



Please ask for: Matt Berry
Extension No: 4589
E-Mail: mattberry@cannockchasedc.gov.uk

26 February 2021

Dear Councillor,

Community Scrutiny Committee (Call-In)

Monday 8 March 2021, 4:00pm

Meeting to be held via Remote Access

You are invited to attend this meeting for consideration of the matters itemised in the following Agenda.

Yours sincerely,

T. McGovern
Managing Director

To: Councillors:

Bennett, C. (Chairman)
Jones, B. (Vice-Chairman)

Allen, F.W.C.	Sutton, Mrs. H.M.
Davis, Mrs. M.A.	Thompson, Mrs. S.L.
Dunnett, Ms. A.J.	Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Freeman, Miss M.A.	Witton, P.T.
Hewitt, P.M.	Woodhead, P.E.
Smith, C.D.	

Invitees:

- Councillor J.A.A. Newbury (Environment and Climate Change Portfolio Leader)
- Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles
- Head of Economic Prosperity
- Councillor J.P. Johnson (Call-In Proposer)
- Councillor R.J. Hughes (Call-In Supporter)
- Councillor Miss O. Lyons (Call-In Supporter)
- Councillor Mrs. C.E. Martin
- Councillor A.S. Boucker
- Councillor P.D. Startin
- Councillor M. Sutherland
- All Rugeley Town Councillors
- Rugeley Town Council Clerk

Agenda

Part 1

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members**

To declare any personal, pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3. **Call-In Request: Car Parking Charges in Rugeley**

The following documents are enclosed for the Committee's consideration:

- Report of the Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles (Item 3.1 – 3.5).
- Cabinet report of 28 January 2021 re: Car Parking Charges in Rugeley (Item 3.6 – 3.13).
- Extract of the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 January 2021 (3.14 – 3.15).
- Call-in Proposer and Supporters Forms (Item 3.16 – 3.19).
- Procedure for Debating Call-in at the Scrutiny Committee meeting (Item 3.20).

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Report of:	Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles
Contact Officer:	Mike Edmonds
Contact Number:	01543 464 416
Portfolio Leader:	Environment
Report Track:	Community Scrutiny Committee: 08/03/21

Community Scrutiny Committee
8 March 2021
Call-In: Car Parking Charges – Rugeley

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information to the Committee regarding the call-in request received in relation to the Cabinet decision of 28 January 2021 in respect of the ‘Car Parking Charges – Rugeley’ report.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members consider the proposal put forward by Councillor J.P. Johnson, as set out in paragraph 3.7, below.

3 Call-In Details

- 3.1 Cabinet, at its meeting held on 28 January 2021, considered a report entitled ‘Car Parking Charges - Rugeley’. The original Cabinet report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Cabinet resolved:
- “That as part of the action in the Council’s proposed new Corporate Plan for 2021-24 to ‘review the Council’s car parking strategy’, a feasibility study be undertaken to look at the implementation of a trial scheme whereby people visiting shops or hospitality venues in Rugeley town centre could have their car parking refunded.”
- 3.3 The relevant extract from the 28 January 2021 Cabinet minutes is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.4 The Cabinet resolution as detailed in paragraph 3.2, above, is the subject of this call-in.

- 3.5 The request for the call-in was submitted by Councillor J.P. Johnson, and supported by Councillors R.J. Hughes, Miss O. Lyons, C.D. Smith and Mrs. S.L. Thompson. The call-in request is attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.6 The reasons given for the call-in are:

“Car parking charges differ and are implemented inconsistently across Council owned car parks in Cannock Chase, for example, there is a fee to park in both Rugeley and Cannock whereas it is free in Hednesford. Local Town Centres are struggling, and it is vital that the Council support small businesses to ensure a successful post pandemic recovery. Rugeley Town Council has recognised this and have offered to financially contribute towards the implementation of free parking to encourage visitors in the Town Centre and assist local businesses.

