



ELGIN CITY CENTRE CAR PARKING SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

COMPILED BY ELGIN BID

14TH JANUARY 2012

**Let's all EMBRACE ELGIN and put the VIBRANCY back into the CITY
CENTRE**

ELGIN CITY CENTRE CAR PARKING SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

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ELGIN CITY CENTRE CAR PARKING CHARGES SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Purpose of supplementary Report

Following the reduction in car parking charges in relation to the 2 hour stay in Elgin City Centre in December it was felt appropriate to carry out follow up surveys to support the Council when making their budget decision for 2012. **The surveys attempt to gauge the initial responses from businesses and communities and indeed if the reduction has made a positive difference and if more needs to be done to further reduce the charges. This report must be considered in combination with the initial report produced on 26th October.**

A copy of the initial report can be found on www.elginbid.co.uk/downloads/reports.

It is acknowledged that the period of time since the charges were reduced is limited and over a typically busy period. However, the survey has been designed to include feedback on how the reduced charges have changed consumers shopping habits (even in this short space of time) and are likely to do so for the long term.

It is hoped that the Council will revisit the recommendations of the original report which are noted below as a reminder. These recommendations were borne from the results of the initial survey carried out and reflect the opinions and feelings of both the city centre businesses and the general public.

It must be remembered that Elgin City Centre will play a pivotal role in contributing to the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Elgin City for the Future project and indeed the overarching Moray Economic Strategy. At present Elgin City Centre is failing as a performing core city, however responses from the activities and projects carried out over the last 12 months by Elgin BID (and others) combined with the responses and comments to the surveys, clearly indicate a desire and belief that Elgin can regenerate and become a key performing city. It is also noted that a performing core city is essential for future economic growth of Moray and therefore all other Moray towns. Councillors should take this into consideration while not forgetting the correlation between parking charges has on the vibrancy of town centres (evidence noted through case studies in the initial report section 2.1.3), comments from the surveys also back this up.

All other evidence on the impact parking charges has on the vibrancy of town centre can be found in the initial report at section 2.0.

1.2 Recommendations from initial Report:

- ❖ Taking into account the dramatic reduction in ticket sales for longer stay parking and the level of parking charges in Inverness City Centre, Moray Council should consider restructuring the parking charges to encourage people to visit and stay longer in the City Centre. The following charges could be adopted: up to 2 hours £1.00, 2 -4 hours £2.00 and 4 – 10 hours £3.00.

- ❖ Low use car parks should be allocated for businesses and employees in the City Centre and lower cost monthly passes could be offered. This would increase the usage on the less used car parks and reduce the instances of parking on residential streets. A survey of business to gauge how much they would be willing to pay should be carried out. This would also increase income to the Council.
- ❖ Respondents to all 3 surveys recommended that free parking should be reintroduced at Lossie Green. The issue of there being absolutely no free parking in Elgin seems to be one of the most contentious issues. This should be considered.

Section 2.0

SURVEY FINDINGS

As the surveys included a max of 6 questions the full responses are noted here. It should also be noted that the surveys were carried out over a 5 day period finishing on Friday 13th January to ensure that the results could be considered by the Council as part of the budget consultations. Longer periods of time would have obviously allowed for a greater response.

2.1 Business Survey: (52 responses)

Question 1

Do you believe that the reduction in car parking charges introduced just before Christmas encouraged more people to visit and shop in Elgin City Centre?

- ❖ Yes 71.1% (37)
- ❖ No 17.3% (9)
- ❖ Unsure 11.5% (6)

Question 2

Have your customers commented that the reduction has attracted them to shop in Elgin City Centre (where they may have gone elsewhere)?

- ❖ Yes 67.3% (35)
- ❖ No 28.8% (15)
- ❖ Unsure 3.9% (2)

Question 3

Are you aware of customers staying longer in the City Centre following the reduction in parking charges?]

