

7th October 2024

Cheshire East Council
Audlem Car Parking Charges
Consultation

Dear Sirs,

This letter summarises the range of discussions which ADCA trustees have had with over 40 members and carers who use our services, with trustees of Audlem Public Hall and with many of the other voluntary groups who use the Audlem Public Hall and Annexe about the Council's proposal to increase the times of charging to include evenings until 10pm and on Sundays.

At our ADCA Committee meeting of 4th October, 2024, trustees agreed to respond to the consultation based on the following resolution:

'Audlem & District Community Action strongly objects to the proposed extension of charging to include evenings and Sundays on the following basis:

- such an extension would have a major impact on the financial viability of both ADCA, the Public Hall and of several other local voluntary groups who use the Public Hall facilities in the evening and on Sundays
- ADCA and the Public Hall rely on regular evening and Sunday events which are held several times each week to provide both income from those who book the facilities and also from vital fund-raising events. Charging for parking at these times will have a very detrimental financial effect on the viability of these activities and will also reduce attendance at events which contribute to vital community activity, health and well-being and social cohesion in our rural area.
- the original proposals to charge for parking in Audlem were predicated on the need to encourage people to use the regular bus services to get into the village. As this bus service has now been withdrawn during the period of this consultation and will not be replaced except on a limited based between Audlem and Nantwich from April 2025, then this proposed increase in charging period is not only completely unacceptable to the people of Audlem, but make the whole basis of the Council's two consultations on the imposition of car parking charges to be null and void legally.
- The Council's own Corporate Plan includes the aims of empowering and caring for local people, supporting thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all and of being an open and enabling organisation. Alongside the Council's existing Rural Strategy, it is clear that introducing car parking at all let alone extending them to evenings and Sunday is very much against the Councils' own stated corporate objectives
- Audlem and the surrounding rural villages are a recognised area of significant deprivation within Cheshire East already given the distance to get to local towns for services and the higher levels of social isolation and number of over 65s than the Cheshire East average. Introducing car parking charges for local people travelling into Audlem for GPs attendance, pharmacy, shopping and social activities will further compound this level of rural deprivation.

- Given these very significant factors, ADCA requests that the proposed implementation of car park charging in Audlem including the suggested increase in the charging period be postponed at least until April 2025 when a new regular bus service may be commissioned by the Council. After April 2025, evening and Sunday charging must not be implemented on a permanent basis for the above reasons. Not to do so would also be very detrimental to the overall community well-being of the people of Audlem and district.'

ADCA is a local charity which is run for local people by local people. It provides a range of day/lunch clubs and carers groups on a weekly basis to over 100 older people and 40 carers and contributes hugely to the health and well-being of the local population. This includes fulfilling successfully a range of grants and contracts with the Council of the years, many of which have clearly demonstrated the prevention of admission to hospital, early discharge and avoidance of use of the Council's social care service. Through our 42 volunteers, we also provide over 300 hours per week voluntary effort which contributes over £160,000 per annum of social value to our local community. Introducing car parking charges in Audlem will have a very significant impact on both the financial viability of ADCA as well as on the level of attendance at our clubs.

Similarly, the work of Audlem Public Hall contributes hugely to the overall health and well-being of our local community.

ADCA fully understands the difficult financial position of the Council and the need to raise more income to address the £100m deficit. But imposing these stringent car parking charges, especially into the evening and on Sundays, on a rurally deprived community should not be a priority. Increasing council tax further, either via Cheshire East or from an increase in the Parish Council precept, or seeking more financial support from government to help address the deficit would be fairer way of doing this as it would be funded via general taxation.

We look forward to a specific written response from the Council to Audlem & District Community Action's objections on behalf of the local community to the proposed changes to local car parking arrangements. We also request that a local meeting be set up between ADCA and relevant senior officers of the Council in the next month so that we can discuss the range of our concerns more fully.

Yours sincerely



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ADCA Chair

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cc. Cllr. Rachel Bailey

Audlem Parish Council Clerk

Cheshire East CEO

Aphra Brandreth MP

Stuart Furber - Chair of Audlem Public Hall