

Appendix B

Report of the Parking Solutions Working Group

September 2003

Officer Contact

Philip Williams
Assistant Director (Integrated Transport)
Cheltenham Borough Council
tel. 01242 264141
email
philip.williams@cheltenham.gov.uk

Contents

	Page
Introduction	
1	Background 4
2	Policy context 5 - 7
3	Current local context 8
4	Current parking enforcement position 9 - 13
5	Experience of other towns 14 - 16
6	Key issues for Cheltenham 17 - 24
7	Key recommendations 25

Appendices

- A Terms of Reference and Membership**
- B On-street waiting restrictions**
- C Plan of town centre off-street car parks**
- D Plan of town centre on-street pay & display locations**
- E Location and details of Residents Parking Schemes**

Introduction

Over the last year, the working group established by Overview & Scrutiny Committee has met regularly to discuss the issues surrounding car parking in Cheltenham. The working group has invited various parties to present to the group. In addition, the group undertook study visits to Oxford and Worcester.

This report sets out the findings of the work undertaken by the group, and a number of recommendations for the Committee to consider.

Report of the Parking Solutions Working Group

September 2003

1. Background

Cheltenham is an economically buoyant town which plays a major role in the economy of the region. It is known for the high quality of its built and green environments, its festivals and as being home to several major organisations including GCHQ. Its town centre ranks amongst the nation's top 30 shopping centres and its night time economy is one of the most popular in the South West.

This economic activity brings with it ever-increasing pressure from road traffic and congestion. Sustainable land use planning and transport strategies, as set out in the Cheltenham Local Plan and the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan, are therefore essential to manage demand for car use and protect the town's environmental qualities which make Cheltenham attractive to residents, visitors and businesses.

Cheltenham Borough Council is able to exercise significant influence upon car use in the town by virtue of its responsibilities as highways agent to the County Council, as local planning authority and as a owner of several major car parks. Even with proposals to encourage walking, cycling, public transport and Park and Ride more than half of all trips will be made by car – each one beginning and ending in a car parking space.

However one consequence of implementing policies to manage car parking supply and limit its impact on the highway network has been an increased demand for effective parking enforcement. This is expected to continue increasing in the foreseeable future for several reasons: as new development is permitted with lower levels of on-site parking; as on-street parking is altered to improve traffic management; as sustainable transport schemes are implemented; and as more residents parking schemes, limited waiting and pay and display areas are introduced.

Tensions are greatest in residential areas around the town centre, in the vicinity of major employment sites, the station, hospital and football ground, and along public transport routes. With parking enforcement resources already stretched to meet existing commitments a long term solution is required which is consistent with sustainable transport and land use strategies and protects the environment of the town for its residents, visitors and businesses.

In July 2002 Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up the Parking Solutions working group to consider the full breadth of issues related to parking and the decriminalisation of parking enforcement in Cheltenham. The group's terms of reference and membership are set out in Appendix A.

The findings of the working group are set out in this draft report.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Parking policies for Cheltenham are set out in the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan 2000/01- 2005/06 and in the initial deposit of the Cheltenham Local Plan, approved in September 2002.

These policies draw heavily upon the following guidance documents issued at a national and regional level:

- Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG3 (Housing)
- PPG6 (Town Centres and Retail Development)
- PPG13 (Transport)
- Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10)

2.2 National Policies

PPG3 recommends that local authorities should review their standards for residential parking provision, which should not exceed an average of 1.5 spaces per dwelling. Lower provision should be encouraged in housing for low car-owning groups of people and in more accessible locations such as town centres.

PPG6 recommends that local authorities should produce a comprehensive strategy for the provision and management of parking, to reinforce the attractiveness and competitiveness of town centres. Such a strategy should cover all types of parking, on- and off-street, public and private, and give priority to shoppers and visitors over commuters. Parking provision at peripheral developments should not be set at high levels which would have the effect of disadvantaging town centres.

PPG13 recommends that on street parking controls should complement land-use policies and charges for parking should be used to encourage the use of alternative transport modes. Controls over public car parking should be backed up by adequate enforcement measures. PPG 13 sets out maximum car parking standards and requires cycle parking to be provided at new developments, encouraging local authorities to set more rigorous standards where appropriate. Major new development proposals must be accompanied by a Transport Assessment which assesses the accessibility of the development by public transport, cycling and walking. If necessary a Travel Plan may be required proposing how the number and impact of car trips can be reduced and how more sustainable modes of access will be encouraged.

2.3 Regional Policies

RPG10 emphasises the need for non-residential development to be located to provide most users with a choice of travel modes to the site. Residential development should be located so that key facilities can be accessed easily by public transport. The travel impact of major sites is to be managed through a Travel Plan with reduced levels of car parking. A consistent approach to parking is sought to avoid competition between locations based upon parking provision.

2.4 Gloucestershire Policies

The six key objectives of the Local Transport Plan parking strategy are:

- To help achieve the traffic reduction targets of the LTP;
- To support the economic and environmental well-being of town centres in the County;
- To ensure that town centres are not disadvantaged by the provision of high levels of parking at out-of-centre locations;
- To avoid competition between neighbouring authorities over parking provision;
- To encourage trips to be made by modes other than the car;
- To contribute towards highway safety.