- ❖ Yes 53.8% (28)
- ❖ No 21.1% (11)
- ❖ Unsure 25% (13)

Question 4

If yes to 1 - 3 Please add any comments in support. Please also include customer comments

Many useful comments were received. Full responses are at Appendix 1. Selection noted below:

'It was noticeable how full the car parks were for longer periods with comments from customers saying it gave them longer to use the town centre facilities and browse. Where normally they would do a trolley dash using the 30 minute free parking or going and using the free parking at Tesco. It was also noticeable that you could always get into a 30 minute street slot during December'

'Many customers comment that its now more enjoyable to spend time in the city centre rather than having to rush back to the car after an hour. Tenants also have noticed a difference in shopping habits with customers having more time to browse'

'People are staying longer now in the Elgin City Centre as they will have lunch, bank appointments etc and still find time to browse round shops afterwards. This has increased our customer count by 10%'

'Car parks have been more fully occupied than they were before the reduction in charges. Customers have been more relaxed about parking and have been willing to spend more time in shops. It is encouraging to see people starting to enjoy the city centre again'

'Our clients have said after the cut they go into the Centre to shop, as before they would've gone straight home'

Question 5

Do you believe that there needs to be a further reduction in parking charges?

Yes 94.3% (49)

No 5.7% (3)

Note: respondents were asked to back this up in Question 6 as it is assumed that everyone would like to see lower charges.

Question 6

If yes to Q 5 please comment on why?

Many useful comments were received. Full responses are at Appendix 2. Selection noted below:

'Elgin city centre needs to compete with the free parking available at the retail park and whilst we are unlikely to have free parking in the city centre in the near future an improved structure of the parking charges needs to be addressed in order that the

dwel time and thus the relevant spend is increased. The recent changes before Xmas were a start but we should not stop there. We should continue to press for a more realistic set of charges across the whole day period to encourage shopping in the city centre'

'The lack of parking or ease of cars travelling directly into the High Street, directed down now onto the relief road past Poundstretcher is causing its own congestion problems, that any reduction in charges will encourage more footfall into the High Street through improved value and will be more competitive with other city centre parking charges & the retail parks that offer FREE parking....It would be nice to see a better value parking permit scheme for workers employed within the High Street area instead of one that simply saves approx £5.00 off full price'

'To encourage visitors to stop in Elgin and then to stay beyond an hour or two. At present Customers are very conscious of parking costs and times. Several visitors have commented that they would like to visit this shop or that shop or stop for lunch but their parking time is almost up so they return to their cars and leave the town. Just today a group of Customers from Inverness mentioned that they would like to stay in Elgin for lunch but as their parking time was almost up they would stop in Forres instead !!'

'Many customers have commented that they appreciate the council acknowledging that there was a need to tackle the problem of parking charges but felt that it would have been better to remove charges altogether. Anything that can be done to assist the regeneration of the city centre should be encouraged 100%'

Comments in relation to level of competitiveness with the Retail Park:

..shops in the centre of town are competing with those with free parking (ie no parking charges) and many town centre retailers do not think they are competing very well at the moment....Same as above retail parks are free- why not charge Mon-Fri and free Saturday to encourage people to support the little local High St shops not just the big retail national companies. Free parking on Saturday would encourage people from surrounding to come visit Elgin not larger cities.....Because we are not on a level playing field against the Edgar Road retailers. Their car parks are regularly busy, sometimes almost full. No charge, obviously.....Many customers commented how it was better and encouraging them to return to the City Centre rather than the retail parks.

2.2 Consumer Survey (23 responses)

Question 1

Has the recent reduction in parking charges in Elgin City Centre encouraged you to visit the centre (where you would have gone elsewhere?)

- | | |
|-------|------------|
| ❖ Yes | 60.9% (14) |
| ❖ No | 43.5% (10) |

Question 2

Has the recent reduction in parking charges in Elgin City Centre encouraged you to stay longer in the City Centre?

- ❖ Yes 56.5% (13)
- ❖ No 43.5% (10)

Question 3

To what extent do car parking charges influence your decision to visit a town - such as Elgin City Centre? Please Comment.

