*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
	13

TITLE OF REPORT: HITCHIN CAR PARK TARIFF REVIEW – YEAR 2010 – 2011

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, HOUSING AND ENTERPRISE

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report summarises ticket sales from NHDC operated car parks in Hitchin between April to November 2010.

2. FORWARD PLAN

2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation related to a decision in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The 2010/11 Corporate Businesses Planning process resulted in the Council deciding to change tariffs in NHDC car parks that delivered rounded tariffs (i.e. to 50p or £1) alongside the need to generate additional income to assist with the delivery of the Council’s Parking Strategy.

3.2 The tariff changes in Hitchin were set to compare with similarly prices and located private car parks in the town centre. This meant the majority of 1 hour tariffs increased to £1 and 2 hour to £1.50. The exception being Woodside where the 1 hour tariff decreased to 50p and 2 hour increased to £1 due mainly to its distance from the town centre.

3.3 Long stay tariffs did not increase as much. As the rounding strategy generally meant a smaller proportional increase of 10 or 20p depending on each car park.

3.2 Appendix A sets out the tariffs as they were in 2009/10 and as they now are. Appendix B sets out ticket sales figures for the April to November 2010 period.

3.3 In addition to tariff increases, the Council implemented a new Pay by Phone (i.e. ‘RingGo’) service in all car parks in mid March 2010. Appendix C shows the RingGo usage data for the April to November 2010 period.

4. ISSUES

4.1 Experience from previous tariff changes (i.e. generally a 10p increase across all tariffs) suggests a down turn in ticket sales in car parks by as much as 10%. This situation normally recovers over a period of time but this cannot be defined precisely.

4.2 Previous tariff changes have generally taken place in more positive economic circumstances. A combination of tariff increase and economic downturn would be expected to result in lower ticket sales, possible in excess of 10%.

4.3 Other authorities in Hertfordshire have experienced downturns in ticket sales even where no tariff increases were implemented. Appendix B also shows that Hitchin Swimming Centre (i.e. HSC) has had a downturn in ticket sales despite there being no tariff change this year.

4.4 Across all car parks in Hitchin over the April to November 2010 period there has been a downturn of 6.1% in ticket sales. Across all car parks in the district this figure is 11.6%. Given the context set out in 4.1 and 4.2 the Hitchin figure is not unexpected and is arguably better than might have been anticipated.

4.5 Despite the reduced ticket sales income before VAT in Hitchin car parks over the same period has increased from £515,944 to £650,743. Approximately £20,000 (net of VAT) has been received from the Pay by Phone service.

4.5 Some of the larger reductions in ticket sales have occurred in those car parks that have had the largest increase in short stay tariffs (Lairage, Christchurch and Biggin Lane). These car parks are more peripheral and/or less well known so where spare capacity has arisen in other car parks more peripheral car parks are likely to suffer.

4.6 St Mary's Square and the Portmill Lane Car Parks have had a reduction in ticket sales that may well have been expected if tariffs were increased by10p as in previous years. In general, however, usage of these car parks reflects their popularity in relation to proximity to shops and market. These car parks are still likely to be first choice for short stay parking because of their location.

4.7 Woodside and Bancroft car parks have both had an increase in ticket sales. Woodside has seen a significant increase. Some of the increase may be due to its cheaper short stay tariff than other car parks. Some of this increase may also be due in part to the effects of displaced parking following implementation of the Triangle CPZ and closure of the former B&Q site as a car park for Station users.

4.8 With regards to the Pay by Phone service, whilst overall levels of usage are proportionally small the overall trend is for increased use month on month, almost doubling in use in eight months. It is worth noting that the Pay by Phone service is widely used across all car parks, not just long stay, despite the 20p convenience fee added to the car park tariff for each session purchased.

4.9 Numbers of Penalty Charge Notices (for parking contraventions) are also down this year compared to last year. This covers both on and on street but it indicates that there are fewer people visiting town centres.

4.10 By way of wider context, town centre retail vacancy rates in Hitchin are 8.4% of units in 2010 as compared to 9.3% in 2009. This may help explain why the downturn in car park ticket sales in Hitchin is lower than the district figure (see 4.4). Hitchin vacancy rate figures compare favourably with the national average (14.8%) and even the four town average in the district (11.9%)

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None arising from this report.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None arising from this report.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None other than officer time preparing this report.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

8.1 None considered necessary for this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That the Area Committee notes the report and any comments it wishes to make about car park tariffs in Hitchin be reported to the appropriate Portfolio Holders via the Transport Policy Officer.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To ensure the Area Committee is able to consider the effects of 2010/11 car park tariffs and report any comments to appropriate Portfolio Holders for their consideration in the forthcoming Corporate Business Planning process.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11.1 None relevant to this report.

12. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Hitchin Car Park Tariffs 2009 and 2010
Appendix B – Hitchin Car Park ticket sales April – November 2010
Appendix C – Pay by Phone usage April – November 2010

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

13.1 Simon Young, Transport Policy Officer
01462 474846
simon.young@north-herts.gov.uk

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Car Park Income Monitoring data