The Local Transport Plan recognises that the urban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester have very different transport pressures and opportunities in comparison to rural areas of the county. Its transport strategy for the Central Severn Vale therefore includes specific measures to manage parking in these two urban centres:

- Initiatives to reduce commuter parking in residential areas;
- The introduction of standard policies across the whole area in relation to disabled parking and badges;
- A review of central area parking provision including the balance of long stay and short stay parking provision;
- The containment of the overall number of public off-street and on-street parking spaces in Cheltenham and Gloucester urban centres;
- Improved signing to make access to parking easier for users.

The LTP places significant emphasis on the expansion of Park and Ride in both Cheltenham and Gloucester, and other measures to support walking, cycling and public transport as alternatives to car travel.

2.5 Cheltenham Local Plan Policies

The car parking policy is not to propose to accommodate additional parking demand. Instead it seeks to encourage the use of alternative forms of transport, retaining the current number of spaces in the town centre, but with a greater emphasis on short-stay parking. This will mean extensive management of the on-street parking stock and be achieved by extending areas of control for on-street parking and changing existing long-stay spaces to short-stay.

To compensate for these stricter controls it seeks the introduction of a comprehensive range of Park and Ride facilities, and to improve public transport services, particularly to cater for long stay parking.

Parking provision at new development is determined by standards which conform to those set out in the Local Transport Plan, in accordance with national and regional planning guidance.

At present there are some 3600 off-street public car parking spaces in the town centre. Several car parks are owned by the Council, and it is its intention to secure their redevelopment to improve the public realm and to raise the quality of car parking provision in the town centre. Over the Plan period it aims to reduce long stay town centre parking in favour of short stay parking, providing alternative provision for long stay parking at new and expanded Park and Ride sites.

3. Gloucestershire Context

3.1 Gloucestershire County Council

Gloucestershire County Council, the Local Highway Authority for Gloucestershire, is directly responsible for highway and transportation functions in all the rural districts in the county. In the urban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester it delegates responsibility for exercising a range of these functions to the borough council and city council respectively. The scope of these powers and responsibilities is set out in agency agreements.

Under its agency agreement the borough council does not have the authority to pursue the decriminalisation of parking enforcement unilaterally. The Parking Solutions Working Group therefore invited officers from Gloucestershire County Council to take part in its investigations and this item was also discussed at agency liaison meetings.

A summary of the officer view from the county council is set out below:

- decriminalisation of parking enforcement is not a priority for the County Council at the present time or in the foreseeable future;
- resources are instead required to fulfil delivery of existing LTP commitments;
- concern about the costs of decriminalisation: start-up costs and whether decriminalised parking enforcement would be self-funding in the long term;
- concern about the effects of decriminalisation in Cheltenham and Gloucester on parking enforcement in rural areas of the county;
- strong preference for a Central Severn Vale wide approach (Cheltenham and Gloucester) to parking enforcement and decriminalisation;
- will cooperate on a joint feasibility study which takes a coordinated approach to consider decriminalisation in Gloucestershire.

3.2 Gloucester City Council

Like Cheltenham, Gloucester City Council has a highways agency agreement with the county council.

Gloucester City Council's Car Parks Manager attended a meeting of the Parking Solutions Working Group and reported that there was little interest in decriminalisation of parking enforcement in the City. Subsequently in June 2003 the Assistant Director (Integrated Transport) was informed that Gloucester City Council's cabinet had asked to consider a report on decriminalisation in Gloucester later this year. The city council asked to be kept informed of the findings of the Parking Solutions Working Group.

The main activities of Gloucester City have recently focused upon improving the quality of their existing car parks.

4. Current Parking Enforcement in Cheltenham

The enforcement of parking regulations has been identified as the key to the success of parking policies and ensuring that traffic management objectives such as improving traffic flows and restraining car trips are met.

Through its agency agreement the borough council has the authority to use powers set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (the Act) to provide for parking both on and off street. The Local Government Act 1972 also contains provisions for the council to introduce parking byelaws to control the parking of vehicles on verges.

The enforcement of on-street parking is carried out by 12 traffic wardens employed by Gloucestershire Constabulary between the hours of 8am to 5pm or 9am to 6pm every other week. The range of on-street waiting restrictions enforced by traffic wardens in Cheltenham is listed in Appendix B. Information on the traffic warden service has been provided by Chief Inspector Mike Barton following his presentation to the working group in May 2003.

In addition to parking enforcement traffic wardens also provide a valuable service controlling traffic and parking for major events including Gold Cup, The Open, Christmas lights switch-on, Carnival and any marches that go through the town as well as stepping in when traffic lights break down.

Traffic wardens enforce compliance with parking regulations by issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (fines). In 2002 a total of 14,532 non endorsable fixed penalty tickets were issued in Cheltenham. Information on the collection rate has been requested but to date we have not received this from the Central Ticketing Office. The busiest areas for enforcement are High Street, Pittville Street and Regent Street however a large number of fixed penalties are issued in the ever-expanding number of residents parking schemes.

However income from fines is channelled to central government and Gloucestershire Constabulary is unable to use these to offset its costs of enforcement, fine collection and recovery. Therefore its costs increase as additional traffic regulation orders and byelaws are introduced by the council.

Recognising this limitation the borough council agreed in 1993 to contribute towards the police force's costs of employing an additional five traffic wardens in order to provide effective enforcement of residents parking schemes. This cost is met using income from on-street pay and display which was introduced in the town centre at the time. It is expected to amount to £98,000 in the 2003/04 financial year.

