

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member and Advisers for Regeneration and Development</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>RERF - Free Saturday parking, Christmas 2013</b>
4.	<b>Programme Area:</b>	<b>Environment and Development Services</b>

### 5. **Summary**

This report seeks approval of an allocation of £9,000 Rotherham Economic Regeneration Fund (RERF) revenue towards funding of free parking in Rotherham town centre on the 6 Saturdays leading up to Christmas

### 6. **Recommendations**

**Approve £9,000 of RERF revenue funding towards the cost of free Saturday parking in Rotherham town centre in run up to Christmas 2013.**

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## **7. Proposals and Details**

This year's Christmas parking initiative will include six Saturdays in the period from 16<sup>th</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December 2013 inclusive

The Christmas trading period is key in the retail sector in ensuring year-round profitability of the business; a poor Christmas trade can have a significant impact on the viability of the business. It is therefore recognised that initiatives to attract shoppers are particularly beneficial to retailers at this time.

In previous years, free parking incentives have been introduced in the Rotherham town centre as a means of driving footfall during the festive period and supporting town centre retailers. This has included offering free parking on Saturdays from the period between the Christmas lights switch-on event and Christmas Day.

One of the key recommendations in the Mary Portas High Street Review was that high streets and town centres should have the flexibility to introduce local parking initiatives to boost trade. This is particularly pertinent to Rotherham, given the proximity to Parkgate and Meadowhall both of which have a free parking offer and based on the impact that Portas Pilot funded initiatives have made in the town centre.

Rotherham has welcomed a recent upturn in footfall figures and a reduction in shop vacancy rates. This can to some extent be attributed to a number of projects and initiatives aimed at regenerating the town centre, including the Business Vitality Grants Scheme, Shop Local, Public Realm Improvements, the Events and Entertainment Programme, Gallery Town and of course the return of Rotherham United to a stadium in the town. Free parking in the run-up to Christmas would complement these projects and initiatives and would provide a further incentive for shoppers to choose Rotherham.

This year a Christmas parking initiative would include six Saturdays in the period from 16<sup>th</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December 2013 inclusive. The loss of revenue for each Saturday is estimated at £4,000.

A marketing campaign would be implemented (cost covered within the existing festive marketing budget) and would include:

- Radio and Press Advertisements
- E-marketing (Facebook/ Twitter/ Rotherham town centre website)
- Weekly e-mails to database of 16,000 Shop Local cardholders/ RMBC employees
- Stickers and signage on parking meters and car-park entrances

At its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013 Cabinet approved the allocation of £24,000 from within Economic & Development Services Budgets to offer free parking in RMBC owned car-parks in Rotherham town centre on six Saturdays from 16<sup>th</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2013, inclusive.

£15,000 is to be drawn directly from the British Land contribution to town centre initiatives. The remaining £9,000 is being sought from the RERF budget.

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## 8. Finance

Funding	Status of funding. Approved/ Awaiting Approval	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
<b>RERF</b>					
Capital					-
Revenue				9,000	9,000
<b>TOTAL RERF</b>			-	9,000	9,000
<b>Other Funding Sources</b>					
British Land contribution				15,000	15,000
					-
					-
					-
<b>TOTAL OTHER FUNDING</b>		-	-	15,000	15,000
<b>Grand Total</b>		-	-	24,000	24,000

There is currently £28,000 of revenue money available under the RERF programme. This is sufficient to fund this project and leave £19,000 for the remainder of 2013/14

## 9. Risks and Uncertainties

Previous years of the free parking initiative has shown it to be successful in helping drive town centre footfall in the run up to Christmas

## 10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Free Saturday parking will contribute to the following strategic priorities from the Community Strategy:-

- Revitalise the town centre

## 11. Background Papers and Consultation

Feedback is continually received from town centre businesses who repeatedly note parking charges as a factor impacting negatively upon their business (in terms of discouraging shoppers who have the option to park free at the nearest competing centres).

A copy of the full RERF application form for this project is available on request. RMBC Finance have been consulted on the report.

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