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**PARKING STRATEGY**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To brief Scrutiny on the outcome of public consultation on the Draft Parking Strategy and seek members views. A copy of the parking strategy document, revised following consideration of comments from the consultation is attached at **Appendix 1**.

**Summary**

2. In July, Cabinet agreed the Draft Parking Strategy 2014-2026, to be used as the basis of public consultation.
3. Through September and early October the public, businesses and transport operators were invited to comment on the draft Parking Strategy.
4. The consultation was publicised through the Northern Echo, Darlington Together and via the Councils website.
5. Comments on the strategy were collected at public 'drop in' sessions, via an online survey and through the post.
6. All residents living within a residents parking zone received a letter inviting comments and publicising the 'drop in' sessions.
7. Organisations representing particular interests were also contacted directly, these included DAD, AGE UK, Distinct Darlington, Town Centre Board, Bus and Coach Operators. See **Appendix 2** for a list of organisations contacted.
8. A full list of the public response to the consultation is attached as **Appendix 3**.
9. Having considered the responses, which are mainly targeted at the actions rather than the objectives of the Strategy, Officers have recommended a number of amendments (and additions) to the Action Plan.

**Recommendation**

10. It is recommended that Members consider the proposed amendments to the Parking Strategy, as set out in paragraphs 50-52 and Table 1, forward their views to Cabinet.

## Richard Alty, Director of Economic Growth

### Background Papers

#### Darlington Parking Strategy 2014-2026

Owen Wilson: Extension 6047

S17 Crime and Disorder	Ensuring, where possible, that car parks are well lit, covered by CCTV and Park Mark accredited will minimise crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	
Carbon Impact	This strategy is an important component of the tools that are used to deliver the Economic Strategy, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan. It will therefore have a role in promoting economic activity whilst balancing the principles of a sustainable travel town that reduces carbon impacts.
Diversity	The strategy has been the subject of an Equalities Impact Assessment.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The Parking Strategy is not one of the strategies that forms part of the Council's Policy Framework as set out in the Constitution and therefore this report does not represent a change to the framework. The Strategy does not impact upon the current MTFP. Where it is the case that delivery of specific actions within the strategy impact on the council's budget framework, these will be referred to Cabinet and to Council for a decision. (For example the proposal to develop a multi-storey car park)
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The draft parking strategy supports the vision and outcomes of the Darlington Partnership by ensuring parking contributes to the vibrancy and economic vitality of Darlington.
Efficiency	No new implications.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

11. Public comments received focused on Town Centre parking (72 written responses), parking in Cockerton (68 written responses) and on residents parking zones (58 written responses).
12. There were also 15 comments relating to parking bays for blue badge holders and a small number of other comments.
13. In addition to the above, Officers recorded comments at drop in sessions, held at the Dolphin Centre, on a Market Stall and at an event in Cockerton.
14. Comments were also received via email, or in person from Age UK, DAD and a number of retail businesses.
15. Principal points from the consultation are:

### Town Centre Parking

16. While many respondents wanted time limited (e.g. no return after three hours) free parking in the town centre, others suggested the first three hours free but with the option to stay longer and pay. Several people suggested car parking tickets should be paid on exit or on foot just before returning to the vehicle to reduce the stress of having to return to their vehicle before the ticket runs out.
17. In terms of charges, a number of people stated that they were confused about the Sunday parking charges and want to return to free parking on Sundays. There was also a suggestion to introduce parking for parts of an hour, at a pro-rata charge, for people who only want to pop into the town centre for a short time. So, for example, a 30 minute ticket would cost 50p and a 15 minute ticket would cost 25p. At the other end of the spectrum, people complained that long-stay parking charges are too high and also suggested that the Council should introduce a weekly/monthly permit at a discounted rate e.g. five weekdays for the price of four.
18. Regarding the parking bays, many people complained the bays are too narrow and are worried about denting/scratching other people's vehicles or annoyed to find their own car dented when they return to their vehicle. Drivers requiring disabled parking bays claimed there are not enough in the town centre and requested more.
19. There were specific representations on the idea of reintroducing on-street parking on Skinnergate. Those for the idea claimed it would increase trade because shoppers would be able to park closer to the shops and pop in easily. Those against the idea claimed it would adversely affect highway safety for pedestrians, reduce footfall and, therefore, reduce trade.
20. Several respondents are concerned that there will be a shortage of car parking spaces in the future and urged the Council to replace the lost Town Hall spaces before the Department for Education offices open and before the development starts on the Feethams site. The number of spaces should reflect not only those lost due to the redevelopment of the car parks but, also, reflect the additional

demand generated by the new developments. One respondent suggested that all the surface level car parks should be redeveloped for town centre uses or be redeveloped as multi-storey car parks to free-up surface level car parks for redevelopment.