The current establishment of 12 traffic wardens including the Senior Traffic Warden is considered to be about 4 wardens below the level required to provide effective enforcement of existing regulations. However the police force continues to experience difficulties retaining a full complement of traffic wardens. Recruitment is hindered by fixed salary scales which do not reflect the high cost of living locally, a low unemployment rate and limited appeal of the job.

As a statutory consultee the police is always consulted when the council proposes to introduce new traffic regulation orders, for instance to create a residents parking scheme. Schemes are only pursued if the police agree to enforce the proposed restrictions, which has been the case to date.

However in the past two years the council has received increasing numbers of reports from residents and members expressing concerns about the effectiveness of enforcement of existing parking regulations. These suggest that whilst the police is generally willing to enforce new regulations it is having to achieve this by stretching its existing resources and reducing the frequency with which streets are visited by traffic wardens.

There are also increasing demands for parking enforcement to be extended into the evenings and increased on Sundays, particularly for the enforcement of residents parking and disabled parking. This can be largely attributed to the growth of the Cheltenham's night time economy and the introduction of Sunday trading, with Sunday now the second busiest trading day of the week.

In the immediate and foreseeable future officers in the Integrated Transport division predict that demand for new traffic regulation orders and byelaws requiring enforcement will increase substantially. Drawing from the experiences of many other urban areas it would be reasonable to expect levels of compliance with parking restrictions to fall rapidly as enforcement provision is diluted. Once this state is reached the enforcement resource required to return to initial levels of compliance is much higher than originally needed. It is therefore in the interests of the police, council, local businesses and residents to prevent a collapse in compliance from taking place in Cheltenham.

Maintaining effective parking enforcement levels and extending hours of operation would require either:

- *additional traffic wardens and revised working hours* – unlikely to be achievable given current difficulties with recruitment and retention of traffic wardens. The Senior Traffic Warden has expressed concerns that revising contracts to include shift work and evening work would exacerbate these problems.

and

- *using Community Support Officers* – within the next few months the Cheltenham division will have the benefit of 20 Community Support Officers. Their primary role will be in preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the fear of crime. However they will also have the power to enforce parking restrictions, akin to traffic wardens.

or

- *a freeze on new traffic regulation orders* – not feasible given the council's highways agency commitments to manage the local highway network and implement approximately £1.3million of integrated transport schemes each year.

and

- *reviewing existing Traffic Regulation Orders* – this would be resource intensive for the council, requiring consultation on changes, however it may enable existing enforcement resources to be more effectively deployed across a wider area.

or

- *the decriminalisation of parking enforcement* – (explored later in this report) – legislation allows the local authority or its subcontractor to receive enforcement income enabling it to fund additional parking wardens as required. Hours of enforcement can be extended and conditions of contract are more flexible. A review of existing traffic regulations would form part of the preparation process.

In reviewing current arrangements for parking enforcement and potential options for the future the Parking Solutions working group has considered options for increasing the current traffic warden resource. This would be difficult to achieve in practice and would require additional funding either from the police or from the council, using income from on-street pay and display. It is not clear yet whether there will be more than a limited opportunity for Community Support Officers to enforce residents parking and limited waiting.

Currently no formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) exists between the council (as highways agent) and police in respect of the £98,000 paid to the police for additional traffic wardens. The creation of an SLA is therefore a desirable short term objective which would quantify service standards and form the basis for decisions on budgets, resource allocation and performance aims. Without this benchmark it is difficult to determine whether the existing 'agreement' gives the council best value and whether it would be effective to top up this funding in future.

The working group has also noted that the latest annual report by the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary makes no reference to parking enforcement. This low priority reflects the greater attention given to achieving statutory performance targets and meeting responsibilities for addressing crime and disorder. In this context it is therefore questionable whether the police would be prepared to divert resources to enhance the traffic warden service in order to meet the future enforcement demands of the highway authority.

Off street public car parking managed by Cheltenham Borough Council is enforced by ten Patrol Officers employed the council using other powers set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. They operate independently of the traffic wardens and play an important role enforcing compliance with tariffs, thereby helping to safeguard car parking revenue which is critical to the council's budget. Whilst there are occasionally difficulties with staff recruitment and retention these are not as great as those experienced by the traffic wardens.

4.1 Decriminalisation

Decriminalisation is the term used to describe the transfer of parking enforcement powers from the police to local authorities. A breach of waiting regulations is therefore treated as a civil matter rather than a criminal act.

The origins of decriminalisation lie in the decline of parking enforcement in London in the 1970's and 1980's and efforts to address this by providing London boroughs with additional powers. A report by the Parking Enforcement Working Party in 1989 highlighted the continuing scale of non-compliance, its economic costs and the difficulties it presented to the police and traffic warden services. Following this report legislation was introduced in 1991 to decriminalise parking enforcement.

In 1992 an Audit Commission report on the traffic warden service also highlighted the low priority being given to parking forces by police forces and the need to integrate the transport planning function of local authorities with the enforcement function of police.

Decriminalisation of parking enforcement, introduced in the Road Traffic Regulation Act (1991) provides local authorities, including those outside London, with powers to enforce all on-street waiting and parking controls in designated areas known as Special Parking Areas (SPA's). The legislation requires the enforcement operation to

be self financing, which is made possible by allowing local authorities to retain revenue from enforcement to fund the enforcement effort. This overcomes the difficulties experienced by police forces which must return revenue to central government and creates a virtuous circle to increase enforcement resources and achieve better levels of compliance.

