
DRAFT CAR PARKING STRATEGY

Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor David Lyonette, Transport Portfolio

Responsible Director – Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Member's approval of the draft Car Parking Strategy 2014 – 2026 as the basis for public consultation.

Summary

2. The last parking strategy was produced in 2009 since when there have been many changes affecting parking, and a new strategy was considered essential to ensure parking continues to meet the needs of residents, businesses and visitors and support the economic vitality of Darlington. Particular focus is given to parking within the vicinity of the town centre, although some more general aspects of parking are also covered.
3. The draft parking strategy explains why we need a new strategy and highlights the issues and challenges we face and sets out our ambitions and objectives for parking to 2026. The strategy is supported by an Action Plan which explains how we will deliver the actions and measure progress. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. **(See Appendix 1)**

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the draft Car Parking Strategy **(Appendix A)** as the basis for public consultation.

Reasons

5. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) An updated parking strategy is needed to replace the strategy produced in 2009.
 - (b) The revised strategy reflects the local, national and global changes affecting parking that have occurred since the 2009 strategy was published.

- (c) The draft strategy provides a clear set of objectives and actions that address parking issues in the Borough.

Richard Alty
Director of Place

Background Papers

- (i) Technical background and analysis report
- (ii) Draft Strategy
- (iii) Development matrix
- (iv) Report on survey of users of on street parking and residents of residents parking zones

Greg McDougall : Extension 2721

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 draft 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 consultation draft does not impact upon the current MTFP although specific responses to consultation may have implications for future revenue and capital expenditure.
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

Why A New Parking Strategy

6. Darlington Borough Council last produced a parking strategy in 2009 – since then there have been several factors, both locally, nationally and globally, affecting parking, including:-
 - (a) Introduction at the end of 2010 of civil parking enforcement
 - (b) Global and national economic downturn
 - (c) Increased pressure for development on existing town centre car parks in line with the emerging Town Centre Strategy and Local Plan.
7. This new parking strategy will set parking policy for the same period as Darlington's emerging local plan, 2014 to 2026. It has reflected on the 2009 strategy and provided an opportunity to examine what is already being done and what has already been achieved in parking in the Borough while also looking at what parking needs to achieve over the next decade.

Methodology

8. In 2012 specialist parking consultancy MVA was engaged to review the 2009 parking strategy and to prepare a technical assessment of vehicle parking provision in the Borough to inform the strategy. The technical assessment addresses fundamental questions like:-
 - (a) what is the optimum number of spaces
 - (b) where should they be located
 - (c) what is the right balance between short and long stay spaces
 - (d) how should charging be managed to support economic prosperity whilst helping to encourage more sustainable travel
 - (e) what influences car drivers choice of Darlington as a destination and what role does parking play in that decision.
9. The consultants examined current supply and demand patterns for parking, as well as identifying specific problems and issues around parking in the town centre and the villages and district centres in the wider Borough.
10. A desktop study of parking data was undertaken to establish patterns and historical trends in parking. This was followed by face to face surveys with car park users and spot counts in various car parks on different days.
11. Socio demographic data showing population make up and levels of car ownership were examined, as was travel behaviour research which shows the travel habits of Darlington residents.
12. Consultation sessions were held to ascertain the views and opinions of various stakeholders including town centre retailers, Council officers and protected characteristic groups (eg DAD and GOLD).

13. The consultants looked at all of the planned developments in the town centre and used transport modelling software to forecast future parking demand.
14. Following the evidence collection a framework was produced that included a long list of initiatives that could be considered (as well as some which should be discounted) as part of the final strategy, as well as recommendations for further evidence collection.
15. The recommended further survey work on parking was undertaken by a specialist market research company in February 2012 – this involved surveying users of on-street pay and display parking about their parking habits, needs and wants. In addition surveys were carried out amongst households in Residents Parking Zones – these looked at how the zones currently operate and whether there was anything which could be done differently to improve them.
16. Following the work done by the consultants and the additional evidence collection, a draft strategy has been produced which sets out a series of measures and initiatives that will aim to meet the challenges and needs of parking in the Borough over the next 15 years.