On 5th November 2020, Rugeley Town Council wrote to Cannock Chase District Council asking that they look into the possibility of offering free car parking as a way of supporting local businesses through the turbulent economic period as the country emerges from the Covid-19 lockdowns. Rugeley Town Council has offered a contribution of £30,000 for 2021/2022 in order to help alleviate the financial impact for Cannock Chase District Council.

This suggestion was detailed in a Cabinet Briefing considered on 10th December and, following that, a letter was sent to Rugeley Town Council on 17th December 2020 informing them that *‘Cabinet fully appreciated the intention of the request made by the Town Council but could not agree to introduce free car parking in Rugeley Town Centre, at this time’*. However, within the letter Cabinet acknowledged *‘the key purpose of the request, which was to support the recovery of Rugeley Town Centre and local businesses post pandemic’* and that the Town Council’s request was *‘to reach an agreement whereby their contribution towards the provision of free parking was similar to the contribution made by Hednesford Town Council’*.

More recently, Cabinet considered a report on Thursday 28th January 2021 which included *‘information in respect of the request received from Rugeley Town Council to provide free car parking in Rugeley for a 12-month period’*.

Rugeley Town Centre provides local amenities to the residents of Rugeley and falls both within and neighbours a number of the Council’s electoral wards. Due to this, the Cabinet decision in question is significant in terms of its effect on the communities living and working in the area. Part 10 of the Council’s Constitution outlines the principles of decision making, which include a presumption in favour of openness, an explanation of the options considered, and the reasons given for a decision.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting on Thursday 28th January 2021 confirm that *‘it was felt that the request from Rugeley Town Council could not be accepted at this time’*. Instead, it was agreed that a feasibility study was required ahead of a trial scheme whereby people visiting shops and hospitality venues in Rugeley Town Centre could have their car parking refunded and it was agreed that this would be included as an action point within the Council’s proposed Corporate Plan for 2021-2024.

Item No. 3.3

Cabinet previously noted that the intention of the motion was to assist local businesses already struggling and to attempt to help post pandemic. On this basis, it can be construed that any action taken in respect of parking charges is time sensitive and therefore requires a swift decision. Cabinet voted that a feasibility study was required prior to any trial being considered or implemented but failed to indicate any form of timeframe. If the public were to look at previous similar decisions by Cabinet then the indication is that the commencement of any such feasibility study is unlikely to be imminent, and this is required prior to any further trial even being considered. Notably, Cabinet have previously voted to undertake feasibility studies in respect of both Elmore Park Toilets and Rugeley Boardwalk, yet neither have commenced over 2 years on. If this were to be the case, then it can be assumed likely that the implementation of a trial, should it be agreed, would fall outside of what could be deemed as the reasonable 'recovery period' in which the Council could offer vital 'post-Covid' support to local businesses. The timing of any review is crucial in supporting the overall aims of such a scheme and there is no clear explanation or indication within the minutes that this has been considered, nor is there any justification to support delay.

Furthermore, Cabinet agreed that a feasibility study be included as an action point within the Council's proposed Corporate Plan for 2021-2024. Subsequently, the new Corporate Plan which will hopefully be adopted in the next week, does include '*Review the Council's car parking strategy*' under Objected 1.2(v). However, neither Cabinet nor the Corporate Plan (which covers a 4-year period) provides any form of concise timeline.

Furthermore, although Cabinet acknowledged the agreement between Hednesford Town Council and Cannock Chase District Council, it appears that no comparison was drawn when considering Rugeley Town Council's request. To ensure openness, information in respect of any similar existing arrangements should be reviewed and, in reaching any decision in respect of this proposal, the criteria, justification and reasons for any previous decisions should be considered and noted. If, the reasons behind Cabinet's decision, identified similarities, distinguishing or differing factors then it would ensure equality and fairness were apparent. With only limited information, it could be difficult to identify Cabinet's reasoning for applying an unequal charging structure. More so, this information would be helpful to understand the Cabinet's justification for using public funds to subsidise parking in some areas of the District, but not in others.