From a legal perspective if the council wished to pursue decriminalisation of parking enforcement (DPE) in Cheltenham, this would require the council to request the local highway authority, Gloucestershire County Council, to make an application to the Secretary of State to designate a Special Parking Area. The Chief Constable would need to be consulted beforehand and should the application be approved the process could not be reversed in future. The process normally takes 18 months to two years to prepare for DPE from the date the highway authority decides to pursue this route. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the county council might not support the council's wishes. Without their support the council could not pursue it on its own account.

However, if support of the county council was forthcoming, it would be advisable to employ a specialist parking consultant along the lines of the approach taken by other authorities. In the first year they could oversee a review of the accuracy of existing legal orders, signs and lines. In the second year the consultant would prepare a detailed financial/operational report on the viability of decriminalisation. They could also help prepare a contract for tender if the council chose to contract out the parking enforcement and penalty charge notice recovery processes instead of performing these in-house.

The initial view of the working group, having considered the decriminalisation experiences of Oxford and Worcester (see below), is that the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued in Cheltenham and the level of income from on-street pay and display are such that DPE in Cheltenham could well be a viable proposition.

4.2 National perspective

Summarised below is the DfT's position on parking enforcement nationally and recommendations to local authorities which have not yet pursued the decriminalisation of parking enforcement. This was recently contained in a letter from the Department for Transport's Traffic Management Division to the Midland Parking Managers Group in April 2003.

- DfT holding discussions with the Home Office and ODPM about the transfer of functions including parking enforcement to local authorities.
- The number of local authorities in England outside London taking on DPE powers has accelerated in the last couple of years and will shortly reach 70, with around 20 additional applications being processed.
- One of the drivers for DPE is that the police are already giving low priority to parking enforcement and in some cases have pulled out entirely. Hertfordshire and Surrey police forces have given notice that they intend to withdraw from parking enforcement in 2004.
- **'It is therefore in the interests of authorities who have not already done so to seriously consider taking DPE powers and that is the message DfT would wish to put across.'**

- DfT recognises that it takes an authority 18 to 24 months to properly prepare for assuming DPE powers so the DfT would not wish to legislate to require all authorities to take on DPE powers by the same date.

5. Experience of other towns

As part of its investigations the Working Group visited Oxfordshire County Council and City of Worcester Council as examples of similar sized towns which have decided to decriminalise parking enforcement (DPE) in Oxford and Worcester respectively.

Set out below is a summary of the key points identified during these visits:

5.1 Oxford

Population 80,000 (100,000 inc. students)

DPE commenced in 1997 to enable enforcement of parking restrictions required for the Oxford Transport Strategy. *'Enforcement enables traffic flow to be improved.'*

Oxfordshire County Council is highway authority and they are currently into second five-year contract with external contractor, Central Parking System (CPS), to provide the following key functions:

- on-street parking enforcement, including residents parking
- Processing of Penalty Charge Notices
- maintenance of signs and lines
- operational responsibility for Pay and Display machines
- suspension of parking bays
- reporting abandoned vehicles
- operation & maintenance of rising bollards

Enforcement levels reflected in penalty notices issued:

Pre-1997	17,000 Fixed Penalty Notices
DPE prediction:	30,000 Penalty Charge Notices
Actual 1997:	46,000 PCNs
Actual 2002:	54,000 PCNs

82% payment collection rate (2002)

Enforcement resources:

Pre-1997	7 traffic wardens (Thames Valley Police)
1997	15 parking attendants
2003	25 parking attendants (Full Time Equivalent posts) with an average of 12 parking attendants on duty each day

Enforcement hours: 7am to midnight (initially 7pm) 364 days a year.
Parking attendant shifts: 12hrs + o/t, 4 days on 3 days off.

Pay and Display: 35 machines in 1997; 86 machines in 2002

Finances: PCN income roughly breaks even with enforcement costs
On-street pay and display income approx. £1million p.a.
Contractor receives a fixed fee in the contract – no bonus

- Residents Parking: schemes reviewed every five years
Limits on permits being introduced
No charge to Oxford residents – Oxford City Council decided to subsidise this at its own expense, approx. £37,000 per year. (£100 charge in Abingdon; £65 in Henley)
- Business Permits: Not available in city centre zone; elsewhere £250/yr, maximum two permits per business.

5.2 Worcester

Population 93,000

DPE recently introduced in February 2003. The pressure for decriminalisation came initially from the Chief Constable, West Mercia Constabulary. This reflects the concerns regarding increasing Traffic Orders from the council and lack of resources to enforce the increased number. The visit enabled members and officers to meet representatives from the police and local authority. It is interesting to note the following comment:

'Probably the best thing that ever happened as far as the police service is concerned'
– Mike Digger, Traffic Management Advisor, S. Worcestershire Division.

City of Worcester Council is highway agent to county council and enforces DPE in city with rural areas enforced by the police. DPE process managed by city council, with surplus to city council under agency agreement.

Enforcement levels:

2002 5,000 Fixed Penalty Notices
DPE prediction: 16,000 Penalty Charge Notices (now 18,000 PCNs predicted)

75% payment collection rate so far – too early to judge.

Enforcement resources:

Pre-2003 10 traffic wardens (five funded by city council)
2003 14 parking attendants (traffic wardens offered TUPE)

Enforcement hours: 8am to 8pm Mon - Fri; (5pm Sat); half day Sunday

Pay and Display: income used to support DPE.