21. One respondent suggested using traffic management techniques, to reduce congestion, together with promoting alternatives to the car.

### **Response to comments on Town Centre parking**

22. Parking tariffs are inevitably a contentious issue with some members of the public and with a number of town centre businesses. In setting charges the Council must set a balance between supporting the economy, recovering the cost of providing parking and the desire to achieve a broad range of policy objectives, including economic growth, a high quality and safe environment, good accessibility for all (drivers and also those travelling by other modes – bus, rail, on foot and by bike), and a fairer society (narrowing the gap).
23. Price is only one of a range of factors influencing peoples' choice of place to visit and park. For example, factors include the nature of the journey, the time available, the weather, the general experience/offer of the destination, safety and security levels, and competing offers from other centres.
24. Nevertheless, it is important that car park charges ensure parking is attractive to car park users. It is also important for the Council in how it manages budgets to cover operating costs.
25. The impact of free (to the user) parking has been by local businesses which see it as a way of increasing the attractiveness of the town centre. This is not recommended as an option for Darlington for a number of reasons:-
  - (a) Anecdotal evidence on the benefits to retail of free parking is conflicting however there is no clear evidence to suggest that free parking on its own increases the economic vitality of Town Centres.
  - (b) Local and national empirical evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of drivers choose their shopping destination based on the shopping offer available and not on cost of parking.
  - (c) Free parking may encourage people who travel to the town centre by bus to switch to using the car, potentially increasing congestion on the roads and in the most popular car parks.
  - (d) There is a cost involved in providing parking (enforcement, signage, maintenance, ticket machines etc.) – this is covered by parking charges so if parking was free the costs would have to be met elsewhere. It is estimated that the cost to Darlington Borough Council of introducing two hours free parking could be in excess of £400,000 per annum. Evidence suggests that bus patronage in Middlesbrough has suffered as a result of the trial in Middlesbrough.

26. Reduced charges were discounted for the same reasons as free parking, ie it would lead to possible shortfalls in cost of providing parking while not increasing footfall.
27. All surplus income the Council generates from operating its pay and display (off street and on street) parking is spent on transport and highways functions, for example highway re-surfacing, maintenance of highway structures etc... For Darlington in 2012/13 net income from Pay and Display parking was £1.009M, spending on highways was £5.535M.
28. Other revenue from parking comes from Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) and from sale of resident parking permits. The Traffic Management Act 2004 (part 6) requires that all income from CPE including sale of residents parking permits should not exceed the cost of running the service. For Darlington in 2012/13 total income was £448,957 made up from £418,527 penalty notice payments and £30,430 residents permits. The service cost £572,630 to run in 2012/13, £123,673 more than the income collected.
29. The basic level of parking charge in Darlington, £1:00 per hour and £4.00 per day has not changed since 2009 a period of time over which inflation has pushed up prices by at least 18% ( RPI 2009 – 2013, Q3). The draft parking Strategy recommends that parking tariffs are reviewed annually.
30. Comments on introducing more flexible tariffs and 'pay on exit' have been acknowledged within the proposed parking strategy. The Strategy proposes the updating of parking meters and introduction of new payment technology, this will allow for a greater range of payment options / tariffs.
31. In response to comments on the quality of parking, the Council in recent weeks has completed improvements, including, re-surfacing and re-lining works at Winston Street, Archer Street, Kendrew Street East, Kendrew Street West, and Commercial Street East Car Park.
32. Differing views were expressed on introducing parking bays on Skinnergate. It is proposed that Officers work with Distinct Darlington, Town Centre Board, property agents and businesses/owners/occupiers on Skinnergate to investigate a range of options for increasing footfall and regenerating the street. This might include changing vehicular access to Skinnergate, however simply opening up the street to parking would have a significantly alter the street environment impacting on pedestrians particularly the young and on disabled people. Opening the street would also substantially increase the amount of vehicular through traffic, using Skinnergate as a route from Duke St to Blackwellgate, which could have detrimental effects on footfall elsewhere. It is therefore better to look at other options for regeneration and increasing footfall first, before taking a decision on opening Skinnergate to traffic.
33. Proposed actions including the construction of a Multi-storey car park on Beaumont Street reflect evidence of existing and forecast parking demand used to support the development of the Parking Strategy.

