

Dorset Council Proposed Parking Charges Strategy Report

June 2021

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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this strategy is to align parking charges across Dorset Council locations. This will bring consistency and structure to charges.

The strategy objectives are to:

- Implement a 3-level tariff structure that recognises the difference between coastal, town and rural locations
- Support Dorset Councils goals to reduce carbon footprint
- Fairer charging options for Dorset Council

The strategy includes car park tariffs, on-street tariffs and car park permits only. On-street residents' permit schemes, blue badge schemes and health care permits are not included in this strategy.

2. Background

Dorset Council Parking Services is currently working under the Parking Orders of the former six Councils, this has led to a disparity of tariffs between areas to the extent that some areas are free to park all day and others pay £9. An alignment of the Parking Orders is necessary to standardise charges to ensure equality for residents.

Parking charging cannot be considered in isolation, as the impact can create either a negative or positive ripple across a community and the surrounding areas. Thus, local needs and pressures have been investigated in formulating the charging structure.

Work on the strategy started in September 2020 with research, analysis and benchmarking activities. To fully understand local areas, there has been stakeholder engagement since March 2021, this will continue until the final strategy is taken to Dorset Council Overview Committee and Cabinet in the Autumn of 2021. The new charges are planned to be implemented in January 2022.

3. Legal Duty

Legal advice was sought to confirm that the method for updating the parking charges follow guidance as per the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984.

3.1 Consultation

Dorset Council are statutorily required to consult with the chief officer of police for the area before making the order under schedule 9 of the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984. The former Council parking policies state that consultation is required with Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts and Town Councils as part of any charges review.

Dorset Council has chosen to undertake a non-statutory engagement in advance of publishing its proposals although there is no general duty to consult with the public at large. Engagement is also being undertaken with Parish Councils.

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4. Proposed Charging Strategy

4.1 Proposed Levels

The Parking Charging Strategy is based on a 3-Level structure that acknowledges the rural, coastal and town locations that Dorset enjoys. It also takes into consideration Dorset's popular visitor and tourist destinations.

The following table shows which location sits under each level:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Location	Location	Location
Beaminster	Blandford	Corfe Castle
Charmouth	Bridport	Lyme Regis
Ferndown	Dorchester	Portland
Gillingham	Shaftesbury	Swanage
Sturminster Newton	Sherborne	West Bay
Verwood	Wareham	Weymouth (beach area)
West Bexington	Weymouth (shops)	
	Wimborne	

Level 1 is Dorset's smaller and more rural locations. It is proposed to have one all year-round charge for this level, except for West Bexington and Charmouth that will have a seasonal charge (see tariff in section 4.2 Proposed Car Park Tariff). Level 2 is Dorset's shopping destinations. It is proposed that there is one all year-round charge for these car parks.

Level 3 is Dorset's main tourist destinations. It is proposed that this level have seasonal charges. Weymouth appears in level 2 and 3. The car parks in Weymouth that are used for shopping will sit in level 2 and the beach area car parks will sit in level 3. Swanage refers to on-street charges only as the car parks are owned by the town council.

4.2 Proposed Car Park Tariff

The following table shows the proposed tariff for each level:

	30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	All day
Level 1 Low season	£0.50	£0.70	£1.00	£1.50	£2.00	£2.50	£4.00
Level 1 High season (Charmouth & West Bexington only)	£1.00	£1.50	£2.50	£3.50	£4.50	£5.50	£10.00
Level 2	£0.50	£1.00	£1.50	£2.20	£3.00	£4.00	£6.00
Level 3 Low season	£0.50	£1.00	£1.50	£2.20	£3.00	£4.00	£6.00
Level 3 High season	£1.00	£1.50	£2.50	£3.50	£4.50	£5.50	£10.00

The tariff simplifies current charges and aims to be logical and gradual. The three levels acknowledge the diversity of Dorset's locations, by having charges that suit the local environment.

The tariff supports local high streets as they are at a low rate (compared to benchmarked locations). It aims to keep charges at a point that will entice customers into the car parks, so that parking is not displaced onto residential roads. It intends to be priced at a point that customers will choose to use active or green forms of travel rather than driving.

Peak season charges are 1st April to 31st October, to cover the extended visitor season that is now seen in Dorset. Level 1 high season charges refer to Charmouth and West Bexington only, the other locations in level 1 and all locations in level 2 do not have seasonal charges as these car parks tend to be used by Dorset Council residents more so than visitors.

Peak season charges are aimed at visitors to Dorset, these charges are benchmarked to similar tourist destinations. Level 3 low season matches level 2, which enables residents to access our tourist destinations at the same cost during the low season.

4.3 Proposed Dorset Car Park Permit

There are currently approximately 76 different car park permits that are issued across Dorset Council. As part of this strategy the former permits will be discontinued in a phased approach (live permits will not be withdrawn but will be replaced by the new 'Dorset Car Park Permit(s)' when they expire).

The permit will have the option for monthly or annual payment. Market research is being done into the cost and offer of the permit.

There will be eligibility criteria for permit applications and the vehicle must be registered in the name of the permit holder. Residents will need to prove that they are a resident of Dorset Council. Businesses will need to prove that they pay business rates (or equivalent) to Dorset Council. People who work in the Dorset Council area will need to evidence this to be eligible for the permit.

4.4 Proposed On-Street Tariff

The following table shows the proposed tariff for each level:

		30 mins	1 hour	1 hour 30 mins
Level 1	Proposed car park charges	£0.50	£0.70	£1.00
Low season	Proposed on-street	£1.00	£1.10	£1.50
Level 1	Proposed Car park charges	£1.00	£1.50	£2.50
High season	Proposed on-street	£1.50	£2.00	£3.00
Level 2	Proposed Car park charges	£0.50	£1.00	£1.50
	Proposed on-street	£1.00	£1.50	£2.00
Level 3	Proposed Car park charges	£0.50	£1.00	£1.50
Low season	Proposed on-street	£1.00	£1.50	£2.00
Level 3	Proposed Car park charges	£1.00	£1.50	£2.50
High season	Proposed on-street	£1.50	£2.00	£3.00

On-street charges are higher than car park charges to encourage drivers into car parks. This helps to keep town centres clear of traffic and thus supports the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Currently, there is no change to parking waivers, blue badges and health care permits. There are no on-street charges in Level 1 locations at present.

5. Charging Strategy Review

Charges will be reviewed annually. When reviewing parking charges Dorset Council will take into account a large number of factors, including but not limited to:

- a. The recovery of expenditure incurred on the provision and management of the public car parks to avoid this financial burden falling on to the council taxpayer and depriving other vital council services of crucial funds.
- b. The parking charges of its competitors, including the charges made by private sector car parks within the local area, as well as comparing its charges with Dorset's Town Councils.
- c. The effectiveness of short-term parking charges in town centre car parks in facilitating turnover of car parking spaces in order to attract more visitors/shoppers to the town centres.
- d. The demand for car parking, as evidenced by occupancy rates at different time and date points
- e. The consumer price index to understand the impact of inflation rate on parking charges.

Any increase in charges will be subject to the usual legal procedure for consultation and advertisement.

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6. Conclusion

The Parking Charging Strategy will enable Dorset Council to align parking charges that are currently inconsistent across Dorset, which is unfair for residents. It also appreciates that Dorset's areas are unique by having a 3-level charging structure and utilises prime locations.

Through the strategy Parking Services will be assisting Dorset Council's goal to reduce the carbon footprint and it will also give residents fairer options for paying for parking.