Finances: £300,000 set up costs mainly due to new build accommodation required for in house enforcement team and new ICT system. Should be recovered within 3 years. Income from PCNs + Residents Parking Permits + Pay & Display, slightly under target after first 6 months. Increased use of/income from off-street car parks.

Residents Parking: Policy reviewed by officers and members
Up to three permits, with escalating charges (£30, £40, £60)

Summary of police and council views:

- enforcement places undue strain on limited police resources, especially when traffic wardens are off duty police officers have to manage up to 50 complaints per day.
- Strain on police increases as new traffic orders are made by the council, yet enforcement levels may not keep pace, so police more likely to oppose new orders. With DPE police would be able to actively support new orders.
- Increase enforcement of parking under DPE increase turnover of parking spaces, benefiting local traders.
- Police now have five more posts for front line policing, free to concentrate on casualty reduction and crime and disorder issues.
- City council now able to implement residents parking schemes which had been put off for years.
- Hereford, Shrewsbury and Wychavon Hills also considering DPE.

Summary

The working group considered two cities of similar size to Cheltenham and found that before decriminalising parking enforcement they shared many of the problems experienced in Cheltenham.

Whilst the push for DPE in Oxford came from the highway authority seeking to implement its transport strategy it was the police force which initiated the change in Worcester, mindful of the difficulties in fulfilling both its transport and its crime and disorder obligations.

Both cities chose different approaches to handle the enforcement function, with Oxford contracting out these services to a private contractor whilst Worcester opting to perform these in-house as council functions.

The statistical information obtained enables a useful comparison to be made with Cheltenham. It indicates that DPE in Cheltenham could well be viable. With the Department for Transport urging authorities to seriously consider DPE the local opportunities in Cheltenham and possibly Gloucester appear to merit further investigation.

6. Key issues for Cheltenham

6.1 Town centre car parking

Off-street car parking in the town centre is provided by a combination of Council operated and private car-parks. Some of these car-parks are permanent whilst others are car-parks operating on sites awaiting development.

A plan of town centre off street car parks is shown in Appendix C.

There are 2714 spaces in off-street car-parks controlled by Cheltenham Borough Council. There are also a further 372 spaces in a permanent car park managed by Beechwood Shopping Centre and 600 spaces at St James.

In total there are some 3600 public off-street car parking spaces serving the town centre. The two full-time Park-and-Ride sites at Arle Court and at the Racecourse also serve the town centre and provide close to 1000 additional spaces.

In 1987 there were 2390 spaces and there were no Park-and Rides sites operational. This represents an increase in the total Saturday car parking provision for the town centre (including P&R) of nearly 96% in 10 years. Despite this the main town centre car-parks operate at above their comfortable operating capacity for much of each Saturday.

Income from the council's off-street public car parking is expected to be £3.8 million in 2003/04. As this supports more than 7% of the council's net cost services, excluding the Housing Revenue Account, officers have been working on a Risk Management pilot study to identify and plan ahead to mitigate any risks to this income stream in future years. Emphasis is being placed on raising the quality of the car parking experience through planned investment, improved maintenance and cleansing in some car parks and the redevelopment of others.

Historically the council's approach to investment in its car parks has been through one-off capital bids to fund items such as parking equipment, improved lighting and CCTV. The absence of an asset management strategy and planned maintenance budget prevents officers from taking a proactive approach to investment, putting pressure on the council's finances during the budget round. As a result several aspects of the service are in need of investment if the council is to continue to depend on car parking income at its current level and reduce expenditure on one-off maintenance and insurance claims. The risk management strategy is helping to prioritise those areas where investment should be targeted, taking a medium term approach to service delivery planning.

As part of its work on an *Urban Design Framework* and *Civic Pride* the council is actively reviewing the future of several car park sites it owns in the town centre. Many of these open air car parks occupy large areas of land, make a negative contribution to the street scene and are inconsistent with sustainable development principles. It is therefore seeking to redevelop these sites to improve the public realm and the quality of public parking facilities. This will tie into proposals to improve accessibility to the town centre through improved park and ride services, bus priority, better pedestrian and cycle routes and improved signage to public car parks.

6.2 On-Street Pay and Display

On-street Pay and Display is currently operational in the following town centre streets, also shown on the plan in Appendix D:

Inner Promenade	66 spaces
The Promenade	39 spaces
Imperial Square	79 spaces
Montpelier Street	54 spaces
Cambray Place	27 spaces

Revenue income from on-street Pay-and Display (including the Inner Promenade) is expected to be around £750,000 in 2003/04. This income is generated from the highway and the scheme is managed by Cheltenham Borough Council through its agency agreement with the County Council. The borough council retains a share of the net income which in 2003/04 will be apportioned as follows:

- £98,000 to fund five police traffic warden posts;
- £89,000 to fund the net revenue costs of the Arle Court park and ride;
- £159,000 towards other transportation schemes and projects approved by the borough council's cabinet, e.g. Civic Pride transport studies.

The existing scheme provides a source of revenue that is used to fund the additional traffic wardens that allow for the enforcement of Residents Parking. Without this source of revenue residents parking could not be provided without either substantial subsidy or with a permit charge that was prohibitively high.

