

Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	27 January 2026
Report Title	Off-Street Parking Order Consultation report
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director and Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. Approve the changes suggested at 2.13 to the Off-Street Parking Order and delegate officers to proceed to 'Has Made Order' for variation no.10.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following extensive discussion on the likely impacts of implementing charges at free car parks, the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee resolved that six car parks would have standard tariffs applied from 1 April 2026 and that the off-street parking order consultation should proceed.
- 1.2 This report summarises the responses to the off-street order consultation and asks Members to consider the responses and action to be taken.
- 1.3 This report does not revisit the policy decision to charge for parking.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council operates 57 car parks across the Borough. 29 are free to use (six in Sittingbourne, 6 in Faversham and 17 in Sheppey). 28 are pay and display car parks where fees are charged. 40 are managed by parking services and 17 are operated by the greenspaces team, based at recreation grounds, open spaces and country parks. Some are in key town centre locations, others are in rural and lower footfall areas.
- 2.2 Following the decision to implement charging at six currently free car parks across the Borough from 1 April 2026 (below), the necessary off-street order consultation was undertaken (variation no.10). The consultation was advertised via posters in each of the car parks and local newspapers from 5 December with the closing date for comments, support or objection by Monday 5th January.
 - a) Little Oyster, Minster on Sea
 - b) Park Road, Queenborough

- c) Library car park, Queenborough
- d) Front Brents, Faversham
- e) Grafton Road, Sittingbourne
- f) Minster Road, Halfway

2.3 A second off-street order consultation (variation no.9) was undertaken in relation to the general increase in hourly rate across all car parks, removal of the 30-minute tariff and the introduction of a fixed evening rate, set out in the Council's Fees and Charges document at Policy and resources Committee on 26 November 2025, which was approved to go out for consultation.

2.4 A number of petitions have been received as set out below;

Number	Main Petition Objection	Number of Signatories
Petition 1	Relating generally to 'Introduction of Charges at the car parks'	2816
Petition 2	Relating to 'Introduction of Charges at Queenborough, Park Road'	328
Petition 3	Relating to 'Introduction of Charges at Queenborough Library (Castle Connections)'	49
Petition 4	Relating generally to 'Introduction of Charges'	124
Petition 5	Relating generally to 'Introduction of Charges'	505
Petition 6	Relating to 'Introduction of Charges at Queenborough'	107
	TOTAL	3,929

2.5 Outside of these petitions a total of 79 responses were received. None were in support, 9 were general comments and 70 were objections. Every response was recorded and acknowledged.

2.6 Appendix I summarises the responses received, whether they were in support or objected to the order and also gives more location specific detail.

2.7 We also received comments from local town and parish councils (Minster PC, Queenborough Town Council, Sheerness Town Council) which can be seen at appendix II.

2.8 Table 1 below identifies the general themes raised in the objections received across each of the car parks, with the Council's response next to it.

	Summary of comment/objection	Comments
1	Displacement – vehicles onto highway	Concerns about the impact on ‘residents parking’ covered several issues including the loss of overnight parking, where off-street locations are currently used to provide relief from congested on-street locations coupled with the financial impact of residents having to pay for it. The initial report on 12 November recognised this as a potential short-term risk. The Council has the ability to mitigate this through use of on-street restrictions at pinch points where safety maybe a concern. This issue has been seen across the Borough over the years where new charges have been introduced and generally settles pretty quickly. The Council does operate resident parking scheme arrangements in some car parks across the Borough, but these have generally been historic and when changes were made to highways directly outside houses that had on-street parking. Members could decide in any of the 6 locations that resident schemes could be offered but this is likely to cause further objections, as where do you draw the line of what properties are included or not and of course would likely reduce the income generated to support operation of the car parks.
2	School safety	Congestion at school times, particularly at Halfway Car Park on Minster Road. We received objection from the primary school that backs onto the car park, setting out the impact it would have on parents. This is not a problem which is unique to Halfway. All schools in the Borough (and indeed county) suffer from congested roads at peak times of drop-off and pick up. However, it is recognised that this car park has played a supporting role over the years, albeit unlikely satisfying all demand due to its small size. Members therefore could consider amending the off-street order in relation to Halfway car park to have no charges between 8.30 and 9.30am and 2.30 to 3.30pm.
3	Economic impact - businesses	The main argument was an impact on businesses where residents ‘pop in’, for example takeaways or to pick up an order from a retail shop. As is the case for most of the points raised in objection to the charging proposal, this point is not unique to Sheppey or any of the free car parks in Faversham or Sittingbourne and the vast majority of residents pay to park to access shops and take away restaurants. No reasons were given as to why the businesses in Sheppey would be more affected than those