At present, it could be argued that the reasoning and analysis behind Cabinet's recent decision are unclear, particular when the current charging structure unfairly disadvantages residents and businesses in Rugeley and Cannock. Cannock Chase District Council has a responsibility to support economic recovery across the whole district and, as such, the main Town Centres in Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley should be treated equally and local businesses supported to thrive."

3.7 Councillor J.P. Johnson is proposing that:

"The decision taken by Cabinet on Thursday 28th January 2021 be referred to Full Council to be re-considered.

I propose that:

- (a) The proposal by Rugeley Town Council be reconsidered with a full awareness, understanding and knowledge of any existing arrangements and ensuring that all Members have sight of the considerations taken into account at the time that any previous decisions were reached.
- (b) Wider car parking arrangements be reconsidered as a matter of urgency and a timeframe agreed with the ambition of increasing footfall into Rugeley Town Centre, Hednesford Town Centre and Cannock Town Centre and supporting local businesses during the imminent period of recovery.”

3.8 The procedure for debating a call-in request is attached at Appendix 4.

4 Implications

4.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

The report to Cabinet on (insert date) referred to the financial implications arising from Cabinet’s resolutions. Any changes to those resolutions resulting from the outcome of this call-in process will form part of further reports to Cabinet, if applicable.

4.2 Legal

The powers of the Scrutiny Committees are limited by the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) and the Council’s Constitution. The Committee cannot substitute its own decision for that of the Cabinet as it has no power to make decisions on Executive functions. If the Committee disagrees with the decision of the Cabinet it can refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration, making sure recommendations as it wishes. The Cabinet must, if the Committee refers the matter back, reconsider the decision, having regard to the Committee’s recommendation, but it is not bound by the recommendation proposed.

4.3 Human Resources

None.

4.4 Risk Management

None.

4.5 Equality & Diversity

None.

4.6 Climate Change

None.

5 Appendices to the Report

Appendix 1: Cabinet report of 28 January 2021: Car Parking Charges – Rugeley.

Appendix 2: Extract of 28 January 2021 Cabinet Minutes.

Appendix 3: Call-in Proposer and Supporters forms.

Appendix 4: Procedure for considering a call-in request.

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Report of:	Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles
Contact Officer:	Mike Edmonds
Contact Number:	01543 464416
Portfolio Leader:	Environment & Climate Change
Key Decision:	No
Report Track:	Cabinet: 28/01/21

Cabinet
28 January 2021
Car Parking Charges - Rugeley

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet a request received from Rugeley Town Council on 13 January 2021 to provide free car parking in Rugeley for a 12-month period on the basis set out in the letter, attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 To seek Members' direction with regards to the next steps to be taken in relation to this request.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet are requested to consider the content of the request received from Rugeley Town Council in light of the information provided in this report and either:
- (a) Agree to the request; and the Budget recommended to Council is amended accordingly to reflect a £67,000 shortfall on car parking income and such funding identified to set a Balanced Budget
- (b) Reject the request, or
- (c) Propose another way forward in respect of the request.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

Key Issues

- 3.1 The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been significant and there is considerable uncertainty as to how quickly the economy will recover. It is highly likely that the pandemic will have a significant impact on our town centres and high streets within Cannock Chase, but at present it is not fully known if these impacts will be short-term or whether they may lead to longer-term changes. The Council's new Corporate Plan 2021-24 identifies that our town centres may need to change and to that end includes a range of objectives aimed at reshaping our town centres. One such objective is to review the Council's car parking strategy over the next 3 years.
- 3.2 The Council also faces a period of financial uncertainty, with a significant loss of income and the increased costs of the impact of Covid-19.
- 3.3 The Town Council's proposal to offer free car parking for a 12 month period in Rugeley, would result in a loss of income to the Council of £67k based on the budget provision for Car Parking in 2021-22. In addition, the Council would not be able to reclaim 75% of lost income (pre-covid) as part of the Government's Income Guarantee Scheme (currently available for April to June 21).
- 3.4 The reduction in income would have to be met from making savings elsewhere, implementing service reductions or use of balances. The Council however has already a forecast deficit of £300K for 2021-22

Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.5 Information in respect of the request received from Rugeley Town Council to provide free car parking in Rugeley for a 12-month period has been set out in this report for consideration. The options available to Members are included in the recommendations section of this report.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Economic Prosperity and supporting the recovery of our town centres are priorities that align with our current and future Corporate Plan for 2021-24.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 On 6 November 2020, the Council received a letter from Rugeley Town Council requesting that Cabinet consider providing permanent fee car parking in Rugeley on the same basis as that agreed with Hednesford Town Council. Appendix 2 refers.
- 5.2 Following discussions with the Leader of the Council and the portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change, the Town Council were informed that whilst Cabinet were likely to be supportive of this request and of its intentions, they could not agree to the offer at that time. The significant financial impact on the Council's future budgets and the fact that the Council had just installed new

contactless pay and display ticket machines and a pay by phone option across all of its pay and display car parks in the District were factors.

- 5.3 On 13 January the Clerk to Rugeley Town Council again wrote to the Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles requesting that Cabinet consider its latest proposal; to offer free car parking in Rugeley for a 12 month period, in return for a one-off contribution of circa £25k to £30k from the Town Council. This would provide the Council with some certainty of income at a time when car parking income cannot be assured.
- 5.4 The Clerk has been advised at Cabinet's request that Members would consider this proposal at Cabinet on 28 January 2021.
- 5.5 Pre-Covid car parking income for all of the Council's pay and display car parks in 2019-20 amounted to £735,288 of which £129,772 related to income from car parks in Rugeley.
- 5.6 So far the net car parking income for all of the Council's pay and display car parks in 2020-21 (April 20 – December 20) is £242,205 of which £50,080 relates to income from car parks in Rugeley. The forecast outturn for Rugeley Car Parks assumes income of approximately £67,000 and compensation as part of the Governments Income Guarantee of £49,000
- 5.7 It is difficult to determine the position for next year. However, if the position remains the same for next financial year, agreeing to the Town Council's proposal based on the income received year to date would result in a loss of income to the Council of circa £37k after the Town Council's contribution of £30k. Agreeing to this proposal would also prevent the Council from reclaiming lost car parking income of circa £13,000 as part of the Governments Income Guarantee scheme (at present only relating to the period April to June 2021).. Obviously if car parking is free no loss of income can be reclaimed under this scheme. The potential full loss, pre COVID, would be in the region of £100,000. The budget for 2021-22 assumes a potential loss in car park income of 25%
- 5.8 In considering this proposal another factor to take into account is the decision of Cabinet in February 2020 to commit £98k capital expenditure to introduce new contactless car park ticketing machines with an additional pay by phone option in all of the district's pay and display car parks. These were installed in December 2020.

Options open to Cabinet

- 5.9 To consider the content of the request in light of the information provided in this report and either:
 - (a) Accept the request and the Budget recommended to Council is amended accordingly and funding identified,
 - (b) Reject the request, or
 - (c) Propose another way forward in respect of the request.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The budgeted provision for Rugeley car parks for 2021-22 amounts to £97,000

Provision exists within the Environment portfolio for car park income in accordance with the original budget for 2020-21. A separate provision exists for the impact of COVID19 with a 25% reduction in income provided for.

A shortfall of £67,000 would exist if a one-off contribution of £30,000 was approved by Cabinet

In considering the proposal Cabinet will need to take into account the financial position of the Council with a deficit of £300,000 existing on the 2021-22 General Fund Budget as included elsewhere on the Agenda

6.2 Legal

None.

6.3 Human Resources

None.

