Cheltenham Borough Council

Car Parking Strategy: 2017 – 2031

CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

ARUP

parking matters

This strategy is the result of collaboration between Cheltenham Borough Council, local stakeholders and many others who took the time to share their views on parking in the town.

Arup and Parking Matters collaborated to provide the technical advice and the recommendations found in this report.

Arup is a global professional services firm with a focus on the built environment. We employ designers, planners, engineers and an extensive range of technical specialists. We have offices in 39 countries, and have had a business in Bristol for more than 40 years. Arup is fully independent and owned by an employee benefit trust. Without any external shareholders, Arup staff are free to put the needs of our clients first.

Through our work we aim to make a positive difference in the world. www.arup.com.

Parking Matters provide innovate advice on parking. Entrepreneurship and problem solving are part of our corporate DNA. We offer a rare combination of expertise covering all aspects of on and off-street parking: strategy, technology and innovation, operational performance optimisation and asset management, development potential and business plans, car park specification, design and refurbishment.

We are at the forefront of Innovation in the parking sector. www.parkingmatters.com

i. Introduction

The vision set out in Cheltenham Borough Council's Corporate Plan is a place where everyone thrives. This will be achieved by protecting and enhancing its built heritage and unique character, by creating the conditions for businesses to innovate and provide good quality jobs. Car parking can play a significant role in helping to achieve this vision.

The parking estate is an important asset to Cheltenham Borough Council. It helps residents and visitors access businesses and services and in addition provides revenue for the delivery of important services. The estate also affords opportunities for improving townscape and assisting regeneration to make a good first impression for those arriving to the town.

Cheltenham Borough Council identified the need for a comprehensive review of its approach to parking provision within the town. This review is required in order to optimise support for the local economy and improve customer service, whilst at the same time supporting the use of more sustainable transport modes and maintaining income levels.

Whilst an asset, parking can also be a problem, with it encouraging traffic, contributing to a poor townscape and costing money to maintain.

This strategy is about achieving balance between the economy, townscape, income and environmental sustainability.

Cheltenham 2017/18 Corporate Strategy:

- *The local economy thrives;*
- *The visitor economy thrives;*
- *Young people thrive;*
- *Our communities thrive;*
- *Cheltenham's environmental quality and heritage is protected, maintained and enhanced;*
- *Sustain and grow Cheltenham's economic and cultural vitality;*
- *People live in strong, safe and healthy communities; and,*
- *Our council can continue to facilitate the delivery of our outcomes for both Cheltenham and its residents.*

Contents

Appendices to the Strategy

1. Background

1.1 Formulating the Strategy

The strategy has been prepared with a focus on:

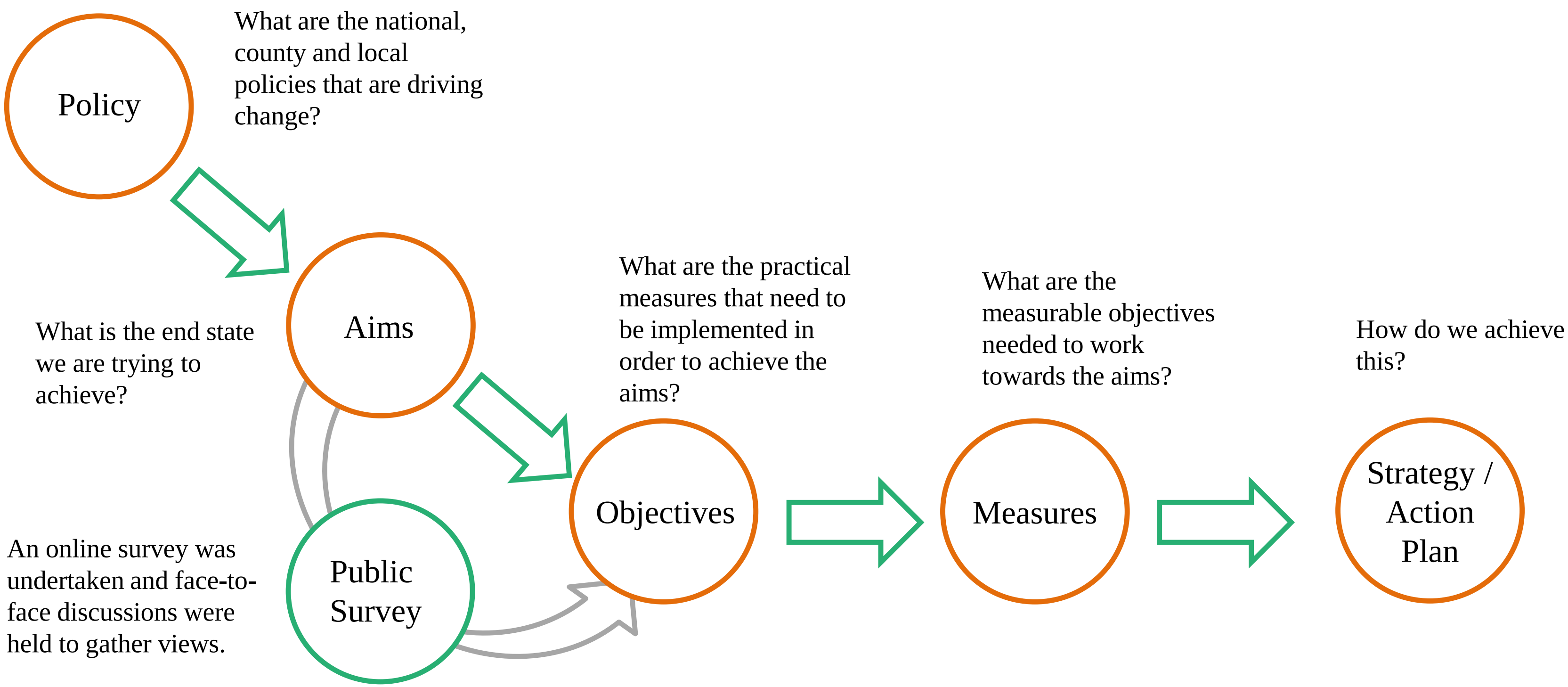
- The policy context;
- Evidence of what works;
- Practical measures; and,
- Realistic actions.

