



# Oadby & Wigston

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

Neil O'Brien MP  
(via email)

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14 September 2021

Dear Neil

I write further to your letter dated 6 September 2021 the contents of which I have noted. Thus far in our correspondence I have restricted myself to directly answering the points raised about the car parking charges and as far as possible avoided engaging in a public 'slanging match' which is of no benefit to either of us, despite the fact that there has been no meaningful engagement with my administration by you to see what assistance, if any, you can provide to avoid bringing these charges in.

Having said that however, on this occasion I feel that I cannot let your recent comments go unchallenged, particularly as you are challenging the political integrity of my colleagues and I with the imputation of hypocrisy vis a vis our election campaign.

I make the following points:

1. Whilst it may be true that a number of candidates in the 2019 election campaign may have referenced free parking in their literature, it was not 'party policy' as no formal manifesto was agreed for that election.
2. It is more than a little rich of you to suggest that my fellow councillors or I have reneged on election promises. You also stood for election in that year on a number of manifesto promises i.e. No Increase in Taxation or National Insurance, maintaining the foreign aid budget at 0.7% of GDP, maintaining the Triple Lock in respect of pension increases. Following election and at the onset of the pandemic your government also promised to reimburse local authorities pound for pound on the additional expenditure incurred dealing with the pandemic.

The reality is that however councils only receive £0.76 in every pound that has been spent and all your other promises have now been broken, your justification being that those promises are no longer affordable due to the costs arising from the pandemic. Yet when my authority uses the same arguments to justify the extension of the charging scheme for car parks it is somehow seen disingenuous and underhand.

3. I also object to your claim that the manner in which this decision was taken lacks transparency when despite repeated requests you have failed to publish my responses to you in full on your social media in order that you can continue to perpetuate the false narrative that you have created around this council. 90% of the £10 million that was budgeted (and which in fact was underspent) that you claim was wasted was spent on agency costs and contractual redundancy payments which are normal business expenses and in no way excessive or out of the norm as my previous correspondence with you showed.

The very recent conclusion of the court case against former employees for defrauding the council and a local charity vindicates the Council's position that the expenditure incurred in legal fees was both necessary and appropriate to prevent them from profiting from their criminal actions.

Turning to the specific points in your most recent letter I do not intend to answer them line by line but in the following way:

1. I accept that the way the figure quoted in the press release was misleading as the figure of £282,000 was the 'break even' figure of introducing the scheme and making good the losses of £170,000. This is in marked contrast to the approach adopted by Harborough District Council, who despite raising a surplus of £1.44 million in the two years between 2017-2019 raised their parking charges by 50% this year without any similar onslaught of negative criticism.

Following consideration of the various responses, the Council is now in a position to release the Exempt papers from the Council Meeting of 30 March. Those papers include the report to members setting out the rationale for the scheme including the modelling process and various options to achieve the break-even figure including the estimated costings of introducing the scheme, along with the minutes of the Meeting and the Zoom recording.

You will note that the scheme adopted by Members was **Option C**, following a motion moved by myself, seconded by the Leader of the Conservative Opposition, Cllr Priti Joshi, and subsequently adopted with 15 of the members present (including Cllr Joshi) voting in favour and 1 member abstaining.

That scheme provides for a payment of £1.00 for up to 2 hours parking, £3.00 for up to 4 hrs parking and £4.00 for over 4 hours parking (Long Stay) with reduced rates in the Leisure sites and also included the availability of a number of permits of different types.

**This remains the adopted scheme agreed in accordance with the Council's constitution and I see no reason for a further vote on the 'default or casual charge scheme'.**

During the debate, and prior to approving the scheme, members requested that officers look at measures that would mitigate the impact of the new charges on residents and further research work was undertaken which ultimately proposed an expansion of the permit scheme so that heavy users of the car parks were not over penalised. The potential to introduce geographically limited permits was informed by the work undertaken by East Lindsey District Council during their Car Park Review in 2016/17 a copy of can be accessed at <https://www.e-lindsey.gov.uk/parkingpolicy>. You will note that the price of an annual permit in East Lindsey (a conservative controlled council) ranges between £166.00 and £415.00 per annum depending on the geographic area covered by the permit.

The purchase of a permit is optional; users of the car parks may choose to pay the Casual Daily Rate and not benefit from the permit scheme but that is a matter for them individually.

2. I have also released a copy of a briefing note that was prepared on 13 August 2021 to provide me with an update on the consultation responses and suggested amendments to the approved scheme arising from those responses, in particular around the short stay bays, displacement and the impact of the charges in the town centres. The briefing note was updated on 03 September 2021 to reflect the addition of town specific permits and the ability for anyone to purchase a leisure car park permit, not just Everyone Active members.
3. Finally, there has been much comment and criticism of the proposed scheme and the suggested impact that car parking charges will have on the business viability of the town centres.

Included at Section 6.1.3 of the Car Park Review referenced above is a resume of the existing academic research relating to the impact of parking schemes/charges on town centres. Overall, the academic studies undertaken extensively across the country indicate that the supposed impact of parking charges is more anecdotal than real. (As the policy document is 67 pages long, I thought it useful to attach the relevant section as a PDF document).

In conclusion, I am satisfied that the information released with this response provides more than a sufficient rationale as to why it is necessary to introduce these charges and also provides information to show how the scheme has evolved after listening to the consultation responses.

Yours sincerely



**John Boyce**  
**Leader**