6.4 Risk Management

One of the keys risk facing the Council is that the economic impact of the pandemic on our town centres is far greater than expected requiring a number of measures to be put in place to support local businesses and to reshape our town centres so that they are fit for purpose in the future. Unfortunately, it is still too early to determine exactly what recovery will look like and what is needed to provide support. Offering free car parking in isolation at this time may not be the answer and providing a package of support once the economic landscape is a little clearer is more likely to offer the support needed to support our town centres and high streets across the district.

6.5 Equality & Diversity

None.

6.6 Climate Change

None.

7 Appendices to the Report

Appendix A: Letter from Rugeley Town Council – 13 January 2021.

Appendix B: Letter from Rugeley Town Council – 6 November 2020.



Rugeley Town Council

Rose Theatre and Community Hall
Taylors Lane
Rugeley
Staffordshire
WS15 2AA

Tel: 01889 574074

Our Ref: RTC.147.20

6th November 2020

Mike Edmonds
Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles
Cannock Chase District Council
Civic Centre
Beecroft Road
Cannock
WS11 1BG

Dear Mike

Car Parking Charges in Rugeley

You may be aware that CCDC Cllr Dudson attended a meeting of Rugeley Town Council in October and part of the discussion was around free parking in Rugeley. He suggested that the Town Council may like to offer funding to Cannock Chase in order that town parking spaces are permanently offered free of charge.

To this end, at the Rugeley Town Council meeting last night, it was agreed that we contact yourselves with a request that Rugeley Town Council pay on the same basis as Hednesford Town Council in order that all town centre car parking spaces are offered free of charge to users.

Please can you advise how we can progress this for the town?

Yours sincerely

Hilary Goodreid
Town Clerk
Rugeley Town Council



The below letter was not included as part of the 28 January 2021 Cabinet report but is enclosed here to reflect the chronological order of correspondence between the Rugeley Town Council Clerk and the Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles.



Hilary Goodreid
Town Clerk
Rugeley Town Council
Rose Theatre and Community Hall
Taylors Lane
Rugeley
Staffordshire
WS15 2AA

Sent VIA Email - clerk@rugeleytowncouncil.gov.uk

17th December, 2020

Dear Hilary,

Re: Car Parking Charges in Rugeley

I am writing further to the Cabinet Briefing held on the 10th December where Members considered the request made on the 6th November by Rugeley Town Council to provide free car parking permanently in the town centre.

Cabinet noted that the Town Council was looking to reach an agreement whereby their contribution towards the provision of free parking was similar to the contribution made by Hednesford Town Council. Cabinet also noted the key purpose of the request, which was to support the recovery of Rugeley Town Centre and local businesses post the pandemic.

Cabinet Members were very supportive of the request but felt that it was too early in the pandemic recovery phase to make such a key decision in isolation. The full economic impact of the pandemic on our town centres and high streets is still unknown and will take several months at least to analyse and to start to evidence the long-term effects.

In addition, when considering this request Cabinet were fully aware of the Council's responsibility to play a key role in supporting the economic recovery of the entire district. It was considered that at this time there was no evidence that providing free car parking in town centres is the sole solution to helping business recover from the pandemic. It is more likely that a number of support measures will be needed to assist the recovery and reshaping of our town centres, including reviewing car parking provision to enable businesses to survive in the future.

The significant financial impact on the Council's budget (circa loss of £100k per annum pre-COVID) by agreeing to this request was also taken into account, as was the significant capital investment made in modernising all of the Council's current car park ticketing machines (Cabinet decision 27/02/2020) which were installed in car parks across the district in early December. Agreeing this request on the current terms offered at the present time would therefore worsen the Council's financial outlook at a difficult time when the long term effect of the pandemic is not yet fully clear.

Civic Centre, PO Box 28, Beecroft Road, Cannock, Staffordshire WS11 1BG

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To conclude, Cabinet fully appreciated the intention of the request made by the Town Council but could not agree to introduce free car parking in Rugeley Town Centre, at this time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Edmonds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'E'.

