



The Oakwood Centre  
Headley Road, Woodley  
Berkshire, RG5 4JZ

FAO Chris Easton  
Traffic Management Team  
Place & Growth  
PO Box 153  
Shute End  
Wokingham  
RG40 1WL

18 January 2023

Dear Chris,

**RE: Objection to Proposed Car Parking Charges, Woodley Car Parks**

We are writing on behalf of the Woodley Town Council Planning & Community Committee. This committee represents a mix of Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour Councillors. This letter has been agreed between members of all parties and seeks to raise concerns with the new parking arrangements in a non-political way with a focus on the potential negative impact of the proposed charges on the Woodley community.

We have a number of issues that we would like to raise and would like to ask for a series of concessions in implementing the scheme. We have given rationale for these concessions and hope that you will respond to each concern in a positive way.

The Planning & Communities Committee has four primary concerns about the parking charges:

1. Change of chargeable times
2. Scale of increases
3. Addition of new charges
4. Disproportionate contribution to WBC parking funds from Woodley

We would also like reassurance that this does not allow implementation of charging in car parks listed in schedule 1 (e.g. The Bulmershe Leisure Centre Car Park) without additional consultation in the future.

Our concerns are detailed below:

## **CHANGE OF CHARGEABLE TIMES**

### **Summary of Concern:**

Reduced evening footfall to local business, primarily affecting <30-minute visitors between 6pm & 10pm.

### **Background**

Woodley has a fledgeling and fragile evening economy currently with a number of new hospitality businesses opening in the last year. The majority of these businesses rely on take-away trade to operate and we have concerns that paying £1 to collect a takeaway in the evening will simply drive business away to local takeaway establishments with free parking (around 10 establishments within a one-mile radius of Woodley Town Centre). Additionally, shoppers frequenting Woodley for shopping in the evening are likely to be driven to use ASDA, Sainsburys or Aldi, all within three miles and offering evening parking free of charge.

Passing trade is likely to be similarly impacted as shoppers wanting to stop by for small grocery purchases in-transit are likely to be driven to Tesco Metro or Marks and Spencer (both within a mile of Woodley Town Centre).

The proposal also appears to remove the 30-minute parking option in Headley Road, which seems unnecessary and was presumably introduced initially to allow short visits to Woodley in the manner described above.

### **Proposed solution / Requested Actions:**

Ideally abolish the evening charges until further research & consultation on impact can be performed. If WBC is not amenable to establishing a dataset to support decision making, the committee would like to suggest that there is a free 30 minute session after 6pm to allow for passing trade / takeaway collection to proceed unhindered.

30 minute parking option re-instated in Headley Road.

We request that WBC acknowledge and address the committee's concerns in writing, detailing what mitigation can be put in place to protect local businesses from the negative impact of this charging on footfall. If WBC chooses not to perform any research into evening usage patterns, the committee would like to request the rationale for this decision.

The committee would be pleased to discuss alternative methods of charging in the evenings. The committee also recognises that limited evening usage data is available for Woodley Town Centre Car Parks and requests that WBC engages in research in the period before and after the price changes to assess the impact on footfall to the town centre that charging creates.

## **SCALE OF INCREASES**

### **Summary of Concern:**

The significant increase in rates will make Woodley Town Centre uncompetitive.

## **Background**

The proposed charges now put Woodley Town Centre in a highly uncompetitive position vs other local area retail centres. More than doubling some charges will jeopardise visits from out of area. With retail centres in Twyford, Lower Earley and Winnersh offering free parking, these excessive charges put Woodley at a competitive disadvantage to other local centres within Wokingham Borough.

Whilst we recognise that Wokingham's charges remain higher, this is perhaps reflected by the far superior parking areas in the town and the significant regeneration project to drive footfall. Conversely, Woodley Town Centre is aesthetically challenging and has had almost no investment in recent years. If these parking charges came with the promise of capital investment this might be more palatable.

As the charges are far above inflation, even if scaled for the last five years since the last increase, the committee would have limited reason to object, however the doubling (and more) of certain charges represents a serious risk to both the commercial and social prosperity of the Town Centre.