		in Faversham or Sittingbourne, where charging has occurred for many years. It is not fair that the people who park in Sittingbourne and Faversham are in effect subsidising the cost of free parking to benefit the businesses in Sheppey. Furthermore, employers were concerned that staff are used to free parking. All employers have to consider what benefits and terms and conditions they can offer employees. There should be no expectation of free parking where they do not control the car park. Season tickets are available that are heavily discounted based on daily tariffs.
4	Economic impact - tourism	This was particularly raised for Queenborough and Little Oyster, Minster car parks. As was discussed at the last committee it is very unusual for seafront car parks to be free of charge and the other seafront car parks on the Island at Sheerness and Leysdown are already pay and display. At Minster there is a large amount of free on-street parking at the Leas as an alternative and some overflow parking for the summer season opposite the Shingle bank. Those wishing to park right at the seafront can choose to do so via pay and display as in other areas. The proposed charges are on the whole lower than other coastal resorts. Members could debate the merits of seasonal charges at these coastal locations e.g. March to October.
5	Financial viability - Local government reorganisation	A number of comments suggested that the costs of implementation would not be realised from income received, ahead of pending local government reorganisation plans and therefore any decisions should be deferred. Regardless of the structure of local government moving forward, the assets will be owned by a publicly funded organisation. Decisions taken now will benefit whichever organisation is in charge. Income taken from 1 April 2026 would allow maintenance and inspection of the assets the Council (or future entity) has responsibility for.
6	Legalities - Sec 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act	Many of the objections referred to this section of the Road Traffic Regulation Act legislation, which describes how income from on-street parking and the enforcement income of on and off-street parking must be spent. Off-street car park income is not considered in this section of the act.
7	Legalities – Queenborough Charter	One objection suggests that the Council is bound by a historic charter. The Queenborough Borough Charter was effectively repealed as a result of a combination of steps. Queenborough was reviewed by the 1876 Royal Commission and identified for reform. The Borough did not

		renew it's (Royal) Borough Charter but rather was reformed as a Municipal Borough under the Municipal Corporations Acts. It remained a Municipal Borough until the Local Government reorganisation in 1974. As such, the original Borough Charter is of historical interest but has no bearing on the current situation.
8	Equalities – particularly the elderly and disabled	Our car parks already provide free parking for blue badge holders who are also eligible for on-street parking in most on-street circumstances. The argument for the elderly could be replicated across the Borough, with elderly residents in other locations already being charged. There was no information given as to why older people should pay to park in Faversham and Sittingbourne car parks and not in the free car parks in Sheppey, Faversham or Sittingbourne. Members would need to be clear on the rationale for this if they wish to accept this reason. There are two car parks (Front Brents and Grafton Road) suggested for cashless payment that could be considered a barrier. These were selected only due to the small number of spaces making investment in a full machine not cost effective and the more remote location at Front Brents (concerns of vandalism). As per the Parking Policy, it is our intention to offer all payment methods wherever possible. However, payment via our cashless parking provider RingGo is not only reliant on a 'smart phone'. A telephone line is also available whereby customers can pay by a debit or credit card over the phone like we all do for other transactions. Furthermore, there are alternative car park options nearby that do offer the full range of payment method.
9	Lack of transparency on costs of implementation and income assumptions	The cost of implementing signage, lines and machines is estimated at £8k per car park, subject to individual site inspection. Enforcement levels will remain the same, so will not immediately add additional cost, but the costs can then be spread over a larger number of car parks. Over time each car park will require maintenance and resurfacing and therefore income is pooled to fund future costs. The expenditure on car parks across the Borough is not broken down by each location in our accounts, as not all cost is directly attributable e.g. the cost of staffing to inspect, enforcement changes from month to month - however we estimate that each car park will cost between £4,500 and

		£6,500 a year. Some of that cost is existing due to usage e.g. repairs/electricity for lighting some will be new e.g. machine maintenance and cash collection. The income was an estimate based on other similar sized car parks and based on predicted lower than average usage in year one. Clearly there will be location differences and so this is purely an estimate, and budgets will be amended accordingly as we get more data on usage.
10	Length of consultation – holiday period	The minimum required consultation period is 21 days. The consultation officially lasted 32 days from the date of advert in the local newspapers but signs were placed in car parks earlier that week and we accepted submissions that were received late as well. The order was publicised well across social media and therefore we feel there was adequate time to make objections known.