Mike Edmonds
Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles



Rugeley Town Council

Rose Theatre and Community Hall
Taylors Lane
Rugeley
Staffordshire
WS15 2AA
Tel: 01889 574074

Our Ref: RTC.148.21

13th January 2021

Mike Edmonds
Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles
Cannock Chase District Council
Civic Centre
Beecroft Road
Cannock
WS11 1BG

Dear Mike

Car Parking Charges in Rugeley

Thank you for your email outlining the response from the Cabinet Briefing meeting.

I took this to the Full Council meeting on 6th January 2021 for Cllrs consideration and the following points were raised:

- 1) It was never suggested that this arrangement would be the panacea to revitalize the town centre following the pandemic – more a case that it would help to bring shoppers back into the town centre and support local shops.
- 2) It is acknowledged that during all the periods of lockdown in the past 12 months, parking income will have been severely restricted. Would CCDC be interested in a one-off donation from Rugeley Town Council of around £25,000 - £30,000 which will ensure that car parks are offered FREE to local shoppers and businesses for a 12-month period? This will entice shoppers back and bring in an assured income to CCDC who will otherwise be struggling to receive income from parking fees for the foreseeable future.
- 3) Cllrs are just looking for Rugeley to be treated the same as Hednesford and therefore will CCDC be reviewing the amount received as a contribution from Hednesford Town Council in order that it more accurately reflects the possible income from CCDC charging for car parking spaces?

I understand that Cabinet will be meeting this Thursday and wonder if you could take this to the meeting for us please?

Yours sincerely

Hilary Goodreid
Town Clerk
Rugeley Town Council



Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Cabinet

Held on Thursday 28 January 2021 at 4:00 p.m.

Via Remote Access

Part 1

PRESENT: Councillors:

Adamson, G.	Leader of the Council
Alcott, G.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader
Pearson, A.R.	Community Safety and Partnerships Portfolio Leader
Preece, J.P.T.L.	Corporate Improvement Portfolio Leader
Mitchell, Mrs. C.	Culture and Sport Portfolio Leader
Johnson, T.B.	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader
Newbury, J.A.A.	Environment and Climate Change Portfolio Leader
Martin, Mrs. C.E.	Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader
Kraujalis, J.T.	Housing Portfolio Leader

62. Apologies

None received.

63. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No other Declarations of Interest were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

67. Car Parking Charges - Rugeley

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles (Item 6.1 – 6.6).

RESOLVED:

That as part of the action in the Council's proposed new Corporate Plan for 2021-24 to 'review the Council's car parking strategy', a feasibility study be undertaken to look at the implementation of a trial scheme whereby people visiting shops or hospitality venues in Rugeley town centre could have their car parking refunded.

Reasons for Decisions

Information in respect of the received from Rugeley Town Council to provide free car parking in Rugeley for a 12-month period was set out in the report for consideration, along with the available options for consideration by Cabinet.

It was felt that the request from Rugeley Town Council could not be accepted at this time, but it was important to acknowledge that they were engaging with the Council on work to improve Rugeley town centre.

As such, it was considered the agreed option could provide the benefits hoped for by the Town Council, but also avoid the unintended downside of people using free car parking provision without using the facilities in the town centre.

Proposer Form



Community Scrutiny Committee

Request for Call-in of a Decision of the Cabinet (Executive)

Minute Reference / Number: **Item 67**

Date of Cabinet Meeting: **Thursday 28th January 2021**

Subject: **Car Parking Charges in Rugeley**

Recommendation (describe the recommendation that you wish to see reviewed):

That a feasibility study be required ahead of a trial scheme whereby people visiting shops and hospitality venues in Rugeley Town Centre could have their car parking refunded be included as an action point within the Council's proposed Corporate Plan for 2021-2024.

Reason for Call-In (please explain):

Car parking charges differ and are implemented inconsistently across Council owned car parks in Cannock Chase, for example, there is a fee to park in both Rugeley and Cannock whereas it is free in Hednesford. Local Town Centres are struggling, and it is vital that the Council support small businesses to ensure a successful post pandemic recovery. Rugeley Town Council has recognised this and have offered to financially contribute towards the implementation of free parking to encourage visitors in the Town Centre and assist local businesses.