Many useful comments were received. Full responses are at Appendix 3. Selection noted below:

'There is more time to browse round the shops and take the time to stop off and have a coffee. When I am meeting friends for lunch or coffee I don't feel that I have to hurry my meal to get back to the car on time'

'They influence me to a large extent, especially as it is possible to shop online without any parking charges nowadays'

'They influence my decision to visit Elgin City Centre greatly, I visit far less frequently now and am more likely to try to park in a free half hour space and try and fit everything I need to do in the short space of time'

'We will go to Springfield retail park and shop there instead.....If I can't get free or cheap parking near town centre I would head to retail parks or supermarkets'

'I have not had occasion to have to stop in Elgin over the Christmas period other than in my lunch hour, however the charges in general have now stopped me from popping into local shops on the way to or from work. I live in Forres so I now (if the shops are still open by the time I get home) go to the shops in Forres instead of raking for change to park in Elgin..... As being a local commuter I also feel penalised and I feel bad but I park on residential streets in Elgin and walk to the centre to work instead of paying even more money'

Question 4

Do you believe that parking charges require to be further reduced?

- ❖ Yes 54.5% (12)
- ❖ No 45.5% (10)

Question 5

If yes to the previous question please comment on why?

Many useful comments were received. Full responses are at Appendix 4. Selection noted below:

'Not so much reduced but kept at £1 for two hour'

'They need to be reduced as this does encourage people to visit the town centre rather than just going to the retail parks. People are more likely to use the town centre if they don't have to hurry back because the parking ticket they have only lasts an hour!!!!'

'I believe in order to bring vibrancy back to the City Centre it s vital to allow cheaper parking which encourages people to stay longer in the centre as well as bringing people from further afield to visit. With increased people in the centre new ideas and initiatives can be introduced to keep people coming to visit the centre. It encourages a more vibrant and interesting centre rather than feeling like a 'ghost town' which is soleless and lifeless. Reduced parking charges are a win win situation for all'

Section 3.0

Conclusions:

Despite the short period of time since the parking charges have been reduced it is clear that consumers are welcoming the reduction. The comments received indicate that people are staying longer in the City Centre and thus spending more money in the City Centre shops. There is also evidence that car parking charges do influence consumer's decision about whether to visit the City Centre. It is acknowledged however that some of the responses indicated that it was perhaps too early to judge the full effects of the reduction.

The recently published Portas Review on also further emphasises the correlation and importance Car Parking charges have on Town Centres. The review quotes – ***'Cars are an intrinsic part of the way many people shop and so many of our high streets simply aren't catering for our 21st century shoppers and recommends that 'Local areas should implement free controlled parking schemes that work for their town centres and we should have a new parking league table. To go head to head with the out-of-town offering, high streets need to have a more flexible, well communicated parking offer' (The Portas Review: Dec 2011: page 27)***

In the long term it seems that shopping habits will change if we can develop a more acceptable and realistic pricing structure. There is an indication that consumers appreciate what the Elgin City Centre has to offer and will shop and spend if encouraged to do so. It is also noted that people absolutely will not pay what is perceived as high parking charges and have in the last 18 months proven this by their actions. Inverness City Centre car parking is still lower than Elgin with all other towns in Moray and Springfield and Elgin Retail Parks offering free parking. Surely this places Elgin City Centre at a disadvantage? What then will be the outcome of the Moray Economic Strategy and Elgin City for the Future.

It must be emphasised (as indicated in the previous report) that we are not saying parking charges are the only barrier to people visiting the City Centre however, they are a real and tangible threat especially as consumer choice increases with the growth of internet shopping and out of town retail parks. Elgin BID (introduced as there was a recognised need that Elgin City Centre needed serious support to survive) has a mandate till 2016 to regenerate the City Centre. In 2012, BID will be focusing on: direct marketing to potential inward investment, work on improving the tourism offer for Moray, providing a packed programme of City Centre events and improvement to the physical environment of the City Centre.

Realistic and competitive car parking charges will increase footfall, business confidence and therefore contribute to the success of these activities and in long term support the on-going regeneration of Elgin City Centre.

Moray Council have made an initial step in recognising the need to look at parking charges but more must be done. Our Town and City Centres need support to survive, faced with the continued on-going recession, increased unemployment and reduced consumer spend. These are factors, however, outwith the direct control of Moray Council. Car Parking charges are not.

