

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 8 October 2018
Report of: Section Head Parks, Open Spaces & Projects
Title: Car Parking Improvements, Cassiobury Park

1.0 **Summary**

1.1 As part of the major redevelopment of Cassiobury Park, its attractiveness to all users has been increased, and especially during peak times in the summer months. This has placed increased pressure on the local area and within the park itself. The original intention was to increase the main car park capacity by a process of redesign, but this was unlikely to provide sufficient parking provision for peak times.

1.2 Proposals have therefore been reconsidered relating to how best to satisfy existing and future park visitors, taking into consideration the capital outlay to improve the car park, manage visitor numbers, impact on the park itself as well as to deter commuter parking and generate income to part offset costs of managing and maintaining the park.

1.3 Further to the above, there is the option as part of the proposed redesign to re-provide a suitable amount of disabled parking bays and to ensure we comply with best practice guidance issued by the Department for Transport. The car park infrastructure is extremely poor and its setting within the park gives the impression of an unwelcoming facility and also impacts on the visual attractiveness of the park. It is worth noting that the original intention here, post HLF funded restoration, was to remove the existing overflow and return this to parkland and redesign the main car park area only. This has since been reassessed and the proposal is now to retain and improve the overflow car park with an improved landscape scheme, which will give a significantly higher car park capacity, increasing the overall number of spaces from 132 to 213, a 61% increase in the number of spaces.

In summary the whole car park improvement project consists of the following

elements:-

- Redesign of the existing main car park with new surfacing and drainage, increasing the capacity and retaining the existing overflow car park, improving the surfacing and boundary treatment (please see designs attached as Appendix A);
- Landscape both car park areas to improve the setting within the park with a low level bund and tree planting;
- Introduce charges to deter commuter parking and generate income to offset ongoing management and maintenance of the park and paddling pools; and
- Promote opportunities to access the park on foot, by bike and public transport.

2.0
2.1

Risks

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood)
Closure of car park	Loss of use for park users, on street parking increased and impact on the fireworks display management	Could be staged – Phase 1 extension Phase 2 main car park. Winter work so car park quieter	Tolerate	4
Income targets not achieved	Budget targets and income not realised – budget pressure	Regular budget monitoring and options include reviewing charges over a period of time	Treat	4
Negative feedback and coverage in media	Public perception lessens – bad news story	Comms message highlighting issues and	Treat	4

		longer term benefits to park		
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3.0 **Recommendations**

- 3.1 To agree the final design shown in appendices A1 and A2
- 3.2 To approve the recommendations to introduce car parking charges based on the two options presented. Option TWO is recommended.
- 3.3 To further investigate the feasibility of whether the charging for commuter parking between October and March is achievable.
- 3.4 To consider whether club members (Croquet, Bowls and Tennis) should be liable for car parking charges.

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Report approved by: Alan Gough – Head of Community and Environmental Services

4.0 **Detailed proposal**

- 4.1 In 2013, the Council appointed The Project Centre to prepare a study on access to Cassiobury Park which covered promoting access on foot, bicycle, public transport and managing parking. In 2014, to supplement the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a Business Plan was developed by Community First Partnership that also assessed the potential of improving the existing car park.
- 4.2 The existing car park accessed off Cassiobury Park Drive / Gade Avenue currently has capacity for 82 vehicles including 6 disabled spaces. The over flow car parking provides capacity for an additional 50 vehicles. Additional, smaller car parks are provided to the very north of the park at Whippendell Wood (off Grove Mill Lane and Rousebarn Lane) but they are small in capacity and some way from the main formal facilities of the park. Access is also difficult via small quiet lanes.
The proposals were to originally reconfigure the main car park and remove the overflow car parking to create an area that was less visually intrusive within the historic parkland and increase the capacity to approximately 152 vehicles, an increase of only 20 spaces.
Parking restrictions now exist within the car park that have meant issues with commuter parking have been resolved with ticket machines in place and restrictions to 6 hours free car parking. The Cassiobury Park Access Study (October 2013) found that even at off peak and off season times the car park was typically 75% full indicating that this is a busy and popular car park.
- 4.3 As part of the HLF development stage works, automated people (9 No.) and vehicle counters (3 No.) were installed in April 2013. In the 10 month period to January 2014 these counters recorded 1.5 million person visits. Annualised data based on these figures would suggest that Cassiobury Park receives around 2.1 million annual person visits (excluding large events). The automated car park counters recorded 24% of all recorded visits (based on an average car occupancy figure of 2 people) accounting for 509,431 annual person visits by car. Gade Avenue Car Park is the busiest car park accounting for 389,300 annual person visits. The 2013 visit survey found that just over one third (37.1%) of visitors travel to the park by car with just over half (51.4%) of all visitors walking. Just 3.4% of visitors appear to use public transport to access Cassiobury Park. The park compares well against other parks nationally that have received HLF Parks for People funding and gathered visitor data.
- 4.4 The Gade Avenue car park always suffered from reduced capacity due to commuter parking during the week. The relatively recent introduction of car parking restrictions has reduced use by commuters freeing up further capacity for park users.
As part of this car park improvement project, car parking charges are now proposed to be introduced alongside the reworking and redesign of the car park. Introduction of car park charging has the opportunity to provide income for Cassiobury Park which

can be reinvested and used to offset increased management and maintenance costs of the paddling pools, now managed by SLM, and the ongoing revenue costs for the park ensuring the long term sustainability of the park. Research elsewhere has indicated that many local authorities are now charging for car parking in their principal parks and anecdotal evidence also suggests that park users often expect to pay to park their car at such a location. These proposals have also been subject to consultation with park users, ward councillors and local residents.