At the outset a workshop was held with key Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) staff and local stakeholder groups including a Business Improvement District representative.

The outcome of the workshop was a set of 'Guiding Principles'. A public survey and face-to-face discussions, for example with disability groups, took place to establish the views of residents and car park users. This engagement was used to refine the aims.

By focussing on what Cheltenham wanted to achieve and recommending evidenced, practical measures, the strategy aims to be agile and able to respond to change

1.2 Methodology



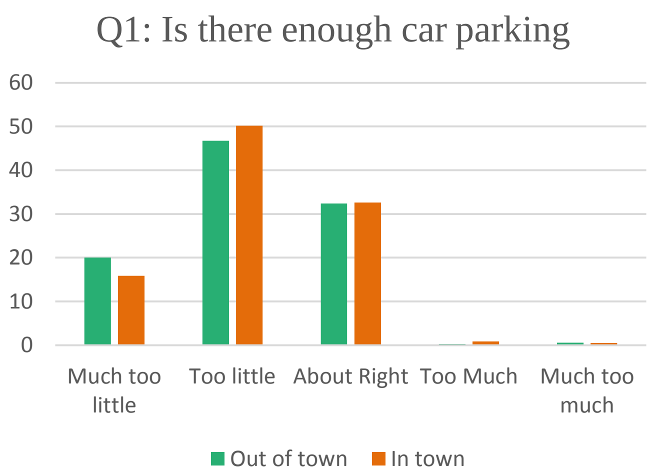
1.3 Survey Results

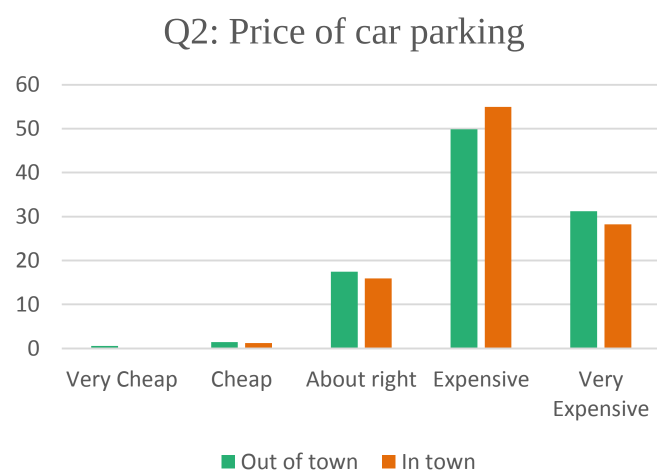
An online survey took place in January 2017 to gather views on specific issues around car parks, with paper forms available at key locations.

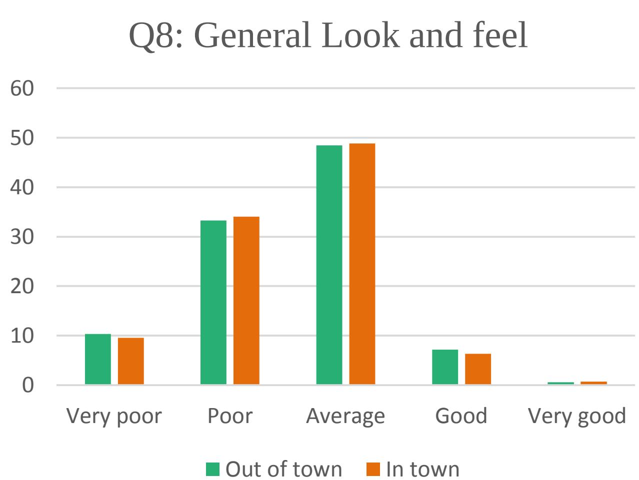
1,153 responses were received to the survey, and answers to some of the key questions are shown.