APPENDIX 1

BJBUSINESS COMMENTS

QUESTION 4

1. Through doing our own survey, there was definitive evidence that shoppers/customers viewed the car parking charges as being too high in Elgin. Therefore, the reduced charges would have been welcomed.
2. It's a shame we need events to bring customers in , where has our old Elgin gone. No high street shops it's not just parking that's wrong it's a lot more. Take after Christmas no one on high street all at Edgar Rd
3. Customers are under less pressure to leave the town so quickly although several have commented on other Towns parking charges being significantly less or in many cases free.
4. It was noticeable how full the car parks were for longer periods with comments from customers saying it gave them longer to use the town centre facilities and browse. Where normally they would do a trolley dash using the 30 minute free parking or going and using the free parking at Tesco. It was also noticeable that you could always get into a 30 minute street slot during December.
5. Various customers have commented that they have stayed longer to continue shopping and also visited other shops
6. Customers were commenting they didn't feel under so much pressure when shopping! Also that with the previous charges it put them off coming into Town if they only had one or two things to get toooo expensive!! Personally I feel the Council have to try harder to work with the shop-keepers to make Elgin a place that people want to visit.
7. Many customers comment that its now more enjoyable to spend time in the city centre rather than having to rush back to the car after an hour. Tenants also have noticed a difference in shopping habits with customers having more time to browse.
8. I feel that Forres has an abundance of free parking, so why can we not have more in Elgin. Obviously it would have a positive affect on Elgin Town centre Trading.
9. Customers were not rushing out of our shop as there car parking was due to run out therefore had more time to book a holiday and increased our business.
10. Feedback from our shop staff supports this.
11. Customers have said they don't have to rush back to the car, they've said they can spend a bit longer walking round now it's cheaper.
12. n/a
13. Several customers have commented that they've been able to stay longer and browse in the city centre, ultimately spending more in local businesses rather than at the big chains, because they're not as pressed for time due to parking expenses/restrictions.

14. I have had a couple of folk mention that it was easier for them to use car parks other than Aldi and Tesco- previously they would go to those parks and then run to leave before the time expired.
15. Customers have commented that they only have 2 hours to do all their shopping, I take it from that, That they are not prepared to pay any more than £1 for parking charges.
16. Whether it is £1 or 50p, the issue is not whether the individual can afford it, it is whether they choose to shop where they don't have to worry about being time limited, having the right change and just the general hassle of having to buy a ticket when they don't have to elsewhere. The price will not change this.
17. A number of my customers have commented favourably on the parking fee reduction but state it should go further.
18. no comment
19. There hasn't been the same rush of customers leaving the premises to quickly go feed a parking meter as the new £1.00 tariff lasted for two hours.
20. People are staying longer now in the Elgin City Centre as they will have lunch, bank appointments etc and still find time to browse round shops afterwards. this has increased our customer count by 10%
21. Customers are aware of the reduction in charges, and that has encouraged them to shop in Elgin City Centre. However there is still a reluctance to pay parking charges, and walk the distance from the Lossie Green carpark, especially during the winter weather we are having.
22. People can now park free at retail parks and high street suffered because of high park charges it's good to see reduced cost of parking centre of town
23. I have made it known before but at the higher rates customers known to me were dithering about whether they would come in to our shop or not, and decided not to as their parking ticket was nearly up and they didn't want to pay out more. With the lower charges they are more inclined to pay for longer. This dramatically affects our cafe revenue.
24. We heard positive comments from customers re the lower rates.
25. Our clients have said after the cut they go into the Centre to shop, as before they would've gone straight home.
26. Car parks have been more fully occupied than they were before the reduction in charges. Customers have been more relaxed about parking and have been willing to spend more time in shops. It is encouraging to see people starting to enjoy the city centre again. At least two of my customers have made the assumption that parking was free and only realised there was a requirement to pay when advised by a car park attendant. One customer stated "But it's free, isn't it?".
27. December was a good month for customers ...customers also agreed that they have stayed longer in the City Centre due to the reduction in the parking fees.

28. We have noticed a lot of customers staying longer in the town due to the reduced parking fees...they have told us this.

29. Many customers commented how it was better and encouraging them to return to the City Centre rather than the retail parks.

