

## INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	11 JANUARY 2022	12
<b>STANNER BANK CAR PARK UPDATE</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

### SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

Following the completion of the Fairhaven sea defence project the new barrier system on Stanner Bank Car Park was put into operation in September 2020. This is the first barrier system operated by Fylde Council and it was agreed that the operation would be monitored with updates provided to the committee on the benefits and disadvantages of a barrier system. This report provides members with information about the logistics of operating a barrier system car park for the 14 months from September 2020.

### SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Inspections, analysis, feedback and direct experience and observation of the barrier system in operation since it was installed.

### LINK TO INFORMATION

Included in the report below.

### INFORMATION

#### Background

1. Stanner Bank Car Park has been present since the Fairhaven Lake site was developed. It can be viewed on aerial photos from the 1940s. In more recent years, since charges to park on the car park were introduced, there was a perceived issue that some customers were not paying for their stay. There was supporting evidence that suggested some customers used the car park as a viewing area whilst they consumed food and drink; usually procured from the neighbouring kiosk. The customers would stay close to or within their vehicles enjoying the views across Fairhaven Lake or the Irish sea. When enforcement officers attended the site, customers would leave before enforcement action could be carried out.
2. In 2014 officers were asked to review the parking management on the Stanner Bank Car Park. A parking consultancy firm, Alpha Parking, were contracted to carry out a study to assess the benefits and advantages of different systems of operation. This included Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology, which was discounted as Local Authorities are not allowed to use it on its own on public car parks, and a pay-on-foot barrier system, which though costly to install and operate, was the cheapest alternative. The outcomes of the study were presented to a Cabinet meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2015 where it was decided that, based on the information provided, it was not economically viable to warrant the necessary investment in a new

management system.

3. Stanner Bank Car Park was closed from late 2018 to 2020 to enable the construction of the new sea defences around Fairhaven Lake and Granny's Bay. During this period officers were asked by elected members to look at the option to install a pay-on-foot barrier control system. Unlike the previous consideration of management options the request was to consider a barrier system only. The rationale for considering a barrier system was concern over the loss of income because of non-payment by users parking to enjoy the views and / or consume food and drink purchased at the kiosk. A capital bid for £50,000 was reviewed and supported by the Operational Management Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2018.
4. During 2019 the entrance area to Stanner Bank Car Park, which was outside the scope of the work funded by the Environment Agency for the sea defence scheme, was designed and costed alongside other public realm works. A special Operational Management Committee was convened on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to review the options and agree draw-down of funding, including the £50,000 for the barrier system.

#### **Installation**

5. The entrance to the car park, including the barrier system, was designed late 2019 and installed spring 2020. This included a widened carriageway, creation of two islands by the entrance to host entry and exit terminals and barrier arms, install of terminals, barrier arms and two payment machines protected by shelters, connecting all equipment to electric supplies, and ensuring remote access and control of the system was enabled. The car park was opened in July 2020 but, due to a delay in the setting up of the card payment system, the barrier was not put into service until September 2020.
6. The addition of the barrier system was specified after planning permission was granted for the changes to the car park as part of the sea defence works and was carried out under permitted development. Once the new widened entrance had been installed with the barrier system, Lancashire County Council colleagues expressed concerns regarding safety implications of pedestrians crossing in front of the operational barrier as well as vehicles driving across the entrance area from nearby on-street parking. As a result, safety barriers were set up to enable safe pedestrian crossing. Subsequently the road-side area has been redesigned with the works substantially completed late 2021.

#### **Intercom/Support Service**

7. An unmanned barrier operated car park management system requires a support service 24/7 over the telephone as part of a safety requirement that mitigates the risk of anyone being unable to exit the car park if the barrier fails and to provide support to anyone who has difficulty with the system. To accommodate the 24/7 support intercoms were installed at each of the terminals and payment machines which created several technical integration issues and cost to the system with calls from the intercom directed to an office phone which was answered by Fylde Council staff during office hours. Out of hours calls for support were diverted to a mobile number that the car parking manager answered, this was not costed and has never been formalised.
8. Following a change to the Council's IT firewall in February 2021 the intercoms stopped working. While the issue was investigated the mobile number was displayed at all points, so customers were still able to obtain assistance and a second mobile phone was obtained for out of hours calls. The temporary solution proved to be more successful than the intercom which automatically cut-out after a set period, often resulting in the customer's problem not being resolved before contact was lost. It also meant that when a call was made in error it would stop other customers calling from other intercoms until the auto cut-out occurred. As such the intercom system has remained out of service with customers able to call the support service mobile number directly. However, the cost and formal arrangements for this level of 24/7 support have not been addressed but will need to be formalised.
9. To facilitate the support service, the office-hours phone was originally staffed by the Council's Customer Service team. However, with the significant increase in tourism and other contacts with the Tourist Information Centre, they were unable to guarantee the support service phone was answered within a reasonable time. Since June 2021 the responsibility for answering calls during working hours has been with the Parking Services directly. Out of working hours, including overnight, weekends and bank holidays, calls are diverted to the second mobile phone which is normally held by the Council's Technical Support Manager who has responded a range of calls at all hours.