### **Proposed Solution / Requested Actions:**

Reduce the proposed charges. The committee suggests that the maximum tolerable increase would be the application of 5 years of inflation to the current charges. The committee would be pleased to discuss alternative charging schedules that reflect the appeal and competition that Woodley Town Centre faces, however it is the opinion of the committee that the proposed charging schedule presents a significant risk to the prosperity of the Town.

We request that WBC acknowledge and address the committee's concerns in writing with either a commitment to mitigate the concerns detailed above, or if WBC is unable or unwilling to address these concerns with practical action, the committee would like to request the rationale for this decision

## **ADDITION OF NEW CHARGES**

### **Summary of Concern**

New charges for residential overnight permits, market traders

### **Background**

Woodley's small markets have been struggling to attract vendors in recent months. An additional £35 cost to attend would be potentially fatal to the markets in Woodley. Would this also apply to the car boot sale in Woodley? This charge would effectively destroy this popular community event.

Similarly, with a number of apartments in the town centre, both the fairness of the 'resident overnight charge' and the hours that it operates seems questionable. With the cost and time restrictions, surely this will just drive resident overnight parking onto already congested local roads in the area?

### **Proposed Solution / Requested Actions:**

Remove overnight resident permit charges for town centre residents currently able to park between 6pm & 8am for free.

Remove the market trader charges.

We request that WBC acknowledge and address the committee's concerns in writing with either a commitment to mitigate the concerns detailed above, or if WBC is unable or unwilling to address these concerns with practical action, the committee would like to request the rationale for this decision

## **DISPROPORTIONATE CONTRIBUTION TO WBC PARKING FUNDS**

### **Summary of Concern**

The stated objective of the parking charge increases are to address the budget deficit that WBC faces, however the burden of monies raised through the charges falls almost entirely on Woodley and Wokingham.

### **Background**

In March 2022, excluding Park & Ride, Station and country park income, Woodley and Wokingham contributed 96% of parking revenues in the borough. Unsurprisingly, Wokingham accounted for 63% with Woodley contributing 33%. As the effect of the charges will be to drive traffic to Lower Earley and Twyford, for the most part where free parking is available at their retail spaces, Woodley would be left at both a competitive disadvantage to these towns, whilst effectively paying significantly more than it's share of the overall contribution. Woodley essentially will suffer to the double benefit of other parishes in the area who see the benefit of the increased revenue whilst their local economies receive a boost from Woodley's lost footfall.

### **Proposed Solution / Requested Actions:**

Address this somehow either through revision of charges as previously suggested, or through capital investment in Woodley to increase the appeal of our town to local consumers.

We request that WBC acknowledge and address the committee's concerns in writing with either a commitment to mitigate the concerns detailed above, or if WBC is unable or unwilling to address these concerns with practical action, the committee would like to request the rationale for this decision

Finally, although we have not listed Sunday charging as a primary objection as we recognise that this is becoming more normal, we do have some general concerns over the impact to park use and would ask that this new charge is included with any future review of the impact of charging.

We hope that you receive our concerns in the constructive manner that we offer them and hope that you will be willing to engage in a constructive dialogue to find a way forward that protects the community interests that Woodley Town Council represents. Whilst we remain opposed to the suggested charging schedule, we recognise that a review of the parking charges in Woodley Town is reasonable and would be pleased to seek a compromise that both protects the interests of Woodley's community and allows WBC to develop increased parking revenues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Wicks', is written over a faint, light-colored grid background.

**Philip Wicks**  
**Chairman - Planning & Community Committee**  
**Woodley Town Council**

(P&C Committee: Cllr Jenny Cheng,  
Cllr Keith Baker  
Cllr David Bragg  
Cllr Carol Jewell  
Cllr Majid Nagra  
Cllr Janet Sartorel  
Cllr Richard Skegg  
Cllr Bill Soane)

cc. Cllr. P. Fishwick (Executive Member: Active Travel, Transport & Highways)  
Cllr. C. Jones (Leader of the Council)  
[TM.Consultations@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:TM.Consultations@wokingham.gov.uk)