Vision and Objectives

17. The overarching vision of the draft strategy is that Darlington offers a parking experience that meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors and contributes to Darlington's economic prosperity by providing parking in the right places and at the right price, to an appropriate standard whilst balancing the principles of a sustainable travel town.
18. The strategy contains six objectives within which the proposed actions are set out. The objectives are to:-
 - (a) Optimise parking supply within the right locations within the Borough
 - (b) Ensure that we have the right balance of parking charges to ensure car parking is not so prohibitive to users it stifles economic activity and yet so competitive that it negatively impacts on bus services and congestion.
 - (c) Ensure we have a range of payment methods to provide more convenience and choice to car park users
 - (d) Address issues associated with Residents Parking Zones to ensure that residents can park close to their homes at reasonable times
 - (e) Ensure that car park users feel safe and secure
 - (f) Ensure that parking for blue badge holders and disabled drivers allows flexibility and accessibility to services and amenities
 - (g) Provide HGV and Coach parking within appropriate locations within the Borough and ensure that secure facilities for motorcycles are maintained and expanded.
19. The general principles underpinning the strategy for the town centre, along with the key actions, have been represented by a simple model and shown diagrammatically on page 15 of the draft Strategy. The Model splits the Town

Centre into three zones and will be applied to all car parks:-

- (a) The zone in the core will mainly cater for shoppers and short term visitors and contains predominantly short stay parking, some of which will be time limited to encourage higher turnover, multi-storey parking and some contract parking.
- (b) An inner ring zone around the town centre will cater for commuters and those making longer visits, consisting mainly of long stay parking.
- (c) The outer ring zone will consist of residential parking and parking for coaches and HGV's.

20. Although the parking strategy covers the same period as the emerging Local Plan, the actions within the delivery action plan are split into different timescales – short term (up to 2 years); medium term (2 – 5 years) and long term over 5 years. Annual reports on progress against outputs and outcomes will be produced and the Action Plan will be regularly updated.

Key Issues

21. Several key issues have been identified which the Strategy seeks to address:-

- (a) Supply and Demand
- (b) Pricing Policy
- (c) Payment Methods
- (d) Residents Parking Zones
- (e) Quality of Parking
- (f) Safety and Security
- (g) Blue Badge Parking
- (h) District Centres and Villages
- (i) HGV and Coach Parking
- (j) Motorcycle Parking

Supply and Demand

22. It is vital that there is the right number of spaces to cope with demand and that the spaces are in the right locations to satisfy the needs of drivers and to ensure parking supports the economic wellbeing and ambitions of Darlington. This is especially pertinent due to the potential loss to development of various car parks in the town centre and the increased demand that will result from some of that development.

23. The technical analysis produced by MVA in 2012 concluded that although there is enough parking supply in Darlington to cope with current demand there is severe pressure on certain car parks and less pressure on others. For example, the greatest demand is to the north and south of the town centre, with Commercial Street East, Commercial Street West and Abbott's Yard to the north and Beaumont Street North and Beaumont Street East to the south regularly operating near capacity.

24. To forecast how much parking supply may be needed over the next decade a variety of factors were considered and assumptions made, including:-
- (a) Current demand for parking
 - (b) Forecast traffic growth based on Central National Road Traffic Forecasts
 - (c) Planned developments within the ring road
 - (d) Projected number of trips to planned developments based on the Trip Rate Indicator Card System method of transport modelling
25. Based on these assumptions demand for parking is estimated to increase by 27% to 2020 on weekdays and around 34% on Saturdays. As there are currently around 2500 Council operated spaces and around 1500 privately operated spaces this would mean an additional 1300 spaces will be required to meet the forecast demand.
26. As demand increases and the area available for surface car parks diminishes because of development, there is an increasing case for multi-storey car parking. The draft parking strategy proposes the building of a multi-storey car park (subject to completion of feasibility work) at Beaumont Street to service developments and forecast demand in the Feethams area. Over time it is anticipated that further multi-storey car parks may be considered necessary in the Commercial Street and Park Place West areas. Work is being undertaken to ascertain the cost of providing a multi-storey car park in Beaumont Street North but early indications suggest costs in the region of £6 million for 600 space capacity. Cabinet agreed to release funding for the feasibility study, through the LTP, in February 2013. Potential Options for funding the multi-storey car park are set out in **Appendix B**.
27. In addition, the strategy proposes investigation into the benefits of introducing short stay, on street parking in Skinnergate and Duke Street. This is in response to consultation with businesses in Skinnergate who feel that parking might increase footfall. Until a specific proposal is planned it is difficult to estimate costs, however there is an indicative budget of £121,000 available from the Local Transport Plan's town centre budget.
28. During construction, the proposed development of a leisure complex and office building in Feethams together with the proposed multi-storey car park in Beaumont Street North will lead to the temporary loss of all of the car parking in that part of the town centre. There is sufficient parking supply elsewhere in the town centre to accommodate the displaced parking but plans will need to be in place to ensure drivers are aware of the alternatives and that they know how to access them. A contingency plan which covers parking availability, accessibility and associated network management implications, is currently being drafted to address this issue.
29. **The recommended approach to addressing these issues is included in the Priority Action Plan Objective 1: Actions 1 – 9.**

Pricing Policy

30. 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.

