



WETHERBY TOWN COUNCIL PARKING CHARGES RESPONSE TO LEEDS CITY COUNCIL CONSULTATION

At its meeting on 9th December 2023 Wetherby Town Council agreed that, together with the 4,965 people who have signed the online petition¹, it strongly objects to Leeds City Council's proposals to introduce charges in any of the town's car parks.

Free parking has long been one of the town's unique selling points to residents, businesses, and visitors alike and there is already concern that this would be the 'thin end of the wedge' with charges following in additional sites in due course.

Whilst the current consultation relates to two sites (Wilderness and Station Gardens) the following grounds for objection are relevant to any site which may be considered now or in the future.

The primary concern expressed by councillors was the potential impact of the displacement of vehicles from public car parks on to residential streets.

Vehicles being parked all day with people walking into town is already an issue in areas of housing such as Glebe Field Drive and there are concerns that this will become worse with the implementation of charges.

Whilst Leeds City Council officers sought to allay these fears, citing a budget for implementing traffic regulation orders on residential streets, there is no faith in the council's ability to effectively enforce any new measures, particularly given the limitations on recruiting additional enforcement officers.

The Town Council does not believe that sufficient assessment has been conducted on the impact that the proposals would have. Wetherby is lucky to have a large proportion of independent retailers, but how will charges impact their viability? It is not only customers who would be affected and potentially deterred from visiting the town, but also staff working in Wetherby.

This is of particular concern given the limited alternative modes of transport available to people coming into Wetherby. Statistics show that an overwhelming majority (45.4%) of Wetherby residents use their vehicles to travel to and from work, with poor bus connectivity and frequency meaning that this is not a suitable alternative for many workers.

The retail sector is considered by the Government to be low-paying², so introducing charges at two sites which provide all day parking would disproportionately disadvantage already low-paid workers at the town centre retail employers.

Wetherby has a higher-than-average proportion of older residents (aged 60 and above)³. The proposals to provide a cashless system could see these residents put at a significant disadvantage as many do not have smart phones or feel comfortable with modern technology. This could result in a reduction in their visits to services and shops in the town centre. An increase in social isolation could have the unintended knock-on effect of increasing pressure on other Leeds City Council services.

Leeds City Council officers have been clear that this is a budget led proposal, yet the Town Council has not seen any evidence that any profits would be reinvested in Wetherby or its car parks and infrastructure. Wetherby residents already pay more in council tax than they receive

¹ <https://www.change.org/p/say-no-to-parking-charges-in-wetherby>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-paying-sectors-review>

³ Office for National Statistics – Census 2021 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/>

back in value of services and this would be an extension of penalties that even extend to having to pay for our own Christmas lights!

At the very least the Town Council suggests that the proposals be 'parked' for a year to allow stakeholders to look at the various issues surrounding highways and parking and put forward a comprehensive plan having studied the issues and impacts properly.

8th January 2024