## Residents' Parking Zones

34. The responses fall into two categories. The first category covers those residents who strongly object to having to pay to park outside their house or in their street. These residents do not object to RPZs, as such, but insist that residents' permits should be free. They therefore object to any extension of the RPZ within their street. The second category covers those residents who accept that the Council should levy a charge for administering the scheme, but object to the increase in charges. In general, these residents insist that, having paid for a permit, they should be guaranteed a parking spot within the RPZ. Various suggestions were proposed:
- (a) Extend the RPZ (not supported by those residents who refuse to buy a permit)
  - (b) Extend the time the RPZs are in operation from 8:00 to 20:00 (currently anyone can park in an RPZ from 18:00 to 8:00 the next morning) and extend the enforcement accordingly
  - (c) Limit the number of permits to one per household (not supported by those residents with two or more cars)
35. While most residents in RPZs adjacent to the Town Centre complain about commuters parking in their streets between 8:00 and 18:00 weekdays, there are specific issues in some RPZs in relation to nearby uses. These vary from parking of off-duty taxis, to Bank Top Station users parking all day (or even for weeks at a time), to inconsiderate or unsafe parking by staff and visitors to the Memorial Hospital. Although the proposed solutions varied, all agreed that action needed to be taken immediately and, therefore, the review of RPZs should be prioritised.
36. Some residents living in the Town Centre Fringe suggested that the long stay car parking charges were too high. They pointed to the popularity of the former Skippers Garage site, adjacent to the Ring Road, which charges £2.50 per day and is always full. They suggested that if the Council charged the same amount then the car parks would be full, thus generating as much if not more revenue, and the number of commuters parking in their streets would be reduced.
37. Two comments, which came from residents from all of the RPZs, related to visitor parking and trades parking. Most people wanted a free, simple, system to enable visitors to pop in at anytime without having to pre-book. The most popular suggestion was a voucher based system where each household is issued with a book of vouchers. Car registration details are recorded and a voucher dated for each visit is placed in the windscreen of the visitors' vehicles.
38. A similar permit system was requested for visits by trades' persons. With a number of residents and trades people objecting to the current £5 admin fee (charged per day) for a trades person permit. At one of the Town centre drop in sessions one tradesman gave a detailed explanation as to how applying for a permit disrupted his business, when on some occasions it took him up to 30 minutes on the phone to obtain a permit.

## **Response to comments on Residents Parking Zones**

39. Reflecting on comments from residents and businesses it is clear that there is a need to review the operation of RPZ's, including times of operation, numbers of permits issued per household and the provision of visitor / trades permits.
40. Reviewing and changing the physical design of the RPZ's is a resource intensive process. The Strategy recommends that this work is prioritised based on an initial review of all of Darlington's RPZ's.

## **Cockerton**

41. The overwhelming response from both residents and businesses in Cockerton is that there is no parking problem and that there is no need to undertake a feasibility study, nor any need to introduce residents parking zones (RPZ), pay and display or time limited parking. Most residents are tolerant of the parking associated with dropping off and picking up of children at the two schools and of the parking associated with daily events and activities at the nearby churches, although some residents stated that parking outside of the schools is a problem, particularly on Prior Street.
42. Residents suggested that double yellow lines should be painted at some of the junctions to improve highway safety. They also suggested installing or improving the signage to the free car park behind the library and shopping parade.

## **Response to comments on Cockerton**

43. Reflecting on comments from Cockerton residents and businesses it is proposed that the action 'Investigate feasibility of on street pay and display parking in Cockerton centre' is taken out of the Parking Strategy.
44. A review and update of parking signage in Cockerton will be undertaken as part of action 7, 'Signage to be reviewed to ensure that it directs drivers towards car park locations appropriate to their trip and destination'.

## **Other Comments**

45. Representatives from Darlington Association on Disability took part in two workshops during preparation of the draft strategy document, comments taken at the workshop are summarised below:
  - (a) Allowing parking on Skinnergate –the proposal presents several problems for disabled people through conflict between cars and pedestrians. If Skinnergate was opened to traffic most disabled would avoid it as they currently do before 10am and after 5pm.
  - (b) Shopmobility – needs to be near parking as most users arrive by car. It must not be in a bus station and it shouldn't be a stand-alone unit.
  - (c) Car parks - In new car parks there should be more than the minimum required disabled bays. When designing proposed multi-storey car parks DAD should be consulted. There is currently insufficient supply of blue badge bays in

Darlington, can we consider more blue badge parking near Crown Street library.