10. Between 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021 there have been 355 calls recorded to the support service, 147 were made out of office operating hours. Initially a lot of the calls were due to regular customers getting used to the new system such as how to pay and where to place the ticket. Call volume on these matters were reduced by including additional instructions on the terminals and payment machines. Over the summer months calls increased, particularly during busy periods, when more faults took place with several individuals making contact regarding the same issue until someone was able to reach the site to resolve the problem. Calls decreased during Autumn/Winter 2021 with the drop off in use of the car park.

#### **Issues**

11. For the barrier system to operate it is not viable to offer free disabled parking as occurs on other Fylde Council car parks. When the system was first brought into service there was negative publicity on social media about the provision for blue badge holders. Staff have been given feedback directly on site, through social media and over the phone at the call centre expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of free disabled parking and the number of failure incidents with the barrier.
12. Negative feedback was also posted on social media and correspondence to the council because of Stanner Bank car park being excluded from the Fylde Resident Permit Scheme. The reasons for this were communicated to permit holders and the level of negative feedback has reduced.
13. Some of the issues experienced have been a result of customers accidentally misusing the system. A barrier system requires additional reliance on the customer to interact with it (obtaining a ticket at the entrance, keeping the ticket safe throughout their stay, entering the ticket in the payment machine and paying for their stay, retrieving the ticket and placing it in the exit terminal) which increases the potential for user error. On several occasions at the entrance terminal where tickets are issued, coins have been forced into the slot causing the tickets to jam and preventing anyone else to enter the car park. Coins have also been placed in the ticket slot on the payment machine where this again prevents the ticket already inserted from being returned and jamming the next customer's ticket. Despite notices placed to advise against these actions, these issues periodically occur leading to a call out, loss of income on the car park and reputational damage from other customers.
14. The issues that have generated the most significant cost and car park income loss have been as a result of vandalism. This could be to avoid payment or due to being stuck on the car park. On other occasions the barriers could have been targeted for deliberate vandalism in the same way any public furniture or asset is vandalised. Street furniture, assets with moving parts or assets that, if damaged, cause issues for others are targeted for vandalism with the rationale behind this unknown.
15. Between September 2020 and November 2021 there were 139 separate instances where the barrier system recorded 'Forced Open' where the barriers had been pushed up. Of these, 72 occurred at the entry barrier and 67 on the exit barrier.
16. On some occasions where vandalism occurs the barrier is just off set from the optimum position meaning that it remains operational, and the 'culprit' has used the car park for free. On other occasions the barrier has been unable to open enough for vehicles to get through so the barrier arm has been removed until an engineer can attend to adjust the settings. The cost of this has been between £200 and £500 dependent on the extent of the damage and the call out fee based on time and day. On two occasions to date (once in May 2021, the other July 2021) the repeated forcing open of the barriers resulted in the bolts shearing which require specialist parts to be ordered which result in the barriers being out of operation for several weeks. The cost of repairing this damage is circa £1,500 on each occasion with an estimated loss of income during each of the two periods between £2,000 to £3,000.
17. The challenge with vandalism is that it can occur at any time and usually occurs out of hours or at weekend resulting in additional resource and cost to rectify. The cost of repairing vandalism and loss of income cannot be recouped from insurance; and even if individuals were identified getting the cost off them without police or legal process is uncertain and as costly, if not more, in time and resource to do so. Because of the function, location and mechanical nature of the barriers they are subject to more vandalism as well as breakdown than the pay and display units.

