Speech by Chessington resident Gia Borg Darcy at Kingston Council meeting, Guildhall, Kingston on 8th July 2025

Ladies and gentlemen, councillors, and fellow residents,

I stand before you today to present a petition signed by well over 1,000 concerned residents who are deeply affected by the recent parking charge hikes in our borough. These increases are not just a minor inconvenience; they are a significant burden on small businesses, self-employed individuals, carers, and residents who rely on their cars for daily activities especially parents with Neurodivergent children or older people with mobility issues who often drive out to hospitality venues for daytime social interaction.

The recent changes have resulted in parking charges tripling in some areas, with hourly rates increasing to £3.30 plus the 10p convenience fee added so it is actually £3.40. This is not just a matter of paying a bit more for parking; it's about the impact on our local economy, our high streets, and our town centres. Businesses are already struggling with online competition, low footfall, and rising costs. These punitive parking charges will only worsen the decline of our local businesses.

The council's actions have betrayed the trust of our community, particularly in areas outside of Kingston town. These businesses give their all to serve our community, and it's imperative that we support them.

As a community, we need to come together to find a solution that works for everyone. We are not asking for a complete exemption from parking charges, but we are asking for a fair and reasonable approach to parking charges, one that increases in line with maintenance inflation, rather than the outrageous 300% hike that has been imposed. Such a huge increase threatens to seriously harm the long-term viability of many of our local businesses. These decisions seem to have been made without any consultation as to the effect each cost would have for each local business, or the impact on each area of the borough. A more reasonable parking increase, or at least increases based consultation or relevant information, would be a much more sensible and acceptable solution.

The council's response (given to journalists) and last night's cllr Wearing's post on social media was yet again a slap on our faces and disregarding our concerns this has been disappointing, I will passionately argue that the removal of the 30-minute free parking option was a grave mistake to start off with so reinstating it was obvious, and morally the right thing to do.

Furthermore, One-Hour Free Parking would be A Lifeline for Local Businesses

I firmly believe that one-hour free parking should be available in areas where businesses are struggling to attract customers. Our pubs and small businesses are the lifeblood of our community, and it's unconscionable that the council has failed to mitigate the repercussions of these increases.

We urge you to reconsider your decision and engage in meaningful consultation with local business owners, self-employed individuals, and residents. We need to work together to find a solution that benefits everyone, not just the council's bottom line.
I would like to request information regarding the revised parking fees in pay and display in the borough, as per the Freedom of Information Act. Specifically, I would like to obtain:

1. Details of the council's banding structure for the CPZ parking areas in the entire borough, including analysis of how the pricing structure is set and how the decision is made to vary the parking fees.
2. Information on the location of CPZ bays that include 30 minutes free parking at £3.00ph.
3. Details of any 4-hour stay parking bays, including 30 minutes free parking.
4. The reason behind removing the user's ability to pay for increments of an hour and imposing whole hour payment for all users of pay and display.
5. Information explaining why car parks are cheaper than pay and display bays in some areas.

Transparency is essential in decision-making, and we believe that providing this information will help us better understand the council's thought process and work together to find a solution that benefits everyone.

The petition before you today is not just about parking charges; it's about the future of our community. It's about ensuring that our high streets and town centres remain vibrant and thriving. It's about supporting local businesses and residents, carers, and friends and family of the elderly, who are already struggling to make ends meet.

In conclusion, as of the 11th April it costs you around £8 to go and see your grandparents for a couple of hours in certain areas of our borough.

I urge you to take our petition seriously and consider the impact of these parking charge hikes on our community. Let us work together to find a solution that benefits everyone.

Thank you.