- (d) Residents parking - there needs to be more flexibility over residents parking locations because when they set them up they try to put them in the part of the street where people with mobility problems live so they don't have far to walk. The problem comes later when those people for whatever reason don't live there anymore and new people with mobility problems move into the other end of the street and can't walk to the residents parking area.
46. Age UK expressed specific concerns over clients accessing services located within their premises on Beaumont Street. The conversion of Beaumont Street (West) car park to contract parking has meant that the nearest parking is Beaumont St (North), a longer walk, up a steep hill. They would like clients to be able to park closer to their premises.
47. Comments at the Town Centre Board and Distinct Darlington Board focused on:
- (a) Town Centre parking charges, where there were mixed views on pricing levels, though the majority of Town Centre businesses would like to see parking charges reduced.
  - (b) Availability of flexible payment options. There was strong support for introducing pay on exit wherever practicable, for example in the proposed multi-storey car park.
  - (c) The need to ensure provision of sufficient parking, particularly short stay spaces for shoppers.

### **Response to other comments**

48. In reply to comments from DAD on Shopmobility blue badge parking and the multi-storey car park, DAD have had an opportunity to input into the MSCP design including the option of locating shop mobility within the car park.
49. In terms of the number of blue badge spaces provided, in off-street car parks the Council has a policy of providing a minimum of 4% + 4 of blue badge spaces. It is proposed that action 22 of the Strategy is revised so that it is to 'Review the location, number and parking restrictions on Town Centre blue badge parking every 5 years'.
50. With respect to residents parking bays for disabled drivers, this will be looked at as part of the review of RPZ's.
51. In response to Age UK's concerns over parking for their clients, the construction of the MSCP on Beaumont Street will provide an opportunity to look at whether the contract parking on Beaumont Street (West) could be moved into the MSCP.
52. Responses to comments from the Town Centre Board, Distinct Darlington and other organisations have already been covered in the previous sections.



## Suggested amendments to the Parking Strategy

53. Comments received on the strategy focused on the recommended actions, rather than the overall strategy objectives. Other than a slight re-wording there are no changes proposed to the six objectives in the draft document:
- (a) Optimise parking supply in the right locations within the Borough.
  - (b) Ensure that the management of parking, including setting of parking fees, provides the right balance between encouraging visitors to Darlington, covering costs and supporting One Darlington, Perfectly Placed policy objectives.
  - (c) Ensure that residents living close to urban centres, notably the Town Centre are able to park close to their homes.
  - (d) Ensure that car park users feel safe and secure.
  - (e) Ensure that the provision and management of parking for blue badge holders enables disabled drivers and/or passengers to access services and amenities.
  - (f) Provide HGV, coach and motorcycle parking at appropriate locations within the Borough.
54. Reflecting on public expectations for transparency on the implementation of parking charges and penalty fines, an additional objective is proposed:
- (g) Ensure that information is publicly available on the revenue generated from Civil Parking Enforcement and Parking Charges, and on how that revenue is spent.
49. Table 1, reviews the actions within the draft parking strategy, where applicable suggesting amendments, based on the outcome of consultation.

## Table 1 Review of Parking Strategy Actions

Parking Strategy Action (Revised)	Objective 1 - Optimise parking supply within the right locations within the Borough	
	Action in draft strategy	Recommendation / Milestone / Comment
1.1	Development of a multi-storey car park within the Feethams area	Recommend: No change to action 2013/14
1.2	Development of a multi-storey car park within the south of the Town Centre Fringe to support the regeneration of the area	<b>Recommend: Reference to South of Town centre is removed.</b>  Timescale will be determined by rate of development.
1.3	Development of a multi-storey car park in the Commercial Street/Kendrew Street area as part of potential Oval development	Recommend: No change to action  Timescale will be determined by rate of development.
1.4	Develop contingency plans to provide parking to replace that lost during the development of the proposed leisure complex, office building and multi-storey car park in Feethams	<b>Recommend: Contingency plan in place by Feb. 2014</b>
1.5	Provide additional parking in Morton Palms area	Recommend: No change to action  Timescale dependent on securing funding.
	Investigate feasibility of on street pay and display parking in Cockerton centre.	<b>Recommend: That this action is deleted.</b>
1.6	Signage to be reviewed to ensure that it directs drivers towards car park locations appropriate to their trip and destination.	Recommend: Complete review and update signage by September 2014
1.7	Investigate additional on street car parking in Skinnergate and Duke Street	<b>Recommend: Action amended to investigate and report on a wider regeneration package for Skinnergate.</b>  <b>To complete by December 2014.</b>
1.8	Provide contract parking in the Town Centre for businesses with a travel plan who need parking for operational purposes.	Recommend: No change to action  Ongoing.