18. There have been other occasions where the system itself has developed a fault. For example, coins jam in the payment machines causing blockages that stop the machines from working and result in customers losing their money because the machine has been unable to validate or reject the coins. During wet weather damp tickets can get stuck/torn in the exit terminal resulting in the ticket not being read and leading to a backlog because the ticket belonging to the next customer cannot be read. In instances such as these the exit barrier is opened remotely with the enforcement officer on duty directed to attend site as soon as possible to rectify. Financial loss is minimal but there is often reputational damage and complaints because of the delay caused.
19. Occasional system errors occur where there is loss of remote connectivity. In normal circumstances when a customer calls the support service telephone the barriers can be raised remotely; either as a one-off occurrence to let a single customer out or to set the barrier to stay open so all customers can leave. However, occasionally the remote connection to the system fails because of a fault with the modem. This means officers are unable to control the system remotely plus card payments will not work. To rectify this an officer must attend site immediately by switching the system off and on again to reboot. In July 2021 on an occasion where the remote connection had dropped the customer insisted on being let out immediately or they would force the barrier open; despite assurances that someone was on the way the barrier was forced that led to the bolts being damaged and significant cost and loss.

### **Income vs Expenditure**

20. During the 12-month period from December 2020 to November 2021, income generated was £24,032. The 5-year pre-sea defence average was £19,078 so income increased by £4,954. This figure could have been £4,000 to £6,000 higher had the barrier not been out of operation due to vandalism.
21. Income comparison with pre-COVID is skewed by the impact of COVID with an increase in visitors exploring the new sea defence works making the location more of a destination and the volume of 'staycation' visitors, as well as repeat walkers from the Lancashire and North West hinterland. All pay and display long stay/tourist car parks have shown significant increase in income since May 2021. St Paul's Avenue Car Park (which was closed for a similar period as Stanner Bank and also attracts visitors to the sea defences) increasing income from a 5-year average of £4,455 to £12,669 during the same December 2020 to November 2021 period.
22. The operation of the barrier system requires arrangements that are in addition to those in place on pay and display car parks which includes:
- a. Maintenance and software - contract at £7,000 per year covering servicing, replacement parts and remote access software. Third party damage/vandalism is excluded.
  - b. Repairs to the barrier following incidents of vandalism.
  - c. Payment card PSP (Payment Service Provider) and Merchant Bank to enable card payments.
  - d. Supply of a modem with sim card to enable internet connection – contract at £216 per year.
  - e. Intercom/mobile phones – two mobile phones at £240 per year are used to provide customer support during work hours and out of hours.
23. After set-up costs were accounted for, the cost of operating the barrier (above standard costs that apply to all car parks, eg non-barrier maintenance, cash collection, etc...) from September 2020 to March 2021 was £9,580. From April 2021 up to November 2021 operating costs were £12,283. Full year costs for 2021/22 could reach £15,000.
24. Taking into account the increase in income and additional costs incurred through operating the barrier, it is expected that the barrier will result in a £10,046 loss. Even if the barrier had not been vandalised resulting in it being out of operation for extended periods, there would still have been a loss of £4,046. In future years this loss is likely to be higher when the cost of out of hours support service is taken into account.

### **Future Operation**

25. To date the out of hours support for the barrier system has been overseen by Fylde Parking Services Officers without additional charge. It is not possible for this to continue. Fylde Council senior management have been exploring out of hours support service on a corporate level covering all out of hours activity. Depending on

how the arrangements are set up, the resource for the barrier car park out of hours support is estimated to cost between £50 to £150 per week or £2,600 to £7,800 per year.

26. In response to vandalism of the barrier system which caused both barriers to be out of service for several weeks and led to a significant loss of income, the option to install a CCTV camera to overlook the barrier has been explored. The cost to install the system along with 4 years of servicing will be in the region of £10,000. After 4 years either the camera will need replacing or, if it is still in a serviceable condition, a new service package will need to be agreed at further cost.
27. Currently there is no budget set for the additional annual cost of operating the barrier system. This will be required to cover operational costs set out in point 22 as well as the out of hours on-call service as set out in point 25. This additional budget will need to be set at £20,000.

#### **Conclusions**

28. The provision of the barrier system, when operating correctly, achieves the original intention of ensuring all customers pay for their parking/dissuades those who do not wish to pay from visiting the site. This in turn has led to an increase in income. There is added benefit in that customers only pay for the time they use and are less likely to feel the need end their stay earlier than they would like.
29. However, there are significant down-sides to operating the barrier including reputational damage from a lack of free parking for blue badge holders and from when the system doesn't operate correctly is out of order, loss of revenue whilst repairs are made and significant extra costs. Overall operating the barrier system results in a financial net loss.
30. Currently operating the barrier system incurs additional unbudgeted expense. A new revenue budget of £20,000 will be required in future.

#### **WHY IS THIS INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO THE COMMITTEE?**

To advise the committee on the operation of Stanner Bank Car Park barrier

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Contact - Andrew Loynd, Technical Support Manager, 01253 658 527