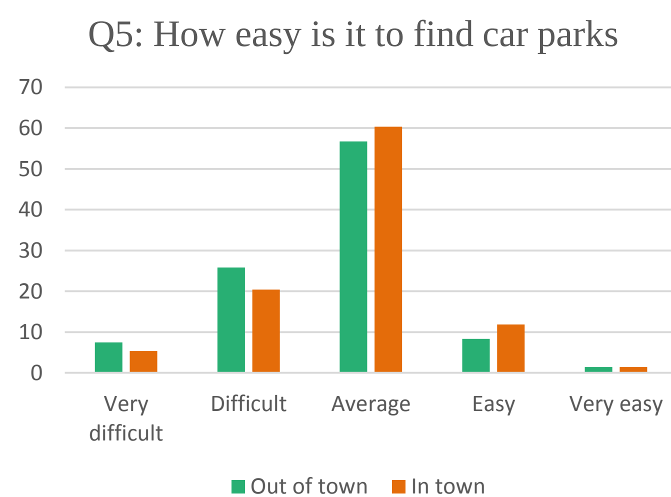
Responses were correlated with respondents home postcodes. GL50, 51, 52 and 54 were classified as 'In town' with others as 'Out of Town'.

A full survey report is included in Appendix 2.









How does Cheltenham compare?

The British parking Association has carried out national surveys on priorities for parking:

- *Location is most important both locally and nationally;*
- *Safety was not as high up the agenda in Cheltenham as it is nationally;*
- *Car parks are harder to find in Cheltenham;*
- *Answers to quantity and price are as expected when direct questions like this are asked.*

1.4 Survey Results

739 people provided open feedback. Most of these were online, but a proportion were made on paper copies of the survey available at a number of places. Comments were also received through Facebook.

Below are some of the most common themes to come out of the free text responses:

The cost of car parking should not increase significantly

Finding car parks when driving can be difficult

The number of car parking spaces available should not be decreased

There should be more options when paying for car parks

Disabled spaces need to be big enough and in the right places

People should be helped to travel sustainably and leave their cars at home

The general look and feel of many car parks is poor

Off-peak parking charges should be reviewed

Views differed widely, and whilst there were some common themes, there was no consensus on the direction for parking. Just two examples are below:

"Car parking spaces should be reduced in favour of Park & Ride. How about ... bringing owners of non-EV vehicles to the attention ... [of] EV grants to purchase."
- Free Text Response

"Car parks in Cheltenham are way too expensive. Car parking spaces are generally too small and car parks are dirty and outdated. Very embarrassing for our town!"
- Free Text Response

1.5 On and off-street parking

On-street parking is introduced to manage demand and to improve traffic flow. Legislation prescribes how income from on-street car parking can be used.

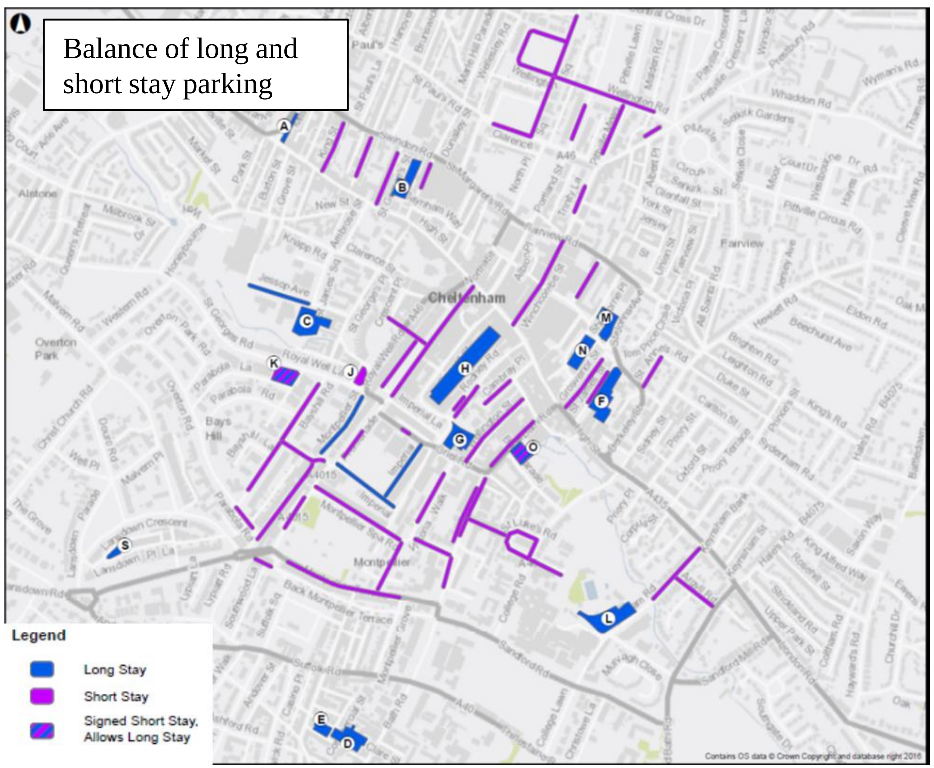
Broadly speaking, on-street parking should be shorter stay and more expensive than off-street parking. This approach benefits traders by increasing turnover of customers and where combined with residents parking helps residents find a space near to their homes. It also helps drivers to find short stay parking close to their destination and carry out quick errands or make purchases.