31. 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. Various options were considered when looking at what level to set charges at, including free parking, reduction on current charges, increased charges and maintaining current charges.
32. The impact of free (to the user) parking has been raised through consultation by local businesses which see it as a way of increasing the attractiveness of the town centre. Middlesbrough has introduced a trial of free parking for two hours and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is encouraging local authorities to introduce free parking, however it is not recommended as an option for Darlington for various reasons:-
 - (a) Anecdotal evidence on the benefits to retail of free parking is conflicting however there is no academic evidence to suggest that free parking increases footfall.
 - (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) Prime town centre spaces would be taken by commuters, pushing shoppers away
 - (d) While free parking is unlikely to increase footfall and town centre trade, by attracting new visitors, it may encourage people who travel to the town centre by bus to switch to using the car.
 - (e) Evidence from bus operator surveys showed that people who travel by bus spend more money in the Town Centre than those travelling by car.
33. There is a cost involved in providing parking (policing, signage, maintenance, ticket machines etc.) – this is covered by parking charges so if parking was free the costs would have to be met elsewhere. Middlesbrough Council has estimated that the six month trial of free parking will result in a loss of revenue of £300,000. 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.
34. 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.
35. There is felt to be no business case for increasing charges. Comparison with other main centres in the Tees Valley suggest the levels in Darlington compare favourably, but we will need to continually review the market to monitor the position.
36. The charging option proposed in the draft strategy is to maintain the current charging structure (ie £1 per hour in short stay car parks and £4 per day in most long stay car parks). Current charges ensure costs are covered but also offer value for money for drivers. It is further proposed that the charging structure is reviewed

annually – should conditions change, charging structure can be altered relatively easily and quickly.

37. Opportunities to work with Distinct Darlington, Darlington's business improvement district project, have been identified. Discussions to date have examined the possibility of a Distinct Darlington loyalty card that offers shoppers discounts in town centre shops against the cost of parking. There is also the opportunity for the Council to work with local businesses on parking promotions and incentivised parking and to promote parking at specific times of year such as Christmas.
38. Waiting times have been reviewed for Abbots Yard car park which operates at 98% capacity all week. Although short stay, there is no limit on how long users can stay. To encourage a higher turnover and subsequently help to increase footfall in the town centre, a maximum stay of three hours is proposed.
39. **The recommended approach to addressing these issues is included in the Priority Action Plan Objective 2: Actions 10-12 & 15**

Payment Methods

40. In response to feedback from Darlington retailers and car park users more variety of payment methods are considered in the draft strategy. The only methods of payment currently available are pay and display or pay by phone. Pay and display can be restrictive as shoppers often have to curtail trips as their parking is due to expire. Retailers have suggested that Pay on Foot, whereby a driver pays for however much parking they have used at the end of a trip, would avoid curtailed trips and thereby increase trade. This is in contrast to Pay on Exit (previously used at East Street Car Park) which relied on a permanent on-site staffing. The cost of retrofitting Pay on Foot to existing car parks could be prohibitively expensive (up to £255,000 per car park at 2006 prices) but the strategy proposes that pay on foot should be standard in all new car parks.
41. Car park users currently have the option of paying for parking using their mobile phone, however this service is several years old and as technology has progressed new methods of payment will be considered when the current pay by phone contract is due for renewal in 2014.
42. **The recommended approach to addressing these issues is included in the Priority Action Plan Objective 2: Actions 13-14.**

Residents Parking Zones (RPZ's)

43. RPZ's were introduced in various areas around the town centre and Memorial Hospital to reduce the pressure of commuter and shopper parking in residential streets, allowing residents the chance to park at or near their homes. There are currently 15 RPZ's in areas where there is pressure from commuters, shoppers and visitors.
44. The draft strategy looks at the issues associated with the operation of RPZ's. The survey of residents within residents parking zones carried out in early 2013 showed

that more than half of the respondents had difficulty parking in their zone at least once a week and that a similar percentage found that their visitors always have difficulty finding a space. To try and alleviate this, the strategy proposes introduction of pay and display parking in the unrestricted areas of residents parking zones and introduction of visitor permits for visitors to permit holders.