- 2.9 There is clearly a large amount of opposition to the implementation of charges at the six currently free car parks, although the majority of this opposition is in relation to the four car parks on the Isle of Sheppey. Many of the arguments above were indeed discussed and debated by Members of the committee when the decision was taken. Other areas of the Borough have charges in place at car parks next to schools or libraries or retail/food outlets. Not all residents own vehicles and the principle of those using the facility should pay is fair.
- 2.10 The key point is that, whilst being free to use, these car parks do incur expenditure through the requirement for regular inspection by Council staff, the need for enforcement staff to visit to deal with contraventions to the car park rules and for periodic repair and maintenance. Failing to charge will result in users of the other council car parks subsidising those who park for free and this is not fair or equitable.
- 2.11 Charging for use of these car parks will help contribute to the maintenance and inspection of the car parks. Although each car park does not need resurfacing annually, the costs of a car park resurface are high (and increasing) and so annual income over a longer time period helps to contribute to these one-off costs by protecting reserves that can be spent on other Council services. An example in some objections was that of the recently resurfaced car park at Ship on Shore. The cost of the resurfacing was £63,307 which should have a life expectancy of about 10-15 years. With an annual average of about £7,000 a year in income, the principle of charging at that car park will not only make a contribution to future repair costs, but it also resolved a long-standing issue of poor visual amenity and nuisance vehicles.
- 2.12 There is also general opposition to the increase in charges. The outcome of variation 9 responses will be included within the Policy and resources report on the budget.

2.13 Following the feedback received, Members need to decide if any amendments should be made to the Off-Street Order. Officers recommend the following changes;

- a) Remove charges for the period 8.30am – 9.30am and 2.30 – 3.30pm at Halfway car park, Minster Road to help alleviate school safety concerns.
- b) Implement seasonal charges at Little Oyster and Queenborough, Park Road car park operating from 1 March to 30 September each year to ensure that peak season availability is controlled, but the car park is available for resident use through the quieter periods of the year.

3 Proposals

3.1 Approve the changes suggested at 2.13 to the Off-Street Parking Order and delegate officers to proceed to 'Has Made Order' for variation no.10.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Implement the charges without any amendment. This is not recommended as the changes were based on comments or recommendations from the consultation.
- 4.2 As the decision to start charging at these six locations was taken at the 12 November 2025 Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee, this report is only about amendments to the terms of the Off-Street Parking Order and therefore it is not an option to overrule the original decision.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The whole report details the consultation taken on this matter.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Community – Complete the Parking Policy Review Running the Council – maximising income
Financial, Resource and Property	Maintaining free car parks is a cost to the council that could be mitigated by transferring to town or parish councils or by the introduction of charges. The draft budget proposal predicts circa £35,000 per year would be generated at the car parks proposed in year one. Operational costs are estimated at around £4,500 - £6,500 per car park per year.

	The Council spends circa £1.4m a year managing 'off-street' car parks across the Borough. Staffing costs are circa £265,000 a year. The one-off cost of installing payment machines, lining and signage in the locations (predicted about £8k per car park) would be covered by the Civil Enforcement Fund reserve which currently stands at £87,703.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Off-street parking is controlled through the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and Traffic Management Act 2004. Following the Off-Street Order Consultation, the Order needs to proceed to 'Has Made' prior to implementation in April 2026.
Crime and Disorder	Free car parks have fewer restrictions on them and vehicles can therefore be left abandoned. This costs the council through enforcement and removal. Charging at car parks may displace vehicles into unsuitable parking locations. This will need to be controlled using the powers available to the Council.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	There is an argument that in order to encourage fewer private journeys, favouring active travel and support the climate emergency, that no car parks should be free.
Health and Wellbeing	Not applicable to this report
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	Not applicable to this report
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The Council needs income to enable the required repairs and maintenance to be made to our car parks. Free car parks are currently subsidised by pay and display car parks, however, receive less investment than them, with the minimum spent in order to meet basic health and safety standards.
Equality and Diversity	Undefined, free car parks may reduce access for disabled users. Blue badge holders benefit from free parking in our car parks.
Privacy and Data Protection	Not applicable to this report

7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Summary of Consultation responses
- Appendix II: Copy of Parish/Town Council submissions

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 A link to the [Council's Parking Policy](#).
- 8.2 Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee report – [A review of free car parks](#) 12 November 2025.
- 8.3 [Draft Budget 2026/27 Report](#) – Policy and resources Committee 27 November 2025.