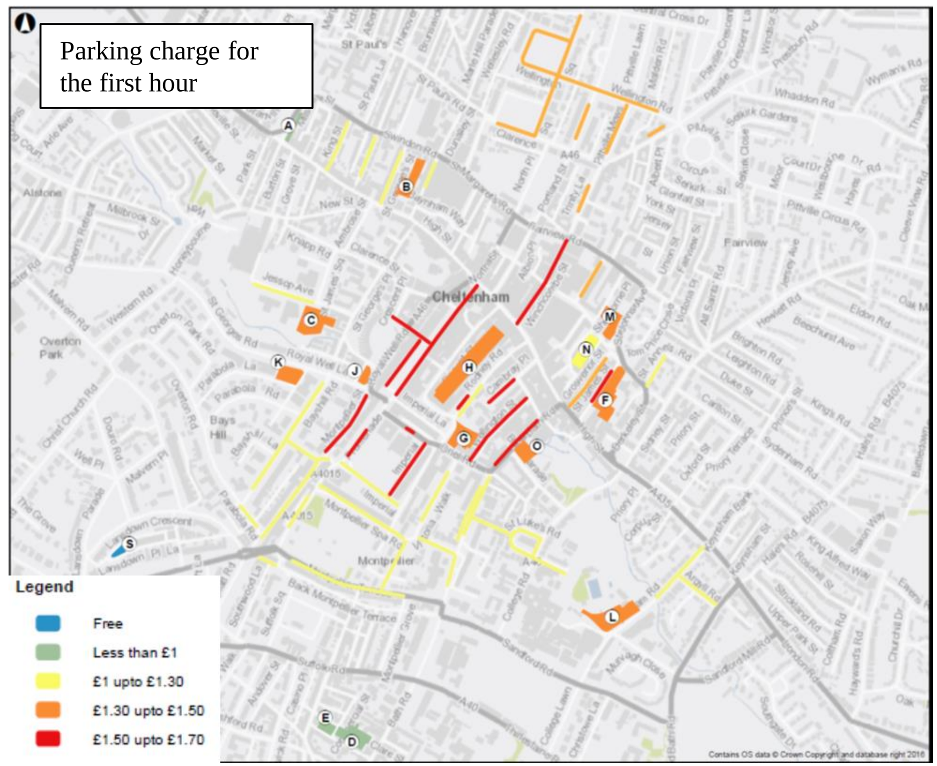
Users expect on-street parking to be more expensive than off-street and parking close to services and prime retail to be more expensive than outlying areas. This is a logical way to manage demand and achieve turnover to support traders and city centre services.

The maps below show the balance of long and short stay parking as defined by ability to park for longer than 4 hours and the price of the first hour of parking.

Broadly speaking it is already the case that on-street provision is focused on short stay and off-street for longer stay and that on-street parking is more expensive than off-street. This aligns well with Gloucestershire's draft parking strategy and with the conventional thinking regarding the balance of on and off-street parking.

There are some anomalies, for example evening charges, where on-street is free after 6pm. Where there is a case, charging periods should be brought in-line.



