interleaved in red):

Cllr Margot McArthur said: "Despite significant increases in our costs, we have taken a decision to freeze all parking charges from April because supporting residents, businesses and visitors is a top priority for the Council".

"At the same time, as part of setting a balanced budget, we will introduce our standard charges on Sundays at all our parking locations. With a growing Sunday economy, it's only right that customers who use our parking facilities contribute towards their upkeep".

We would love to see some evidence that there is a growing Sunday economy in Westerham - we certainly wish it were so.

"Ending most free parking also supports our efforts to tackle climate change by encouraging more people to visit our towns using sustainable forms of transport."

With all respect, invoking climate change is stretching the credibility of your argument. That apart, there is virtually no viable Sunday public transport for visitors to Westerham.

“However, we will still offer free weekend parking in our staff car park a short walk from Sevenoaks town centre.”

We assume this is Gordon Rd which has 146 spaces. Well, we would like to see a similar concession made for visitors to Westerham.

## **WESTERHAM DARENT CAR PARK**

**We propose that Darent Car Park should have free all-day weekend parking, like SDC offers at the Gordon Rd Car Park in Sevenoaks.**

All Westerham townsfolk we spoke to felt that SDC had treated us badly when it withdrew the established practice of the first 3 hours being free Monday to Saturday. WTP wrote an extensive report on Parking Amenities in 2013 which it is still on the Visitwesterham website.

Free parking for first 3 hours creates a strong incentive to stay longer. Promoting the use of the Darent car park also helps generate more short term parking in the town centre and encourages first-time visitors. The short walk through the churchyard helps visitors to consider how they might like to spend their time.

## **SUNDAY IS DIFFERENT**

Sunday must surely be the day to stop hurrying and worrying and relax. Sunday should be the day for a family walk and a day to try a new path and risk getting lost, leaving enough time to stop for a tea on the way back - without worrying about overrunning the parking you paid for. Getting back and finding you've got a ticket is likely to ruin the whole day.

And please don't forget Sunday morning football in King George's Field. Improving the amenities in the field has been a major project for Westerham and we hope it will bring lots of visitors who might like to walk into town for lunch.

## **THE WESTERHAM ECONOMY and FOOTFALL**

Footfall is the key to making our economy viable. We often hear of people who discover Westerham and say “let's try to stop if we can find a parking place” and then drive on through. How can we ensure that they try to come back another day? It is generally agreed that Westerham's main assets are the countryside, our shops and restaurants, our heritage and our warm and friendly community. We will never have a train station and there is little

likelihood of a decent bus service, especially as commuting patterns have changed so dramatically now that everyone wants to work from home, for at least part of the week.

Decisions about parking charges, like so many other things, should never be made in isolation, without regard to the question “How does the local (Westerham) economy work?” This was the subject of the KCC Healthcheck back in 2008. It was an audit of Westerham taking in the economy, transport, social life and the environment. It’s still out there at

[www.visitwesterham.org.uk/community/town-council-partnership/the-healthcheck](http://www.visitwesterham.org.uk/community/town-council-partnership/the-healthcheck)

Fifteen years on, there is a strong case for re-running the exercise. WTP looks forward to working with SDC and WTC to address all these issues and will continue to lobby to ensure that Sunday parking remains free in Westerham.

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