On 5th November 2020, Rugeley Town Council wrote to Cannock Chase District Council asking that they look into the possibility of offering free car parking as a way of supporting local businesses through the turbulent economic period as the country emerges from the Covid-19 lockdowns. Rugeley Town Council has offered a contribution of £30,000 for 2021/2022 in order to help alleviate the financial impact for Cannock Chase District Council.

This suggestion was detailed in a Cabinet Briefing considered on 10th December and, following that, a letter was sent to Rugeley Town Council on 17th December 2020 informing them that '*Cabinet fully appreciated the intention of the request made by the Town Council but could not agree to introduce free car parking in Rugeley Town Centre, at this time*'. However, within the letter Cabinet acknowledged '*the key purpose of the request, which was to support the recovery of Rugeley Town Centre and local businesses post pandemic*' and that the Town Council's request was '*to reach an agreement whereby their contribution towards the provision of free parking was similar to the contribution made by Hednesford Town Council*'.

More recently, Cabinet considered a report on Thursday 28th January 2021 which included *'information in respect of the request received from Rugeley Town Council to provide free car parking in Rugeley for a 12-month period'*.

Rugeley Town Centre provides local amenities to the residents of Rugeley and falls both within and neighbours a number of the Council's electoral wards. Due to this, the Cabinet decision in question is significant in terms of its effect on the communities living and working in the area. Part 10 of the Council's Constitution outlines the principles of decision making, which include a presumption in favour of openness, an explanation of the options considered, and the reasons given for a decision.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting on Thursday 28th January 2021 confirm that *'it was felt that the request from Rugeley Town Council could not be accepted at this time'*. Instead, it was agreed that a feasibility study was required ahead of a trial scheme whereby people visiting shops and hospitality venues in Rugeley Town Centre could have their car parking refunded and it was agreed that this would be included as an action point within the Council's proposed Corporate Plan for 2021-2024.

Cabinet previously noted that the intention of the motion was to assist local businesses already struggling and to attempt to help post pandemic. On this basis, it can be construed that any action taken in respect of parking charges is time sensitive and therefore requires a swift decision. Cabinet voted that a feasibility study was required prior to any trial being considered or implemented but failed to indicate any form of timeframe. If the public were to look at previous similar decisions by Cabinet then the indication is that the commencement of any such feasibility study is unlikely to be imminent, and this is required prior to any further trial even being considered. Notably, Cabinet have previously voted to undertake feasibility studies in respect of both Elmore Park Toilets and Rugeley Boardwalk, yet neither have commenced over 2 years on. If this were to be the case, then it can be assumed likely that the implementation of a trial, should it be agreed, would fall outside of what could be deemed as the reasonable 'recovery period' in which the Council could offer vital 'post-Covid' support to local businesses. The timing of any review is crucial in supporting the overall aims of such a scheme and there is no clear explanation or indication within the minutes that this has been considered, nor is there any justification to support delay.

Furthermore, Cabinet agreed that a feasibility study be included as an action point within the Council's proposed Corporate Plan for 2021-2024. Subsequently, the new Corporate Plan which will hopefully be adopted in the next week, does include *'Review the Council's car parking strategy'* under Objected 1.2(v). However, neither Cabinet nor the Corporate Plan (which covers a 4-year period) provides any form of concise time line.

Furthermore, although Cabinet acknowledged the agreement between Hednesford Town Council and Cannock Chase District Council, it appears that no comparison was drawn when considering Rugeley Town Council's request. To ensure openness, information in respect of any similar existing arrangements should be reviewed and, in reaching any decision in respect of this proposal, the criteria, justification and reasons for any previous decisions should be considered and noted. If, the reasons behind Cabinets decision, identified similarities, distinguishing or differing factors then it would ensure equality and fairness were apparent. With only limited information, it could be difficult to identify Cabinet's reasoning for applying an unequal charging structure. More so, this information would be helpful to understand the Cabinet's justification for using public funds to subsidise parking in some areas of the District, but not in others.