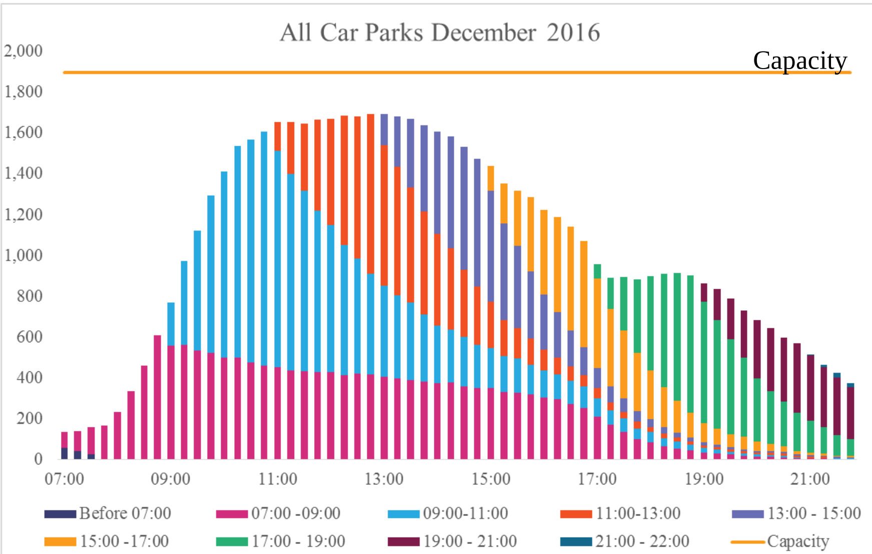


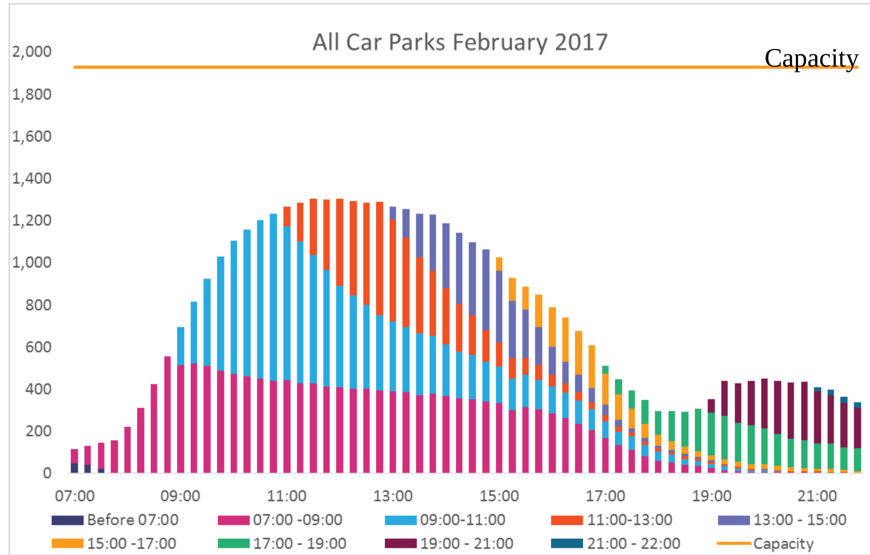
1.6 Surveys

Usage surveys took place on Thursday 15th of December in 10 town centre car parks to capture pre-Christmas demand. The surveys used Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) data. This date was chosen specifically because it represented what was likely to be 'peak' demand. Parking was also free after 6pm on this day to support late night shopping.

The survey was repeated on Tuesday 7th of February to capture the 'normal' demand. Usual parking charges, including evening charges applied during this survey.

The different colours show the arrival time of vehicles and then when they departed giving a profile of use across the day.





Although the town centre car parks were very busy, only Royal Well was full for long periods of the day. Whilst entry to Regents Arcade was restricted for parts of the day, the ANPR data, backed up with manual counts showed that it did not reach its stated capacity at any point. This suggests problems with the barrier equipment. Regent Arcade is specifically dealt with in the detailed recommendations.

Even on what was almost certainly one of the busiest days of the year for parking and shopping, there was capacity in town centre car parks.

Some car parks are very busy on normal days as well. Royal Well, Regents Arcade, High Street and Chelt Walk were shown to be busy on both survey days and when spot counts were carried out. Of the town centre car parks, St Georges' Rd and Town Centre East generally had the most spare capacity.

District car parks where charges are not levied are often very busy during the day. This is especially the case with Whitefriars (formerly Sixways) and Lansdown Place.

1.7 Benchmarking – Car parking charges

Looking at the *value* of a space is more useful than simply looking at the *cost* of parking. British Parking Association research confirms that drivers expect to pay more in the centre of a town than in an out of town location. This reflects the variety of services and the vibrancy of a town centre environment.

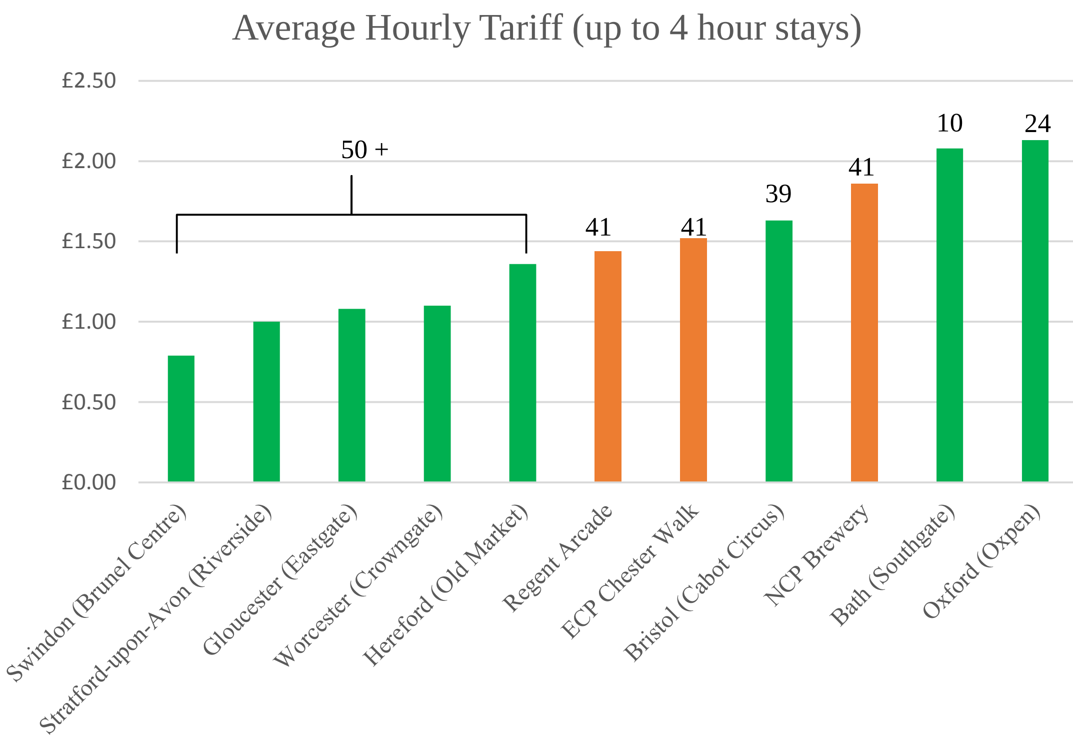
Research suggests that whilst unduly high parking charges can impact upon town centres, the link between parking costs and retail footfall is not clear.