- 4.5 The principle of introducing car parking charges at Cassiobury Park was endorsed by Cabinet on 20 January 2014. Consultation with the Council's traffic section and review of other car parking data and income figures suggested that the introduction of car parking charges at Cassiobury Park could generate around £73,000 annually (although this was based on not retaining the overflow) and £98,000 based on including the revamped extension. This was submitted to the HLF as part of the application process. There is also a commitment from the council that all car parking income is reinvested in the park to offset the increased management and maintenance costs and to sustain the park for the future. However, since the work was undertaken by the Project Centre and Community First Partnership, further discussions and details have now been carried out in relation to the increased capacity and the current fees and charges set by the council (presented as Option TWO below - recommended).

Car Parking charges are therefore based on the proposed car parking layout scheme which is as per the attached layout in appendix A and is described as follows:-

- 4.6 **PROPOSED DESIGN – IMPROVE EXISTING CAR PARK AND RETAIN BUT IMPROVE THE EXTENSION**
Original no. of spaces - 132
Total no of spaces proposed - 213
Increased by – 81 spaces (61% increase in capacity)
Capital cost - £980,000

- 4.7 The car park will be redesigned with:-
1. New edging and kerbs;
 2. Re-levelled and re-surfaced and re-lined;
 3. Cashless Ticket machines introduced;
 4. Low level barrier to prevent ingress by out of hours traffic;
 5. Improved access to the park hub for pedestrians from the car park;
 6. Improved signage;
 7. Drainage – none previously existed
 8. Early warning notifications on car parking availability on Cassiobury Park Avenue linked to a bespoke 'loop system';
 9. Low level lighting;
 10. A pre-booked coach space for school visitors to the park;

- 11. Height barriers; and
- 12. Significant soft landscaping.

5.0 Implications

There are a number of wider implications in relation to the ongoing management of the park and car park in relation to daily use and accessibility.

- Doing nothing – the car park will deteriorate further and continue to be an issue with park visitors unable to find a space and for those attempting to park on especially busy days. Income nil.
- Basic resurfacing and enhanced maintenance – the car park capacity remains the same, but accessibility is not improved. Income generated but not maximised.
- Full redesign – maximum capacity reached, automated early warning in place, efficiency of access improved, income generated but maximised.

5.1 Charges are based on the following options:-

5.2 OPTION ONE

Monday to Sunday

8am – 5pm

Up to 2 hours – FREE (no impact on dog walkers, joggers, short term visitors)

ALL DAY – £2-00

Maximum stay 6 hours. Charges apply 7 days per week.

Annual combined income of up to £100K

or:

5.3 OPTION TWO

Assumptions:

- Pricing 0-2 hours Free (no impact on dog walkers, joggers, short term visitors)
- Pricing 2-3 hours £2
- Pricing 3-4 hours £3
- Pricing 4-5 hours £4
- Pricing 5-6 hours £5

Maximum stay 6 hours. Charges apply 7 days per week.

Annual combined income of up to £200K

Two further issues need consideration:-

- The introduction of chargeable car parking for commuters for the 'extension' which is usually closed for the winter. This would need to be considered as a permit scheme and could generate further income from October to March. This

will require a Traffic Regulation Order.

- The Cassiobury Park Stakeholders Group met on the 12th September and was updated on the car parking proposals. Concerns were raised with regards to the effect of introducing charges to their membership numbers. In total, circa 100 members would be affected with average stay for each member ranging from 3-6 hours. The clubs requested that consideration be made for car parking permits to be issued to club members.

6.1 **Financial**

6.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the Council has committed up to £1,000,000 for this scheme. Colleagues in finance have assessed the income generation calculations and are satisfied all avenues have been explored and calculations are realistic.

The scheme has been added to the Capital programme for this financial year to ensure completion by Easter 2019. Option Two is therefore the preferred recommendation.

6.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

6.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that this is currently within the council's capital programme and has been agreed by Council. The proposed new car park layout will require a new Off Street Parking Places Order as it significantly amends the current car park and the ability to charge will be included in the Order.

6.3 **Equalities/Human Rights**

6.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that there are implications in relation to equalities and human rights. An EIA is attached as appendix B. Consultation has also been carried out with regards to the proposals and is attached as Appendix C.

6.4 **Staffing**

6.4.1 No issues

6.5 **Accommodation**

6.5.1 No issues

6.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

6.6.1 The introduction of cashless payment machines will negate issues with regards to opportunities for crime and disorder and lead to a better and safer car park. The car park will also be closed after dark, reducing further any ASB within the car park at night.

6.7 Sustainability

6.7.1 The car park has had no works carried out here for over 10 years. The benefits to the long term sustainability of the park are income generated to offset costs of running the park and in some cases an incentive to find alternative ways to travel to the park. Automation in relation to early warning signage will avoid some of the gridlock experienced on busy weekends and when there are events in the park.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Proposed layout of car Park
- Appendix B – EIA
- Appendix C – Summary of consultation

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report