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3 June 2025

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NOTICE OF MEETING - TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE 11 JUNE 2025

Further to the agenda sent to you for the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee which will be held on Wednesday, 11 June 2025 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Reading, please find attached the appendices relating to the following:

- Agenda Item 6(c) - Request for Changes to Road-side Parking on Wokingham Road

Richard Woodford
Committee Administrator

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

11 JUNE 2025

From Bernadette Cowling

Changes to Road-side Parking, Wokingham Road, Earley

I am writing on behalf of the congregation of Earley Christian Fellowship (ECF), 153 Wokingham Road, Earley to express our dismay at the recent changes to the road-side parking on Wokingham Road. ECF has been based at 153 for over 40 years. For all this time, the church has relied on, and been able to park freely on Wokingham Road, albeit in the last 5 years subject to a 2 hour un-charged time limit and small charge thereafter.

The charging structure for Wokingham Road was carefully considered by the TMSC in 2019/20, in direct response to representations received (including from ECF) about the proposed metering. Issues considered by Committee at that time included the 'Pay to Pray' debate; the Council's requirement to comply with the Equality Act 2010 (and hence any proposal not being discriminatory to persons of protected characteristics (eg by way of religion, age (young or old), disability or pregnancy)) and the inherent importance to ECF of an adequate free parking period on Wokingham Road. The tariff arrived at at that time was a 2 hour un-charged period, followed by 50p per hour thereafter. For most week-day activities at ECF, the 2 hour free period was sufficient for parking. On a Sunday morning however, when people are typically at ECF for longer, 3 hours used to cost 50p. This has now risen to £2.70 (including 20p RingGo admin charge) - a whopping 440% increase! The removal of the 2 hour free period and extortionate hike in price is completely contrary to the careful consideration by this Committee in 2019/20 of the effect of the tariff on ECF. Many of the ECF congregation do walk, cycle or use the bus to come to services and events, but those who are older, have young families or travel from further afield rely on there being easily accessible parking nearby without prohibitive cost. Removal of the 2 hour free period and huge increase in price could therefore be considered indirect discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 (indirect discrimination can occur when there is a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages a person with a particular protected characteristic).

Furthermore, the disabling of the meters and the consequent requirement to use an app to park really is discriminatory against those without smartphones, those who aren't tech savvy (such as the elderly), or those who aren't local (eg if we have a funeral or wedding).

We would be grateful therefore if the meters on Wokingham Road could be returned to use and the previous tariff reinstated.

RESPONSE by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

The petition from the Earley Christian Fellowship (ECF) cites a previous decision by the Transport Management Sub Committee (TMSC) in 2019/20 and the Equalities Act 2010.

The decision by the committee not to introduce charges at that time was in line with many other areas where there was limited free parking. The changes in the tariff structure in January 2024 removed the majority of these free periods. The change now brings the area into line with the rest of the borough. As background the free period in both Dunstall Place and Recreation Road was removed as part of the annual review of fees and charges. A

petition from residents and businesses in the area around the car parks, protesting the removal of the free period was submitted to TMSC. Both petitions were rejected

The parking charge is now consistent across the borough treating all people and all religious groups in the same way. It would be difficult to provide a different approach at Wokingham road to support the ECF as this could be viewed as favouring one religious group over another.

As part of a review of the number and location of pay and display machines, it has been decided to install a card only pay and display machine close to the ECF. This will negate the need to use the Ring Go service, thereby avoiding the 20p convenience charge.

The councils overall move towards creating a net zero borough is not supported by free parking, even for a limited period. Pay and display charges are an effective and proven tool in encouraging behaviour change and by maintaining a free parking period, travellers would be encouraged to continue to use their vehicles, which is not something the council wishes to encourage.