Conclusions of benchmarking:

- Short stay tariffs are broadly comparable with nearby towns and cities;
- Cheltenham is neither the most expensive nor the cheapest;
- Tariffs are good value and could be increased to pay for the improvements needed to car parks; and,
- Private operators tend to be more expensive, they optimise revenue rather than usage.

"Visitors to town centres suggested that car park charges do impact behaviour but the general availability of spaces is felt to be more important than cost in their overall decision about visiting. Traffic flow and parking signage have as much, if not greater, effect on their decision to visit the town centre, how long they spend there, and how much money they spend."

- Association of Town & City Management



* The orange bars represent three car parks in Cheltenham – CBCs Regent Arcade, NCPs Brewery and ECPs Chester Walk

* Numbers above bars denote retail vitality index by retail specialists, Harper Dennis Hobbs. Scoring the quality of the retail offer rather than simply size to give a 'vitality' ranking. Lower is better.

The overall number of spaces is subject to change and could improve with major retailers planning to come to the town.

1.8 Benchmarking – Off peak charges

Most comparable towns and cities charge for parking in the evening and at weekends.

Shopping centres know their market and want to encourage footfall off peak especially for food and leisure, yet still generally charge in the evening and on Sundays.

	Evenings		Sunday	
Location	Charge	Period	1hr	All Day
Cheltenham (Regent Arcade)	£2.50	1730-2400	Normal Charges Apply	
Gloucester (Eastgate)	Free	1800-0700	£1.00	£2.00
Worcester (Crowngate)	£1.00	1700-0900	£1.00	£1.00
Swindon (Brunel Centre)	Normal Charges Apply		Normal Charges Apply	
Bristol (Cabot Circus)	£2.00	1700-0700		
Oxford (Oxpen)	£3.00	2000-0800		
Bath (Southgate)	£2.00	1800-2400		
Stratford-upon-Avon (Riverside)	£2.00	1600-2400		
Hereford (Old Market)	Free	2000-0800		

Conclusions:

- Offering free parking would have a significant financial impact but limited, if any, impact on footfall;
- Tariffs are good value and could be increased to pay for the improvements to car parks which are needed .

Free parking was offered on the day of the Christmas Parking Survey.

Whilst the data is only a snapshot, the effect of free parking would appear to be minimal; the proportion of car parking in the off peak period was only 0.5% different on the free parking day and the normal charging day.

Table: % occupancy of car parks in the off peak period

	Christmas Survey *Free Parking	Second Survey
18:00–20:00	12.3%	11.9%
20:00-22:00	3.9%	3.7%

Research suggests that whilst unduly high parking charges can impact upon town centres, the link between parking costs and retail footfall or retail is not clear and research at the Dept. of Urban Transport Economics, Erasmus University of Rotterdam shows no statistical correlation between footfall and parking charges.

1.9 Headline Findings

Headline findings are categorised between the ***management*** and ***spatial*** aspects of car parking. Management findings relate to the charging regime, management systems, staffing, and back office functions. Spatial findings include those relating the look and feel of car parks, land use, and wayfinding.

Management Findings

- The key shortcomings are similar to many other smaller local authorities; there is no resilience in the current system with the service largely maintained by the goodwill of frontline staff.
- There is a lack of investment and data on which to base decisions. Equipment needs to be renewed to improve customer service and the quality of data.
- It is costing CBC about the same as it would a private operator to operate the same business and an assessment of the market rent potential suggests that outsourcing the operation would be unlikely to produce financial benefits.
- Although tariffs are broadly in line with other comparable places, there is a case for increasing tariffs to help fund improvements.
- Regent's Arcade is underperforming when compared to other prime car parks in comparable retail areas.
- The parking operation is too small to be sustainable in the long term and resilience needs to be created through strong management and partnership.

Spatial Findings

- There is some capacity and car parks are rarely full. There is neither a strong case to dramatically reduce or increase the number of car parking spaces in the town centre.
- The end-to-end customer experience is poor, way-finding to and from car parks needs to be improved as well as information and signage on car park sites.
- The balance between off and on-street is broadly as should be expected. On-street parking fulfils a different role; that of traffic and demand management, compared to off-street parking.
- Car parking detracts from townscape in some places breaking the historic built environment.
- There are few obvious opportunities for site disposal and prior experience suggests that short term capital receipts do not make up for the longer term loss of income.
- Any sites that are disposed of should be done with outline permission and development licenses in place to stop them being run as car parks by subsequent owners.

Across both categories a key finding is the need for more management resource to provide strategic direction and implement the change required.

1.10 Headline Findings – Perceptions v Reality in 2017

In discussions with stakeholders through the public survey, views were often expressed about the current state of play for parking in the town. Considering these views against usage survey data, national best practice examples and benchmarking against other places, the reality differs from the perception in a number of ways.