APPENDIX 2

BUSINESS COMMENTS

QUESTION 6

1. For people to visit the town centre for longer and to save businesses losing out to the retail park (free parking) or to Inverness (cheaper parking), then there has to be a permanent review/reduction of the car parking charges in Elgin. If this is not done, people will just do a quick & rushed dash into the town to do the necessities (like go to the bank) using free half hour parking, instead of staying for longer and doing more such as shopping & dining. My business, being a restaurant, obviously needs customers to stay for longer than 1 hour to eat, and longer in the town if they wish to eat and do shopping. The council has to listen to business owners in order for them, not just survive, but also to prosper.
2. Customers are saying to pay even a pound to park it's not worth coming to their local bakery for their bread. So which means no sale in our shop and maybe closure of our shop.
3. To encourage visitors to stop in Elgin and then to stay beyond an hour or two. At present Customers are very conscious of parking costs and times. Several visitors have commented that they would like to visit this shop or that shop or stop for lunch but their parking time is almost up so they return to their cars and leave the town. Just today a group of Customers from Inverness mentioned that they would like to stay in Elgin for lunch but as their parking time was almost up they would stop in Forres instead !!
4. To continue on the success of the Christmas reduction to make people stay in the City Centre and support the small local businesses.
5. Customers will stay longer
6. Retail park is free, town you have to pay. Its clear why the parking should be free, free parking, more shoppers for longer.
8. Elgin city centre needs to compete with the free parking available at the retail park and whilst we are unlikely to have free parking in the city centre in the near future an improved structure of the parking charges needs to be addressed in order that the dwell time and thus the relevant spend is increased. The recent changes before Xmas were a start but we should not stop there. We should continue to press for a more realistic set of charges across the whole day period to encourage shopping in the city centre.
9. Trading is getting more and more difficult so some one needs to think realistically what has to be done to encourage visitors and customers to return to the town centre and prevent it from becoming even more of a ghost town
10. To be charged £1.00 for 2 hours in Elgin is more than if customers were shopping and paying in Inverness. We need to entice people to want to shop in Elgin town centre so the cheaper the car parking is the better.
11. Free supermarket parking definitely helps attract shoppers away from the High Street so the same should work for the city centre.

12. People need to be encouraged to come to Elgin. They need to have shops in the centre to come to, they need to be able to get parked and the parking needs to be free. Customers have told us they go to Lossie and Forres where it is free parking. If they don't have to rush back to their car before the ticket runs out. They're more relaxed, will spend longer wandering about and do spend more money the longer there in the town centre.
13. I still feel the car parking charges are too expensive
14. To further encourage people to shop in the city centre instead of choosing retail parks. Also to reduce shoppers parking on residential streets in the City Centre. Shoppers look for free parking and clog up parking spots for City residents (eg. Reidhaven Street, South Guildry Street)
15. Unless there is a free option people will continue to use the out of town centres.
16. £1 for 4 hours should keep everyone happy.
17. They need to be abolished. Nothing else will do.
18. To encourage more shoppers to the town. Also if the parking fees were reasonable more people would park on a long term basis rather than fill the surrounding streets, at present it's far too expensive to park your car every day for a week whilst at work.
19. Current charges are in line with & sometimes more expensive than Inverness where there is a much bigger range of stores. We need to try & keep people in Elgin & reduced parking charges would help.
20. The lack of parking or ease of cars travelling directly into the High Street, directed down now onto the relief road past Poundstretcher is causing its own congestion problems, that any reduction in charges will encourage more footfall into the High Street through improved value and will be more competitive with other city centre parking charges & the retail parks that offer FREE parking. It would be nice to see a better value parking permit scheme for workers employed within the High Street area instead of one that simply saves approx £5.00 off full price.
21. The shop outlets in the main high street are charity and small businesses including banks cafe/restaurants so customers don't tend to spend as much time in the main part of town.
22. Because we are not on a level playing field against the Edgar Road retailers. Their carparks are regularly busy, sometimes almost full. No charge, obviously.
23. Same as above retail parks are free- why not charge mon-fri and free Saturday encourage people to support the little local high st shops not just the big retail national companies. Free parking Saturday would encourage people from surrounding to come visit Elgin not larger city's.
24. Because of the Moray Council's policy of allowing out-of-town shopping such as Edgar Road and Springfield Park, shops in the centre of town are competing with those with free parking, ie no parking charges, and many town centre retailers do not think they are competing very well at the moment.

