

Why have parking charges?

- 1.1 In Surrey many shopping areas have a variety of parking facilities. These are typically:
 - On street spaces, managed by the County Council as the Highway Authority
 - Off street car parks, usually owned and managed by District and Borough Councils, but sometimes privately owned.
 - Supermarket car parks, usually free for customers and limited to 2 hours or so
- 1.2 District and Borough Councils and private car park operators currently charge for parking in the majority of car parks they own and manage. Sometimes the car parks have a free initial period in smaller towns, villages or shopping areas to encourage visitors. On street parking spaces in Surrey (with a few exceptions e.g. Guildford and Woking) tend to be free.
- 1.3 In shopping and retail areas, off street car parks usually offer longer term parking whilst parking on street is limited to one or two hours. On street spaces tend to be closer to the shops and they are often more convenient for short shopping trips or to make collections/deliveries. A shorter parking time limit also benefits customers and local businesses because it increases the turnover of the parking spaces ('churn') improving access to retail or other facilities.
- 1.4 Free time-limited on street parking is difficult to enforce as Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) need to monitor parking activity at regular intervals and record number plates and other details to confirm whether a vehicle has outstayed the time period allowed. This is time consuming and inefficient, reducing the amount of time available for them to patrol waiting restrictions (yellow lines) that are often installed for safety or congestion related reasons. In practice many large on street parking areas are poorly enforced due to the difficulties involved.
- 1.5 Parking charges usually take the form of 'pay and display'. This requires the motorist to take a ticket from a machine and place it in their vehicle showing their parking time allowance. This allows a CEO to see instantly whether they are legally parked and enables far more efficient enforcement of the restrictions. Because enforcement is easier, compliance improves, again helping 'churn'.
- 1.6 Where there are charges for using off street car parks (as is the case in the vast majority of those operated by the District and Borough Councils in Surrey) and on street parking is free, drivers often tend to 'cruise' nearby streets looking for a free space. This can contribute to congestion, particularly when drivers wait in the road for a space.

- 1.7 Charging for on street parking discourages this behaviour and, if the on street charge is the same or higher than the off street car parks, visitors are encouraged to go straight to a car park. This can help reduce congestion and CO² emissions.
- 1.8 A comparatively higher tariff for on street spaces also encourages drivers to only buy as much time as they need, again helping 'churn'. The increased availability of spaces means drivers who need or want to park on street can find a space more easily without having to wait. The increased availability of spaces can be particularly helpful to businesses on roads with high levels of passing traffic (or trade).
- 1.9 A free initial parking period has been widely discussed and is recommended in some locations by the Transport Select Committee Parking Task Group. A free period would have an impact on pay and display parking income where used, however if the free period was followed by the medium tariff of £1 per hour then it is considered that there would be sufficient in most locations to cover the costs of operating the machines. This means the first 30 minutes would be free, however if a visitor wanted to stay for an hour it would cost £1. Where allowed, 2 hours on street parking would cost £2 with this tariff. Set in this way the tariff also encourages visitors to use the off street car parks for longer stay parking.
- 1.10 There have been some case studies about the effect of parking charges on local businesses. There are many other factors that could also influence business performance (competition, wider economy, e-commerce etc) making it difficult to directly link performance with parking charges. The main conclusion of most studies is that where parking charges are introduced, the tariff should be proportional to the retail offer (i.e. the type of shops and businesses present in a particular location and the length of time customers would spend in them). The parking charges need to be set reasonably in comparison with local car parks and the scale of the attraction. Where parking charges are introduced it is usual for the turnover of parking spaces to increase, which in turn helps increase footfall in retail areas.
- 1.11 While assessing potential new locations where on street parking bays could be introduced and before suggesting their inclusion, officers of the County Council gave due consideration to a number of important factors, including, but not limited to:
 - the effect of the bays on the flow of traffic
 - whether the bays would have any adverse impact on access to adjacent premises
 - the provision of off street parking in the locality
 - the availability of roads with no parking restrictions in the vicinity of the bays (and consequently possible displacement)
 - the proximity and nature of the local retail offering

- 1.12 In some cases pay and display machines could be installed in conservation areas. Where this is planned Surrey Highways will work with conservation officers to agree locations and colours that will have the least impact on the surrounding area