Perception	Reality
− There is not enough parking space in the town generally	+ Information available and surveys carried seem to suggest that there is capacity in the town centre even on peak days
− Parking in Cheltenham is expensive and discourages visitors	+ Charges are in line with other towns and cities regionally with similar offers
− The customer experience is poor and payment systems are not customer friendly	+ Yes, the customer service needs to be improved, but this it not unusual for parking nationally and is achievable
− There is an imbalance between on- and off-street parking	+ On-street parking fulfils a different role and is generally already shorter stay and more expensive than off-street
− Peak demand is a problem	+ Even on the last shopping Thursday before Christmas there were some spaces although it was busy, and the town centre parking may of appeared ‘full’ from a customer perspective
− Free evening and Sunday parking would improve footfall	+ There is no evidence locally or nationally to support this view

2. The Strategy

2.1 Policy Context

The policy context provides a framework within which any strategy must operate and sets out the high level objectives of government. The strategy considered:

- National Policy of government;
- County Policy of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC); and
- Local Policy of Cheltenham Borough Council.

In each case the headline objectives where they relate to parking are stated alongside the policy.

Key National & County Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

- Convenient, safe and secure;
- Appropriate charging;
- Appropriate provision for motorcycles;
- Enforcement should be appropriate.

GCC Local Transport Plan

- Commuting by other modes;
- Resilient network;
- Enable economic growth;
- Short stay on-street.

GCC draft Parking Strategy

- On-street should focus on short stay parking;
- Discourage commuter parking;
- Longer stay parking off-street;
- Tackle events parking.

Key Local Policies

Draft Place Strategy

- Improve identity and vibrancy of the town;
- High quality environment.

Economic Strategy

- Lack of parking and congestion identified as an issue by consultees.

Corporate Strategy

- Enhance townscape;
- Supporting the economy;
- Innovation;
- Town as a destination;
- Sustainable travel.

Local Plan

- Focus on short stay parking;
- Resist increase in overall parking levels;
- Effective management.

"Local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking in town centres so that it is convenient, safe and secure, including appropriate provision for motorcycles. They should set appropriate parking charges that do not undermine the vitality of town centres. Parking enforcement should be proportionate."

- National Planning Policy Framework

Aims

2.2 Future Parking Patterns

Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy allocates 10,917 new homes to Cheltenham in the plan period to 2031. Over the same period of time the way people choose how to travel and where to travel is likely to change significantly. The plan is currently with the examiner and this figure could change.

Commuters and Residents

If unmanaged, new development could result in increased demand for city centre parking.

- Using census travel to work data 10,720 new homes could result in demand of almost 1,000 more parking spaces;
- Whilst there is some capacity in off-street car parks, this means that demand could not be met without additional car parks and spaces in the town centre;
- Local Planning Policy seeks to limit additional town centre parking.

The strategy for commuters and residents must be:

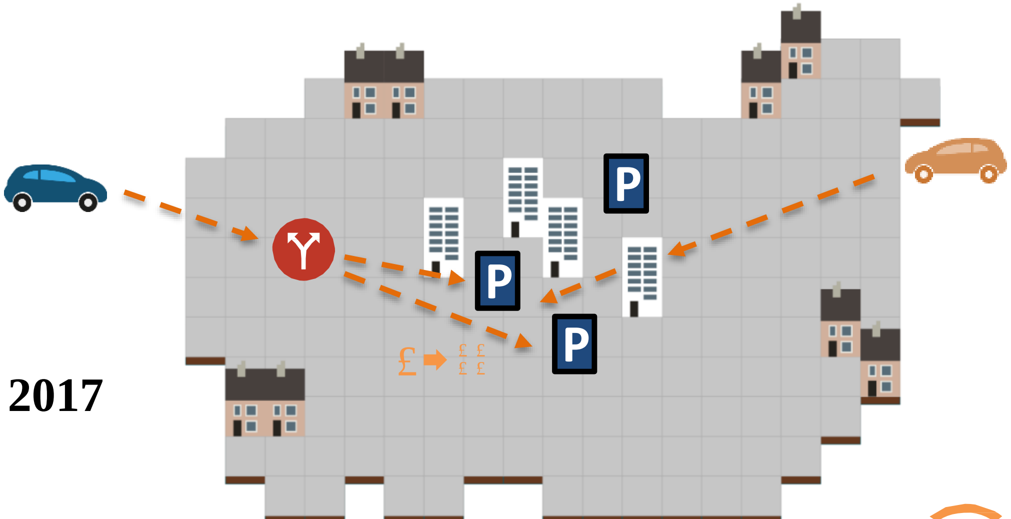
- To encourage walking, cycling and public transport use through investment in services including Park and Ride (P&R);
- Linked to wider planning policy which seeks to allocate sites of a sufficient size to attract new public transport services; and,
- A pricing policy which ensures that long stay parking is always more expensive than bus travel or P&R.