Cash collection from on and off-street parking is managed by the Economy and Business Improvement Group. Officers are currently seeking to increase the availability of card payment methods at machines to reduce handling costs and potential for fraud.

As part of its strategy to encourage use public transport, park and ride, cycling, walking and lift-sharing a review of on-street parking in the town centre is required. Existing measures to manage demand for car parking through charging and development control policies which limit private non-residential parking are unlikely to achieve these objectives given the large quantities of unrestricted on-street parking are available within walking distance.

The future type and provision of on-street parking in and around the town centre should therefore support the implementation of transport and planning policies. This will encourage commuters to use public transport and park and ride, whilst maintaining some short stay parking for shoppers, protecting existing residential parking and possibly providing revenue to support improved enforcement and new park and ride services.

6.3 Disabled Parking

The location and quality of disabled parking has a significant bearing on the ability of some disabled people to access services and enjoy a good quality of life. The council's Integrated Transport division is responsible for residential disabled parking bays, the provision of disabled parking both on and off-street and the Shopmobility service in the town centre.

Disabled badge holders are exempted from paying to use the council's off street car parks. This is not the case in public car parks operated by private sector, including

Beechwood Arcade and the proposed NCP Brewery car park. Little information is available about the cost to the council, which could increase as new private car parks cannot be forced to adopt the same concession. It also creates difficulties with enforcement and auditing of income at the Pay on Foot system at Regent Arcade car park. This issue could be addressed at some expense using Automated Number Plate Recognition technology to open and close the barriers for the vehicles of registered users.

There is significant potential to improve the quality of parking for disabled badge holders in the majority of the council's car parks. Presently these are not well marked with suitably sized disabled bays in convenient locations and this improvement would be relatively inexpensive to implement.

The Shopmobility service has been located in Beechwood Arcade since 1993 and includes a more recent satellite office in the Equals premises in the High Street. It employs three part time staff and loans out buggies and wheelchairs for a fee. Both locations are suited to people accessing the town centre by car, which poses difficulties for disabled people who do not have a car and travel by bus. The net cost of the service is some £60,500 in 2003/04.

As part of Civic Pride transportation studies options will be drawn up to enhance the Shopmobility service, seeking to address some of the limitations of the existing locations and to benchmark the service against other good examples nationally.

On-street disabled parking in the town centre will also be reviewed as part of the transportation studies for Civic Pride. These will take a holistic approach to disabled access in all its forms, including off-street parking, accessible bus services, taxi provision, Shopmobility and higher quality pedestrian routes. Where disabled parking is provided on-street the emphasis will be on improved quality. Enforcement of disabled parking bays, which is currently difficult in the evenings, could be improved by using Community Support Officers or through the decriminalisation of parking enforcement.

The provision of disabled parking bays in residential areas is an area where clear policies are necessary to manage demand and ensure that the system continues to be respected by other road users. Other towns have ceased to provide this function after creating too many bays in streets with limited on-street parking. To prevent this situation from arising locally a review of existing policies is advised.

6.4 Town centre periphery car parking

Although the town centre and the streets immediately surrounding it suffer most from the high demand for on-street parking, there are other locations in the town where on-street parking needs careful management. Problems usually result where long-stay parking demand from commercial activity conflicts with demands by shoppers and/or residents. The areas around the railway station, Bath Road shopping area and General Hospital for example experience severe problems of this nature.

On-street parking controls which provide exemptions for residents can ease some of these difficulties, particularly when adjacent off-street facilities are not used to their full advantage. The Council recognises that residents prefer to park their cars near their homes and that on-street parking controls should be used to assist them. Residents' Parking Schemes can either be 'shared' (i.e. Residents able to park all

day but other motorists are subject to limited waiting) or 'exclusive' (i.e. a section of the highway is allocated to Residents' Only).

Resident parking and limited waiting require considerable enforcement, which need to be addressed before a scheme can be introduced. This is especially so with 'shared' parking schemes, which must be visited much more frequently by traffic wardens. In order to help finance the installation, administration and enforcement costs, those residents who wish to participate pay an annual permit fee, currently £42.

If such schemes are to work then they need to be carefully implemented, effectively enforced and kept up-to date. This requires a considerable resource input from both the police traffic wardens and the council.

In parallel the council is seeking to work with those organisations which generate significant parking demand to involve them in addressing the source of the problems. This is being pursued through voluntary adoption of Travel Plans and by requiring Travel Plans to be introduced in connection with planning consent for certain types of new development. In almost all cases Travel Plans make business sense, improving accessibility to services, reducing unnecessary business mileage and supporting staff and visitors to share lifts, take the bus, cycle or walk. The Cheltenham Travel Plan Group has provided a useful forum for the council to use its limited resources to bring together local experience and be a catalyst for change.

6.5 Park and Ride

Park and ride has a fundamental role in the transport strategy for Cheltenham town centre. It aims to reduce the volume of car traffic entering the town centre by attracting commuters and longer stay shoppers whose journeys into Cheltenham are either difficult or not possible by conventional public transport. In this way it reduces the impact of traffic on routes into and within the town, enables town centre parking to be prioritised for short stay use and can help promote urban regeneration.

Cheltenham town centre is served by two park and ride sites: a commercial service is provided by a major bus operator from the Racecourse, to the north, which has approximately 600 spaces, and; a service subsidised by the county council which runs from Arle Court, to the west, with some 360 spaces.

