



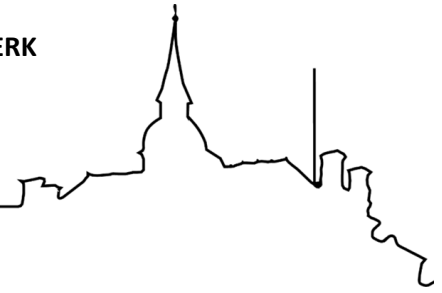
TOWCESTER TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN HALL

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INTERIM TOWN CLERK

Deborah Jewell



Sent by email

Re: Objection to Proposed Parking Charges in Towcester

On behalf of Towcester Town Council, I am writing to formally object to the proposed introduction of increased parking charges on West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) car parks within Towcester. We are deeply concerned that, despite earlier public consultation responses strongly opposing charges, and the subsequent decision not to proceed, WNC is now revisiting this matter with significantly higher fees. This reversal raises serious questions about procedural fairness and the principles of legitimate expectation in public law, whereby those consulted are entitled to expect that decisions reached following consultation will not be overturned without clear justification or meaningful engagement.

The proposed charges appear excessive and risk rendering these parking areas underused, particularly outside trading hours. Rather than serving their intended purpose, vacant spaces may inadvertently encourage anti-social behavior and fail to provide safe, accessible parking for residents. Parking charges will displace cars that would have been in a car park overnight onto on-street parking in what are already overcrowded residential streets.

WNC is under a statutory duty pursuant to Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to ensure the expeditious, convenient, and safe movement of traffic, including pedestrians, while maintaining reasonable access to premises and supporting the economic vitality of the area. The current proposals conflict with these duties by restricting access, reducing town centre footfall, and undermining local economic activity.

The wider economic implications must be carefully considered. Market towns such as Towcester rely on increasing footfall to sustain independent businesses. Limiting free parking durations will deter visitors from attending events, accessing services, shopping, or supporting hospitality venues, which is contrary to WNC's statutory duty to have regard to the economic and environmental impacts of traffic regulation decisions.

There is particular concern regarding those working in the nighttime economy, many of whom are younger individuals on lower incomes. The introduction of high parking charges may make it financially unviable for them to park safely while working, undermining employment opportunities. This creates a disproportionate impact that WNC must consider in line with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, which requires public authorities to have due regard to the impact of decisions on those sharing protected characteristics, including age.

While Towcester Town Council recognises that introducing charges after an initial free period may help reduce enforcement costs, if WNC is proceeding with a review of the Traffic Regulation Order—originally justified for consistency yet now accompanied by numerous exceptions—it would be appropriate to reassess the benefits of the current proposals. We urge consideration of extending the free parking period from three hours to four hours and introducing free parking after 6:00pm. This would better support residents without off-road parking and help keep narrow residential streets clear for emergency vehicle access, in line with WNC's statutory duties.

Under Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, any surplus income generated from off-street parking charges must be used only for specified purposes. Case law (e.g., *R (Attfield) v Barnet LBC [2013]*) makes clear that parking charges must not be set primarily to generate profit; instead, charges should be set to manage demand and traffic flow. If the purpose of the proposed charging regime is materially to raise revenue—whether to fund enforcement, equipment, or other services—this would be unlawful.

The decision-making process must comply with general principles of administrative law, including reasonableness (the *Wednesbury* principle), transparency, and proper consideration of consultation responses. Failure to properly consider previous objections or to justify a departure from earlier decisions may render the process vulnerable to legal challenge.

Sponne Car Park is within Towcester's conservation area, yet in a possible contravention of planning laws, there appears to be no planning application for installing barriers, cameras, and payment kiosks.

In summary, Towcester Town Council questions the fundamental objective of the proposed scheme. The current proposals appear to conflict with statutory duties; risk breaching established legal principles regarding income generation and fail to demonstrate clear community benefit. Rather than supporting residents, businesses, and the local economy, these proposals threaten to cause detriment across all sectors of the community.

We urge WNC to reconsider these proposals and engage in meaningful consultation with local stakeholders to ensure that any changes to parking charges genuinely serve the interests of Towcester's residents, businesses, and visitors.

Yours faithfully,

Towcester Town Council