At present, it could be argued that the reasoning and analysis behind Cabinet’s recent decision are unclear, particular when the current charging structure unfairly disadvantages residents and businesses in Rugeley and Cannock. Cannock Chase District Council has a responsibility to support economic recovery across the whole district and, as such, the main Town Centres in Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley should be treated equally and local businesses supported to thrive.

What are you proposing?

The decision taken by Cabinet on Thursday 28th January 2021 be referred to Full Council to be re-considered.

I propose that:

- (a) The proposal by Rugeley Town Council be reconsidered with a full awareness, understanding and knowledge of any existing arrangements and ensuring that all Members have sight of the considerations taken into account at the time that any previous decisions were reached.
- (b) Wider car parking arrangements be reconsidered as a matter of urgency and a timeframe agreed with the ambition of increasing footfall into Rugeley Town Centre, Hednesford Town Centre and Cannock Town Centre and supporting local businesses during the imminent period of recovery.

Please indicate below who should be invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting?

Member(s)	Officer(s)	Representative from organisations/public
All Members detailed below that have supported this motion.	D. Piper, Head of Economic Prosperity	All Rugeley Town Councillors
Cllr Carl Bennett	M. Edmonds, Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles	Clerk of Rugeley Town Council
Cllr Christine Martin		
Cllr Anthony Boucker		
Cllr Paul Startin		
Cllr Mike Sutherland		

Name	Signature	Date
Cllr Justin Johnson (Proposer)	Via email as agreed	09/02/2021

Supporter Form



Community Scrutiny Committee

Request for Call-in of a Decision of the Cabinet (Executive)

Minute Reference / Number: **67**

Date of Cabinet Meeting: **28 January 2021**

Subject: **Car Parking Charges - Rugeley**

I support the request for call-in proposed by Councillor J.P. Johnson in respect of the above.

Name	Signature	Date
Cllr Robert Hughes	Via email as agreed	09/02/2021
Cllr Olivia Lyons	Via email as agreed	09/02/2021
Cllr Doug Smith	Via email as agreed	09/02/2021
Cllr Samantha Thompson	Via email as agreed	09/02/2021

Procedure for Debating Call-in of Cabinet Decisions at Meetings of the Scrutiny Committees

Notes:

Prior to members of the Committee debating the call-in, other Members of the Council present and other invited persons who are not members of the Scrutiny Committee will be requested to sit in the public gallery.

The relevant Cabinet Member may remain in the chamber and answer questions put through the Chairman. The Cabinet Member may speak at any time if invited by the Chairman. The Chairman will invite the Cabinet Member to exercise a right of reply at the end of the debate before the Proposer of the motion exercises their right of reply.

A Scrutiny Committee may exercise their statutory powers to invite such persons and request such information as they consider necessary to facilitate their examination of the matter and they adjourn the meeting if necessary to facilitate this.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee should be present for all of the debate prior to them exercising their vote to ensure that the Committee makes an informed decision based on the evidence presented.

Procedure

1. The Proposer (who must be one of the members of the Scrutiny Committee requesting the call-in) shall read their motion, formally propose the motion and give reasons for the call-in.
2. If none of the members of the Scrutiny Committee who requested the call-in are present, the Chairman shall ask if any other member of the Scrutiny Committee will propose the motion. If no member proposes the motion the call-in will be deemed to have been withdrawn.
3. Once the motion has been seconded, the Chairman shall allow those others of the five members who requested the call-in and who are present to speak before any debate.
4. During the course of the debate members of the Committee may propose minor amendments to the motion with the consent of the Proposer (or the stand-in Proposer).
5. The Committee may:-
 - (a) reject the motion, or
 - (b) refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration with a recommendation.
 - (c) refer the matter to full Council with a recommendation for a decision.
6. A formal written decision will be made on the call-in within ten days of the Scrutiny Committee first meeting.