Patronage of both park and ride services has been increasing annually, generating significant benefit to the town centre economy. In 2002 196000 trips were made on the Arle Court service, representing an increase of 53% since its first year in 1998. With over 25,000 trips made in December 2002 alone it is clear why the park and ride strategy has the support of major town centre retailers.

The success of park and ride in Cheltenham, and in other towns with well-used park and ride services, is directly linked to the implementation of parking policies which have raised the cost of long stay parking in the town centre relative to the cost of park and ride. Other measures such as the provision of bus lanes to make the journey by bus quicker than by car and high quality buses are essential to make the service attractive but would not have been nearly as effective in the absence of supportive parking policies.

Looking to the future, the council is working with the county council and Tewkesbury Borough Council through the Local Transport Plan to progress the implementation of

additional park and ride sites to serve other entry routes into Cheltenham. In light of the recommendations of the Halcrow Cheltenham Park and Ride Strategy (2002) the cabinets of Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council have since resolved to seek the implementation of a new park and ride service along the Tewkesbury Road (A4019) corridor as the next priority with a service along the Shurdington Road (A46) to follow later. Feasibility work on the Tewkesbury road corridor and potential sites is currently underway.

The provision of new park and ride is currently being put forward by the county council as its major scheme bid in the second Local Transport Plan (LTP) covering the period to 2006/07 to 2011/2012. As these schemes are also proposed in the current LTP it is possible that some preliminary works will take place before then, such as bus priority measures or land purchase.

In the interim the focus will be on raising the profile and quality of existing park and ride services. Since their introduction both sites have been expanded to meet demand however they, in contrast to the services offered in many other towns they still lack essential facilities such as toilets and they do not cover Sunday and evening trading. Officers are currently investigating the opportunity to provide services at these times in the run up to Christmas, to provide additional support to town centre retailers.

6.6 Local shopping centre car parking

Beyond the town centre the council owns and operates off-street public car parks in the following locations: (number of spaces)

- Bath Terrace (160);
- Church Piece, Charlton Kings (40);
- Commercial Street, nr Bath Terrace (37);
- Coronation Square (144);
- Idsall Drive, Prestbury (12);
- Lansdown Place Lane (25);
- Sandford Lido (141);
- Sixways (50)

Most of these car parks play an important role supporting shops and businesses within local centres. This has economic benefits and enables more people to access services locally, retaining these within walking and cycling distance and contributing to a higher quality of life.

Pay and Display is in operation at Sandford Lido, Bath Terrace and Commercial Street however the other car parks are free.

Although these car parks have an important function there are often shortcomings in terms of their quality. Additional investment needs to be investigated and prioritised on a risk management basis. This could include measures to improve security, surfacing, provision for disabled users, cycle parking and cleanliness. In some cases the introduction of waiting restrictions and/or charges may be necessary and should not be ruled out. These would maintain the turnover of spaces for the benefit of local businesses, limit use of improved facilities by staff/commuters and provide a stronger case for car park investment.

6.7 Residents car parking

Residents parking provides reserved parking areas for residents who may otherwise find that local on-street parking spaces are unavailable due to pressure of parking. It is implemented and administered by the council through the Local Transport Plan process and enforcement is provided by traffic wardens employed by the police. Five of the wardens are funded by the council at an annual cost of £98,000 in 2003/04.

The system entitles residents of eligible properties to purchase up to two permits, at £42 per year, allowing them to park in a designated area between the hours of 8am and 6pm Mondays to Saturdays, not including Bank Holidays.

The plan shown in Appendix E shows the extent of existing and proposed residents parking schemes, the numbers of spaces provided and the implementation date.

From this it can be seen that:

- Most residents parking schemes have been set up on the periphery of the town centre. These are typically residential areas within walking distance of the town centre or hospital with no on-street waiting limit or charge.
- 25 schemes are in operation providing 889 residents parking spaces in the town. Scheme size ranges from 3 spaces to 200 spaces, with an average of 36 spaces per scheme.

The pace of introducing new schemes has accelerated rapidly since the mid-1990s and the schemes have got smaller:

- 3 schemes totalling 117 spaces in the 1970's;
- 3 schemes totalling 35 spaces in the 1980s;
- 5 schemes totalling 371 spaces in the 1990s;
- 14 schemes totalling 366 spaces since 2000.

Increasingly residents have been contacting council officers and Members requesting the implementation of new schemes and the additional enforcement of existing ones. Given the limited resources of the traffic wardens to enforce existing schemes, on-street pay and display and other waiting restrictions council officers have started advising against committing the council and police to new schemes until there is more certainty about the provision of effective enforcement.

It has become clear that several areas of the existing policy on residents parking need to be clarified and brought up to date. The visits to Oxford and Worcester, referred to earlier in this report, have also provided a fresh view of the options available. Issues to review include:

- *scheme size* – introducing residents parking schemes is a very time consuming process and it doubtful whether working on schemes with 3 to 10 spaces makes efficient use of the Integrated Transport division's limited resources. Setting a minimum threshold is recommended.
- *eligibility* - residents with off-road parking are not eligible, however this needs to be clearer and provision made to prevent use by residents of new

development which does not provide off-road parking.

- *permit numbers and cost* – providing two permits conflicts with current local plan policies which allow car-free development and no more than an average of 1.5 spaces per dwelling. New residential development puts pressure on existing scheme and there is no upper limit on the number of permits issued per scheme.
- *scheme review* – some flexibility is needed to ensure that schemes remain effective over time. A review of each scheme every five years is advised.