Visitors – people will want to visit Cheltenham if…

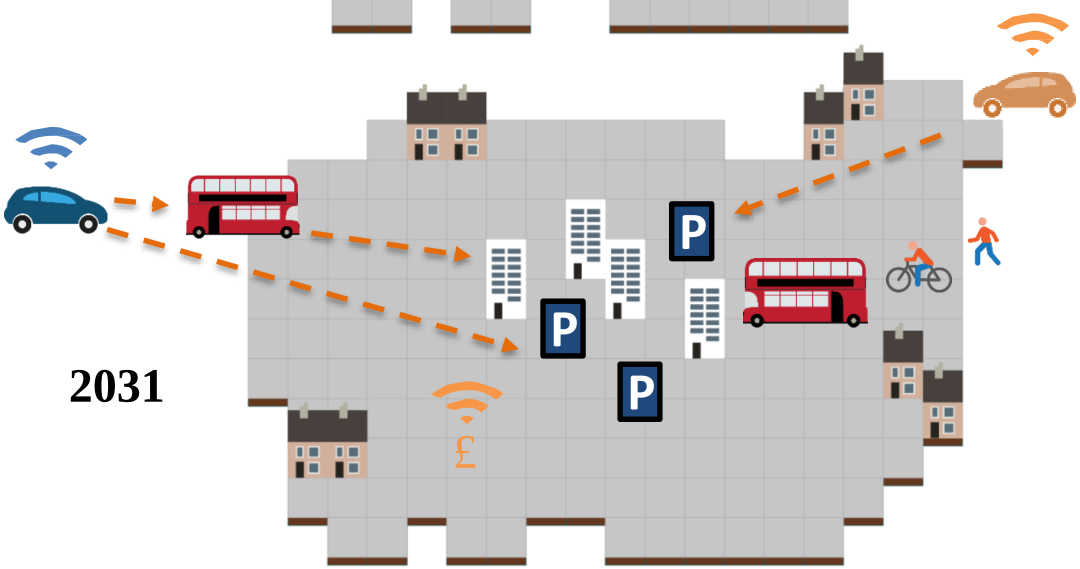
	The town's "offer" is attractive to potential visitors	Potential visitors know about the town's 'offer'
2017	Users' expectations of the parking service is low, as in most towns.	Visitors may know about tariffs in advance but visit hoping to find a parking space.
Next 5 years	The parking element of attractiveness is integrated into in-car guidance systems.	Visitors will expect to have real time information on space location and availability.
5-10 years	Parking availability will be a significant factor in deciding where to go for shopping or leisure.	Failure to provide accurate real-time parking information and automatic payment may result in a decision to go elsewhere.
15 years +	Vehicles drive you to the most convenient location for your chosen activity.	The vehicle's knowledge of the town's offer is now the deciding factor.

2.3 Future Parking Patterns

The strategy boils down to: better data and information; a better environment and customer service; and a roadmap for funding these improvements.



2017



2031

In 2017

Commuters:

- Currently using prime spaces for long stay parking
- Phone payments are growing quickly for longer stays over three hours
- P&R sites are underutilised

Visitors:

- Visitors find it hard to locate the car parks
- Cash payment most popular, but longer stay is increasingly made by phone
- ‘Welcome to Cheltenham’ visitor experience can be poor

By 2031

Commuters:

- Use public transport, walk and cycle more often
- Or if they do drive use long stay car parks on the edge of the town centre
- Use cash rarely, instead are using automated payment

Visitors:

- Are likely to arrive in a connected vehicle which plans their route and suggests where to park
- Automatic payments and paperless ticketing
- Better ‘welcome to Cheltenham’

2.4 Aims, objectives and headline measures

Aim 1

Respond to a changing world

Driverless vehicles, connected cars and flexible payment options are already here and parking needs to respond as this becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Aim 2

Diverse destination

Parking needs to support the transition of the town centre to a quality destination that goes 'beyond shopping'. A place where people want to visit, enjoy and play.

Aim 3

Improve Townscape

Cheltenham has a unique townscape and some superb buildings. Parking needs to contribute to improving the a sense of 'place' across the town.

Aim 4

Support the Economy

Parking has a role to play in supporting the economy and vitality of the town centre.

Objectives

Aim 1:

- Giving people the information they need when they need it
- Responding to connected and automated vehicles

Aim 2:

- Improve the end-to-end customer experience
- Payment – making parking and paying easier

Aim 3:

- Encouraging sustainable travel
- Maintaining income levels to allow investment

Aim 4:

- Appropriate charging regime
- Appropriate levels of car parking provision

Headline Measures

Increased capacity to deliver the change agenda. A dedicated senior staff resource is required to implement the strategy, and improve efficiency and performance. This post should be self funding .

Aim 1:

- *Better information and data capture*
- *Improve customer experience of payment*
- *Change the way that car parks are managed and run*

Aim 2:

- *Giving people the information they need*
- *Encouraging more sustainable travel*
- *Simpler and consistent payment methods*

Aim 3:

- *Minimum Standards of quality and consistency*
- *Wayfinding and signage improvements*
- *Consider sites for regeneration and disposal*

Aim 4:

- *Simple and logical charging regimes*
- *Working with others to simplify parking*
- *Better systems for coach and events parking*