25. To compete with the Retail Park. Also heard a few people saying that they used the bus TO the Retail Park but unaware of any using the bus FROM the Retail Park to the City Centre.

26. Because the high street has been busier, so if a small decrease in price had made a difference then a bigger decrease definitely will.

27. Many customers have commented that they appreciate the council acknowledging that there was a need to tackle the problem of parking charges but felt that it would have been better to remove charges altogether. Anything that can be done to assist the regeneration of the city centre should be encouraged 100%

APPENDIX 3

CONSUMER COMMENTS

QUESTION 3

1. They don't really influence my decision. I just accept them as I have to be in Elgin!
2. Well with only 2 hour maximum stay in the closest one. It restricts eating out as if I'm shopping for gifts I have no time to eat or vice-versa. No train runs from my town to Elgin so we go else where on train and car to Elgin More car parks with £1. Parking all day. In season it could be put up in St. Giles for summer season visitors. At Christmas for the last few years as soon as I start buying gifts I go elsewhere as 2 hours parking is not long enough.
3. Why pay in Elgin when Forres is free
4. If i can't get free or cheap parking near town centre I would head to retail parks or supermarkets
5. There is more time to browse round the shops and take the time to stop off and have a coffee. When I am meeting friends for lunch or coffee I don't feel that I have to hurry my meal to get back to the car on time.
6. Would like to stay for longer but still think parking is excessive. Also think that are Elgin shopper's subsidising the other towns such as Forres, Buckie and Keith. I can lunch there and not look at time as it has free parking.
7. They influence it a great deal, especially how long I will stay in town. If I can avoid going in I normally due, because it is a pain to have to pay money to visit shops. However if I do have to go into Elgin town centre I make sure and wait until I have several things to do and then get it all done at once--in an hour so I don't have to pay more for parking. If parking fees were less, I would definitely stay longer in the town centre and visit more stores.
8. They influence me to a large extent, especially as it is possible to shop online without any parking charges nowadays.
9. If it is too expensive to park then people will either not come at all or only stay say for 2 hours!!
10. I have not had occasion to have to stop in Elgin over the Christmas period other than in my lunch hour, however the charges in general have now stopped me from popping into local shops on the way to or from work. I live in Forres so I now(if the shops are still open by the time I get home) go to the shops in Forres instead of raking for change to park in Elgin. As being a local commuter I also feel penalised and I feel bad but I park on residential streets in Elgin and walk to the centre to work instead of paying even more money.
11. Cheaper cost means I don't need to rush everything into an hour. Can visit more shops and grab a coffee or smoothie in town
12. I would have a look at the shops in town rather than shop online or go to retail park.

13. Free

14. We will go to springfield retail park and shop there instead, also you cant even shop at tescos due to people parking there ad then walking up town

15. They influence my decision to visit Elgin City Centre greatly, I visit far less frequently now and am more likely to try to park in a free half hour space and try and fit everything I need to do in the short space of time.

16. If I haven't got change, I'll park further out, and often end up just visiting super markets and retail

APPENDIX 4

CONSUMER SURVEY

QUESTION 5

1. Only in the city centre to encourage people to stay longer and visit more shops or have time to a meal. It would be no use if people who work in the centre used all the spaces leaving none for visitors.
2. If you only want a quick visit to one shop it is £1 regardless
3. Not so much reduced but kept at £1 for two hours
4. They need to be reduced as this does encourage people to visit the town centre rather than just going to the retail parks. People are more likely to use the town centre if they don't have to hurry back because the parking ticket they have only lasts an hour!!!!
5. i am not prepared to pay £3 + for a day's parking.
6. I think that 50p an hour would be much more acceptable, and £1 for 2 hours. This allows people to window shop to a much better extent.
7. I believe in order to bring vibrancy back to the City Centre it s vital to allow cheaper parking which encourages people to stay longer in the centre as well as bringing people from further afield to visit. With increased people in the centre new ideas and initiatives can be introduced to keep people coming to visit the centre. It encourages a more vibrant and interesting centre rather than feeling like a 'ghost town' which is soleless and lifeless. Reduced parking charges are a win win situation for all.