Given the high profile of parking and its effect on people's quality of life it is recommended that all these points be considered as part of a comprehensive review of the council's residents parking policies and practices in 2004/05.

6.8 Town Centre Permit Parking

A number of organisations located in the town centre are provided with discounted or free permits for staff/visitor use of the council's off-street car parks. This practice has been on-going for several years and is based mostly on historic decisions. Current recipients include certain religious establishments, community nurses, the coroner's office and the farmers' market.

Permits are also available to private motorists for spaces in Grosvenor Terrace and North Place car parks. These offer a significant discount compared to the cost of paying to use these car park every day.

The principle of providing incentives for commuter, business and visitor parking in the town centre is now at odds with approved policies regarding land use planning and transport in the town centre. The continued provision of discounted or free parking may therefore be undermining these policies and efforts to encourage use of public transport and park and ride. This practice also risks setting a precedent and it makes inefficient use of car parking capacity in the town centre. Alternative incentives should be considered, to encourage more sustainable forms of transport.

For these reasons a review of existing policy and practice is considered necessary to ensure that it is fair and consistent with current policies. This will be undertaken in the next financial year.

6.9 Event parking

In recent years the council has received a rising number of complaints by local residents in Whaddon and Pittville about uncontrolled on-street parking in the vicinity of the Whaddon Road football ground on match days. This parking was causing significant difficulties to local residents, sometimes unable to leave their homes, was preventing emergency service access and was damaging grass verges.

To address these issues local Members, council officers and representatives from the police, football club and bus operator worked together in an approach which could be applied elsewhere in the town. In essence a 'carrot and stick' approach was adopted.

Incentives, or 'carrots' included: managing the travel arrangements of fans by using the Cheltenham Town Football Club web site, fan magazine and programme; publicising travel information including discounted local bus services, car sharing and a local park and ride service from the Racecourse; publicising this information to away fans' clubs; and improving understanding and ownership of travel problems through a travel survey at CTFC.

'Stick' measures which were publicised widely at the same time included: reducing the problem parking through temporary parking restrictions enforced by wardens on match days only; and introducing a byelaw to prevent verge parking;

7. Key recommendations

In light of the findings of this report the Parking Solutions Working Group advise Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to:

- note the report;
- request the county council to prepare a joint brief with the Cheltenham Borough Council to further investigate the decriminalisation of parking enforcement (DPE) in Cheltenham in 2004/05; a partnership with Gloucester City Council should be explored as part of this process.
- instruct officers to prepare an SLA for traffic wardens by April 2004
- instruct officers to review residents parking policies and practices in 2004.
- instruct officers to develop a strategy for managing the quantity and pricing of on street parking in the town centre during 2004.
- defer the designation of new residents parking schemes other than those already committed until after this review.
- instruct officers to review issue of parking permits issued to organisations in the town centre in 2004.
- instruct officers to produce an asset management strategy for the council's car parks by April 2004, drawing on current risk management work and reinvesting a proportion of income into ongoing maintenance and renewal in order to enhance the safety and quality of the car parks.
- instruct officers to work with Gloucestershire Constabulary (Traffic Warden section) to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of available enforcement resources.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ENVIRONMENT
1st July 2002

Item 11
De-criminalisation of on-street parking

Proposed Terms of Reference for Working Group

Overall Objective : to investigate ways and means of providing more effective enforcement of on-street parking in Cheltenham, and report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Key Tasks :

1. Investigate the procedures required to implement de-criminalisation of on-street parking pursuant to the Road Traffic Act 1991.
2. Consider the practical issues and implications of such action including those of funding and resourcing.
3. Obtain information on the success of schemes introduced elsewhere.
4. Consult and liaise with the County Council and Police.
5. Consult with all relevant standard consultees.
6. Consider other options to provide more effective enforcement of on-street parking provisions including, but not limited to, the extension of the operating hours of residents parking schemes and the introduction of additional residents parking schemes, taking into account the general effect on highway safety.
7. Consider the practical issues and implications of such other options including those of funding and resourcing.

Membership :

At least two Overview and Scrutiny Committee members plus representatives from Engineering and Legal Services.

Cllr Mrs Franklin

Cllr Garnham

Cllr Mrs Hibbert

Marie Fallon – Group Director Environment

Philip Williams – Assistant Director (Integrated Transport)

Peter Godwin – Transportation Manager

Tim Evans – Solicitor, Legal Services

Reporting to - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Environment.

First report September 2002.

On-street waiting restrictions currently enforced by Traffic Wardens in Cheltenham

1. **Double/single yellow lines**
Normally used to prevent parking at locations where parked vehicles are otherwise a hazard. These restrictions do not prevent loading /unloading and therefore can be used at locations where there is a need to ensure kerbside space is available for essential servicing of properties. Can also be used to protect areas for buses.
2. **Limited Waiting**
The introduction of a maximum permitted time limit ensure a turnover of spaces and therefore is of benefit in streets close to shopping areas.
3. **Specialist areas for the Disabled**
An important facility which allows disabled badge holders to park close to a particular facility.
4. **Residents Parking**
The allocation of kerbside space to specified users. An important facility for sustaining residential properties close to the town centre or other locations where all the kerbside space may be otherwise occupied.
5. **Pay-and Display**
A facility that introduces car parking charges close to the town centre shops and ensures an efficient use of prime parking spaces.