



WEST MALLING PARISH COUNCIL

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West Malling Parish Council response to TMBC Parking Consultation January 2024

Councillor Matt Boughton confirmed at a Chamber of Commerce meeting that TMBC needs to raise an additional £50k of annual revenue in our area. West Malling Parish Council prides itself on being open and constructive in our dealings with the Borough and will assist, where possible, with achieving this while requesting that the concerns and views of our residents, business owners and visitors to our town are given due consideration.

As a means of raising additional income, the Council would suggest that TMBC only increases the parking charges in the car park behind Tesco with a view to seeing how much additional income this would generate. Not only would this produce an immediate source of additional income, but there would be savings from the considerable infrastructure costs needed for the other proposals within these consultations. There would also be the cost saving of not needing to employ additional traffic wardens to monitor the proposed new designated areas.

Introduction of off-street parking charges – Ryarsh Lane car park

West Malling Parish Council is **strongly against** the introduction of any parking charges for the Ryarsh Lane car park other than the present business permits. We also do not wish to see the extension of parking charges to 8pm. This will have a serious impact on all the side roads where the parking restrictions end at 6pm. Residents returning from work, or from an evening out will be unable to find anywhere to park. It will also impact on all the early cafe, pub and restaurant trade pushing people to make later bookings and increase noise and disturbance into the night or to find alternative locations where parking is easier.

This car park is also essential for the thriving monthly Farmers Market which has an excellent reputation. The free car park is used by both stall holders and market goers and because it is free on Sundays draws in visitors from all around the area. Should these parking charges be introduced then we could see the number of stall holders and visitors reduce and the market close.

Nearby allotment holders are also regular users of the car park dropping off heavy bags and equipment.

The consultation document does not make it clear whether residents of Ryarsh Lane, with parking permits, will be covered for 24/7 parking. This section of the consultation document does not open properly on some devices.

Introduction of on-street parking charges – West Malling High Street and Swan Street

The Council is **strongly opposed** to the introduction of charges for these areas.

The Parish Council believes that there is only a small number of cars that park in the High Street and Swan Street one-hour bays for longer than is permitted. We agree that this is a concern and would like to work with the Borough to alleviate this.

Local businesses, shops, pubs, restaurants, cafes, West Malling CE Primary School, and St Mary's Church will all be affected in different ways, a business may have fewer clients, shops lose footfall, people may spend less in pubs and eateries. The longer-term knock-on effect could be profound. For example, fewer users of Tesco supermarket may mean that they withdraw from the town. This would lead to a complete downgrading of the town's viability and a reduction in the chargeable business rates.

The environmental impact of these changes cannot be overstated. Residents use the 1-hour free parking in the High Street to shop in Tesco. Shopping is heavy and awkward to carry. If they must pay for their hour then they will drive to Lunsford Park, Larkfield where parking is free, or to Kings Hill. This will have an environmental impact on the borough and increase poor air quality. TMBC should be encouraging people to shop as locally as possible, and this was particularly necessary during Covid. The first free hour is also essential for people visiting both the church, and churchyard, throughout the week and school drop off and pick up times. We ask that if charges are introduced then it is important that the 1 hour free remains.

We ask that TMBC take into consideration that West Malling is within a Conservation Area and that any alterations to the town need to be carefully considered. The introduction of numerous paying machines & information display signs around the town will detract significantly from the historic attributes that currently make West Malling an attractive place to live and visit. We also ask that TMBC take into consideration previous work undertaken to de-clutter the High Street so as to create an inviting area for residents and visitors alike; WMPC have previously agreed with TMBC a Design Statement to ensure only high quality coordinated street furniture is installed.

Both TMBC and West Malling Parish Council have a duty to consider all changes and how they will affect disabled, less well-off, older visitors and residents. Anything that restricts people with mobility issues (not just blue badge holders) from getting from A to B is detrimental to their wellbeing. Getting from your car and finding a machine can be no straight forward task. The ability to use the parking app particularly in an area which is renowned for poor mobile reception is a serious concern. We stress, for ease of use, that should the Pay & Display machines be introduced then they must be able to take cash and debit cards. The increased cost of an outing is a huge disincentive for those who struggle economically. For those disadvantaged, these worries lead to a loss of confidence and living a more restricted life. It is known that this can have a dramatic effect on people's mental health.

Visitors to the town are needed to keep West Malling as the vibrant and attractive place it is to shop and enjoy hospitality. West Malling should be welcoming and accessible to all ... regardless of their means. Mary Portas said, 'town halls ignore at their peril the risk of driving trade out of the high street to shopping malls ...' also stressing that parking charges risk undermining the vitality of the high street.

Alteration to the loading bay outside Tesco, West Malling

West Malling Parish Council agrees with this part of the proposal as it agrees that the current parking arrangement can present danger to road users. We ask TMBC to be mindful of the loss of parking bays this would cause. The Council believes that this is another reason that the one-hour free parking remains for the rest of the High Street and Swan Street.

Increase to on-street parking charges

Residents parking permits - West Malling Parish Council agrees with this part of the proposal.

Residents parking permits, non-UK registered vehicle - West Malling Parish Council agrees with this part of the proposal.

Visitor 24-hour vouchers - West Malling Parish Council agrees with this part of the proposal.

Increase to off-street parking charges

Business parking permit - We would ask TMBC to investigate making this more equitable and efficient. Presently there are far too many spaces not being used.

In conclusion we are asking TMBC to take a holistic look at the impact of these proposals and not just the impact to parking, but on the fabric of the town and the lives of the people who live and visit here. We agree with the sentiment of the present Government's Levelling up strategy ...**creating opportunities for everyone across the UK by improving jobs, pay and living standards, making streets safer, protecting health, and wellbeing & investing in high streets and town centres.**

The Parish Council would welcome a meeting with TMBC to work towards achieving the Borough's goals. We are both concerned and perplexed by the confusing consultation documentation on TMBC's website. Residents are understandably annoyed and upset by the seemingly, if unintended, lack of clarity and are left with a belief that their views are not genuinely sought. Working together, both TMBC and West Malling would be stronger and better placed for having a healthy and prosperous future.

Yours faithfully,



Claire Christmas
Clerk to West Malling Parish Council