45. **The recommended approach to addressing these issues is included in the Priority Action Plan Objective 3: Actions 16-18**

Other Issues

46. The **quality** of car parks is important and user surveys indicate a general level of satisfaction with Darlington's car parks. However, various car parks are showing signs of extensive wear and tear. Some funding from Darlington's Local Transport Plan is currently used to maintain car parks but the strategy reinforces that all new parking should meet current design standards.
47. There are improvements currently programmed for several town centre car parks. The improvements, funded by the Local Transport Plan, will involve resurfacing and re-lining parking bays. Although this will reduce the number of bays, it is anticipated that the improvements will make the car parks more attractive and therefore more well used. Car parks due for refurbishment include Commercial Street East and West, Kendrew Street East and West, Winston Street North and South and Archer Street.
48. When parking, many drivers will park in the first car park they come to or in a car park they are familiar with – this is often due to lack of awareness of alternatives which may be more suitable. While this is particularly the case with first time and occasional visitors to Darlington it is also true of some residents and regular visitors. In addition, lack of awareness of parking choices can lead to increased road traffic and congestion as drivers search for car parking. One of the most effective ways of alleviating drivers searching for parking is comprehensive **signage** which signposts drivers towards car parks. This can be done with static road signs and with variable messaging system signs which provide up to the minute electronic information.
49. The strategy examines **safety and security**. To maximise the safety of car park users it is an aspiration that, CCTV is retained in car parks and that car parks and walk routes to car parks are well lit. In addition car parks should continue to meet the criteria required to maintain Park Mark accreditation.
50. In considering the needs of disabled drivers and **blue badge** holders the strategy proposes to maintain the current policy of three hours free parking in car parks and on street. Consultation with disabled drivers has suggested the policy works well and requires little or no alteration.
51. Few parking issues were identified beyond the town centre in **district centres and villages**; however some were identified in Cockerton. Residents and representatives of local businesses suggested there is pressure from parking around Cockerton and in residential streets. As unrestricted, free parking is

available in the car park behind the parade of shops, the strategy suggests looking at the possibility of introducing short term pay and display parking around Cockerton Green to increase turnover and therefore footfall in local shops.

- 52. Long stay parking for **coaches and HGV's** is currently provided at Chesnut Street – it is proposed that this continues until such time as this land may be developed as part of the Town Centre Fringe project when alternative sites will be considered.
- 53. Free parking for **motorcycles** is currently provided in the form of locking bars in short stay car parks. The strategy proposes that this continues but also that the potential for providing similar facilities in long stay car parks is explored.
- 54. **The recommended approach to addressing these issues is included in the Priority Action Plan Objective 4 and 5: Actions 19-24**

Financial Implications

- 55. The following table is, an initial attempt to cost the various actions included in the Strategy and identify sources of funding (*will also include income estimate where possible*)

Proposed Action	Estimated Cost/ Income	Funding Source
Development of a multi-storey car park within the Feethams area to mitigate against loss of current supply and accommodate increased demands.	£6 million	Feasibility work underway. Appendix B outlines options for potential funding methods
Development of a multi-storey car park within the south of the Town Centre Fringe to support the regeneration of the area.		
Development of a multi-storey car park in the Commercial Street/Kendrew Street area as part of potential Oval development		As part of Oval development costs
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	£50k	To be identified
Provide additional parking supply in Morton Palms area	£410,000	Feasibility and business case being prepared.
Ensure all new parking meets current design standards	Within cost of each new car park	