Parking Strategy Action (Revised)	Objective 2 - Ensure that we have the right balance of parking charges to ensure car parking is attractive to users and ensure that we have a range of payment methods to provide more choice to car park users.	
	Action in draft strategy	Recommendation / Milestone / Comment
2.1	Develop a range of tariffs and review them annually to ensure they remain competitive and deliver the desired outcomes of the strategy.	Recommend: No Change to action. Review annually.
2.2	Weekly, four weekly and annual tickets to be available either from ticket machines or by e-mail or telephone.	Recommend: No Change to action Timescale 2014/15 (This linked with the procurement of new ticket machines)
2.3	Introduce time limits in short stay car parks and in on street parking close to shops to encourage turnover and access to main shopping locations.	Recommend: No Change to action Spring 2014
2.4	Pay on foot to be implemented in all new multi-storey car parks and considered in other new car parks.	Recommend: No Change to action To be introduced in new MSCP, due to open Spring 2015.
2.5	Current pay by phone contract will be re-tendered ahead of its expiry. New technology explored to ensure that car park users in Darlington benefit from the most up to date methods of payment. New machines to be installed with the facility to accept card payment (for transactions of £4 or more) and with the capacity to accept smart cards when introduced.	Recommend: No Change to action Autumn 2014.
2.6	Work with Distinct Darlington to investigate jointly delivering parking promotions and incentive schemes for the Town Centre that can be used for car parking and other purposes.	Recommend: No Change to action No Change to action Christmas promotion 2013 and ongoing.

<b>Parking Strategy Action (Revised)</b>	<b>Objective 3 - Address issues associated with residents' parking zones to ensure that residents can park close to their homes at all reasonable times and encourage town centre visitors to use appropriate car parking facilities, boosting town centre footfall</b>	
	<b>Action in draft strategy</b>	<b>Milestone / Comment / Recommendation</b>
3.1	Introduce pay and display parking for non-residents within residents' parking zones	<p><b>Recommend: Change to continue to review requests for changes within RPZ's on a case by case basis.</b></p> <p><b>And</b></p> <p><b>Complete a high level review of all RPZ's in 2016 /17 including consideration of extending zones, number of resident's spaces and changes to unrestricted areas such as limited waiting and/or Pay and Display.</b></p>
3.2	Introduce visitor permits for use in RPZ bays	<p><b>Recommend: Change to Introduce visitor permits and a new process for issuing trades permits for use in RPZ bays.</b></p> <p><b>Bring forward implementation by summer 2014.</b></p>
3.3	Continue to charge trade vehicles for parking.	<b>Recommend: Change to review charging structure and implement by summer 2014.</b>
<b>Parking Strategy Action (Revised)</b>	<b>Objective 4 - Ensure that car park users feel safe and secure</b>	
	<b>Action in draft strategy</b>	<b>Recommendation / Milestone / Comment</b>
4.1	Walk routes to car parks to be signed and lit to acceptable standards and CCTV to be installed where possible in off street car parks.	Recommend: No Change to action 2014.
4.2	Principles of Park Mark accreditation or equivalent will be the ambition in each off street car park.	Recommend: No Change to action Ongoing.
4.3	Ensure all new parking meets current design standards	Recommend: No Change to action Ongoing

<b>Parking Strategy Action (Revised)</b>	<b>Objective 5 - Ensure that the provision and management of parking for blue badge holders enables disabled drivers and/or passengers to access services and amenities.</b>	
	<b>Action in draft strategy</b>	<b>Recommendation / Milestone / Comment</b>
5.1	Continue 3 hours free parking in car parks and on street in the town centre for blue badge holders.	<b>Recommendation: Review the location, number and parking restrictions on Town Centre blue badge parking every 5 years.</b>
<b>Parking Strategy Action (Revised)</b>	<b>Objective 6 - Provide HGV and Coach parking within appropriate locations within the borough Ensure that secure facilities for motorcycles are maintained and expanded.</b>	
	<b>Action in draft strategy</b>	<b>Recommendation / Milestone / Comment</b>
6.1	Long stay parking for coaches and heavy goods vehicles to be provided at Chestnut Street	Recommend: No Change to action Ongoing
6.2	Continue to provide free parking in dedicated bays with locking bars in short stay car parks and explore potential for installing locking bars in long stay car parks.	Recommend: No Change to action Ongoing
<b>Parking Strategy Action (Revised)</b>	<b>Objective 7 - Produce an annual report detailing income from CPE and Pay and Display parking and how the income is spent.</b>	
	<b>Action in draft strategy</b>	<b>Recommendation / Milestone / Comment</b>
7.1		<b>Produce an annual report detailing income from CPE and Pay and Display parking and how the income is spent</b>