Proposed Action	Estimated Cost/ Income	Funding Source
Investigate feasibility of on street pay and display parking in Cockerton centre	£40,000	LTP
Signage to be reviewed to ensure that it directs drivers towards car park locations	To be identified	LTP
Investigate additional on street car parking in Skinnergate and Duke Street.	Unknown until scheme developed	LTP
Provide contract parking in the Town Centre for businesses with a travel plan who need parking for operational purposes		Funded from permit sales
Develop a range of tariffs and review them annually to ensure they remain competitive and deliver the desired outcomes of the strategy	Estimated £19,500 per change to existing charges	DBC revenue
Weekly, four weekly and annual tickets to be available either from ticket machines or by e-mail or telephone		Funded from permit sales
Introduce time limits in some short stay car parks to encourage turnover and access to shops	£5,000	DBC revenue
Pay on foot to be implemented in all new multi-storey car parks and considered in other new car parks	Costs determined with each development	
Current pay by phone contract will be re-tendered upon its expiry. New technology explored to ensure that car park users in Darlington benefit from the most up to date methods of payment	£10,000	Car Park budget
New machines to be installed which the facility to accept card payment (for transactions of £4 or more) – with the capacity to accept smart cards when introduced	£150,000	Car Park budget
Work with Distinct Darlington to investigate a smartcard loyalty card for the Town Centre that can be used for car parking and	£7,500	DD to pay DBC to hold events

Proposed Action	Estimated Cost/ Income	Funding Source
other purposes by December 2013.		
Introduce pay and display parking for non-residents within residents' parking zones	£325,000	LTP beyond 2015
Introduce visitor permits for use in RPZ bays	No cost	Cost funded through permit sales
Continue to charge trade vehicles for parking	No cost	Cost funded through permit sales
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	Costs unknown pending further work	LTP
The principles of Park Mark accreditation or equivalent will be met in each off street car park	£3,100pa	Car Park budget
Long stay parking for coaches and heavy goods vehicles to be provided at Chesnut Street	No cost	
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	No cost	

Outcome of Consultation

56. The draft strategy has been consulted on at various stages of its production between June 2012 and April 2013 and is ongoing. Consultation and engagement has included:-
- (a) Car park users surveyed in April 2012
 - (b) Consultation sessions held with various stakeholder groups in June 2012, including local businesses, protected characteristic groups (DAD, GOLD) and Council officers
 - (c) The technical report produced by consultants MVA was presented to Place Scrutiny Committee in June 2012
 - (d) Public engagement sessions were held in summer 2012 in conjunction with the town centre regeneration project
 - (e) Users of on street pay and display parking were surveyed in February 2013
 - (f) Residents in Residents Parking Zones were surveyed in February 2013
 - (g) The draft strategy was presented to the Town Centre Board in March 2013 and Place Scrutiny Committee in April 2013.

57. The consultation undertaken has produced a variety of responses and resulted in many suggestions. Some of these suggestions have been incorporated into the strategy while others have been investigated and discounted. Most of the consultees have been supportive but throughout the course of the consultation to date it has become clear that parking is a very contentious topic and satisfying the needs of all stakeholders is extremely challenging.

Equalities Considerations

58. Equalities Impact Assessments were carried out on the draft strategy. A desktop exercise was undertaken to identify any potential equality issues around parking.

59. Engagement sessions were held with protected characteristic groups (DAD, GOLD) to ensure the strategy was aware of issues affecting different car park users. The desktop assessment and engagement sessions suggested that there are no significant impacts requiring attention and that current parking policy meets the needs of all groups.

Next Steps

60. Subject to Cabinet approval the draft strategy will be the subject of further consultation which will allow Darlington residents, businesses and interest groups the opportunity to comment on the strategy and the proposed actions.

61. Following consultation and any amendments to the strategy it will be adopted in late 2013.

APPENDIX A: DRAFT CAR PARKING STRATEGY (ATTACHED)

APPENDIX B: FUNDING METHOD OPTIONS FOR MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK (MSCP)

The proposed funding model utilises Home & Communities Agency (HCA) funding to provide the MSCP on the Beaumont Street North site, with subsequent purchase by the Council after 5 or 10 years. The income generated by the car parking spaces would be received by the Council with an element of this being used to make an annual financial return to the HCA. It is expected that the projected uplift in parking income from increased development traffic (Cinema & Offices) and a short term financial contribution from the Department for Education will mean that this arrangement does not impact on income projections in the current MTFP.

Subject to negotiation, the HCA would fully fund the construction of the MSCP with a commitment from the Council to purchase the asset from them after 10 years. It is intended that the HCA funding would be in the form of equity that the Council will repay on the current market valuation at the point of redemption. Further work is ongoing to project the likely valuation scenarios and repayment schedules based on operating costs and projected income, for example, one scenario is for a mixture of an immediate payment and subsequent staggered payments.

The proposed annual financial return to HCA is £54,000 per annum (1% of the budget capital cost). As stated above, it is expected that this would be payable from additional income outwith the MTFP.

The HCA have advised that they are willing to pay £15,000 towards project development costs to inform their funding decision.