
Towards a Cheltenham Parking Strategy (draft v10)

COVERING STATEMENT

Parking facilities are a key component to the vitality of any town centre and Cheltenham is no different in this respect. The newly created Cheltenham Development Task Force has set out its central area ambition which is:

“to support the town’s economic strength and sustainable development by revitalising key streets and spaces to the highest attainable quality for the benefit of the whole community.”

The role of streets and streetscapes needs to be considered in conjunction with how Residents, commuters and visitors access the town and its services – thus, the contribution parking schemes make to the well-being of the local economy is an area that requires detailed consideration.

The ‘Cheltenham Parking Board’, (The Board) a County/Borough partnership is moving towards to a more holistic approach to parking in Cheltenham and which will lead the development of a jointly owned parking strategy for Cheltenham (the Strategy), considering both on and off-street parking needs within the Borough.

Urban design and public realm is another consideration that the parking strategy needs to take into account. Many of the existing street-scapes in the town have evolved organically over time in both their use and occupation. To accommodate future changes and in support of the overall economic well being of local communities, the parking strategy needs to take into account and where feasible act as an enabler, in managing and enhancing local parking space provision and associated amenities.

The Board should ensure that the Strategy is underpinned by parking policies with particular regard to:

- Managing the traffic network to ensure expeditious movement of traffic, (including pedestrians and cyclists), as required under the TMA Network Management Duty
- Improving road safety;
- Improving the local environment;
- Improving the quality and accessibility of public transport;
- Meeting the needs of people with disabilities, some of whom will be unable to use public transport and depend entirely on the use of a car;
- Managing and reconciling the competing demands for kerb space.

The use of the surplus generated needs to be discussed between the GCC and CBC and clarity sought on the legislative restrictions that govern the expenditure in Section 55 (as amended).

As evidenced via feedback from communities, engaged thus far, the parking strategy needs to acknowledge the opportunities for a range of localised and shared parking arrangements that supports local transport schemes, including car clubs, cycling, shuttle buses and community transport options.

This also needs to be linked to smarter travel plans such as those adopted by several major local employers, but also those developed in the future in conjunction with community and other defined groups with structure and delivery mechanisms. This approach will encourage

communities to work together in delivering sustainable transport choices aligned for both on /off-street parking provision.

It should be acknowledged that parking schemes play a pivotal role in supporting a number of strategies and schemes, for example, The Agency Agreement, Sustainable Travel Towns, Community & Neighbourhood Management and DIY Street Schemes

Consideration should be given for CBC to have a more active and strategic role in the development of policy and in the management of the engagements and consultation process, this could provide opportunity for the GCC to allocate resources into developing and supporting County wide strategic initiatives.

Towards a Cheltenham Parking Strategy (draft v9)

Contents

Background.....	3
Changing circumstances.....	4
Key target outcomes.....	5
Existing Provision.....	7
Headline outputs.....	9
Proposed solutions.....	9
Current issues for discussion.....	10

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Parking facilities are a key component to the vitality of any town centre and Cheltenham is no different in this respect. The newly created Cheltenham Development Task Force has set out its central area ambition which is:

“to support the town’s economic strength and sustainable development by revitalising key streets and spaces to the highest attainable quality for the benefit of the whole community.”

- 1.2 The role of streets and streetscapes needs to be considered in conjunction with how residents, commuters and visitors access the town and its services – thus, the contribution which parking facilities make to the well-being of the local economy is an area worthy of detailed consideration.
- 1.3 As with many towns, parking in Cheltenham consists of both “on street” and “off street” provision. Both on and off street public parking facilities are operationally managed by Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), but the strategic management of on street parking facility is currently overseen by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), which has commissioned CBC to manage the day to day operation of the service in Cheltenham There is also parking facility provision in private ownership, often linked to specific facilities or venues, with pricing linked to public parking tariffs governed by Section 106 planning agreements.
- 1.4 What has become clear is that the overall level of parking provision in Cheltenham has simply evolved over time. Public parking facilities have primarily been provided on land owned by the Borough Council which was perceived as surplus to operational requirements, in the sense that there was no immediate pressing alternative use, other than as an opportunity for parking spaces. There has never really been a co-ordinated strategic approach to the number of parking facilities, their accessibility, their capacities, their location, their quality or the signage to them. Equally, on-

street parking has also developed in a relatively uncoordinated manner, responding to specific pressures rather than through a coherent defined approach.

- 1.5 Off-street publicly available parking facilities in Cheltenham, are owned or controlled by CBC, on-street pay and display parking spaces are strategically overseen by GCC and managed by CBC as part of the Agency Agreement.

2.0 Changing circumstances

- 2.1 Several independent but related strands of work, suggest that CBC and GCC should work collaboratively to consider the adoption of a defined parking facility strategy for Cheltenham.

- 2.2 The specific strands are:-

1. The traffic modelling work being undertaken by the Cheltenham Development Task Force, which has raised some fundamental issues concerning traffic movements associated with parking facilities in the town; which further suggests a significant increase in traffic in and around Cheltenham by 2026.

It further suggests that many road junctions in Cheltenham are likely to become severely overloaded. New development will add to the pressure. Therefore it is clear that the parking strategy should include a clear strategy for dealing with these forecast problems and that further there needs to be a clear link to LTP3 thus ensuring an holistic approach is taken when considering the parking issues linked to road improvements, traffic management or public transport strategies.

2. A new CBC approach to parking facility management, has identified a range of shortcomings in the way that parking income and data are collected and managed and which is considering improving the customer parking experience by introducing new booking and payment arrangements based upon "smart" technologies;
3. The development of the 'Cheltenham Parking Board', a County/Borough partnership which is moving towards to a more holistic approach to parking in Cheltenham and which will lead the development of the parking strategy for Cheltenham, considering both on and off-street parking needs within the Borough;
4. The adoption of the CBC asset management plan which highlights parking facilities as a significant source of existing revenue, but also offering the potential for development opportunities and capital receipts, to support Cheltenham's economy;
5. The need to implement environmentally and economically sustainable transport solutions for the town, including additional Park & Ride facilities;
6. Recognition that surface parking facilities are not an efficient means of providing the required quantum of car spaces in town centres, where

land values are at a premium;

7. Data that suggests there is a surplus of capacity and thus, higher management and operational costs associated with existing parking facility provision than may be necessary.

- 2.3 All of these factors suggest that it would be prudent to develop a more holistic approach to the provision of parking facility in the town.

3.0 Key target outcomes

- 3.1 Critical to any analysis is an understanding of the outcomes sought. These have been defined as follows:-

- Sustainable solutions that reduce the impact of vehicular traffic in the town centre but equally, do not damage the experience of Cheltenham as a desirable social, retail and cultural destination. For example, encouraging the use of park and ride and reducing cross-town journeys purely for the purpose of accessing a parking facility, which should ideally be available at each key entry point to the town;

This needs to be linked to LTP3 in identifying the locations of Brockworth, Elmbridge, Uckington and West of Severn Park and ride sites.

Parking related policies will need to promote sustainable economic growth and be defined in terms that relates to Cheltenham's needs, with clear benchmarking against national indicators.

- On-street provision which supports a reasonable level of resident parking, whilst also supporting the needs of the wider community and local businesses; critically, on-street provision should not be designed to compete with off-street provision where capacity exists, or where it is desirable for long stay provision to be located off-street;
- Cost efficiency in the provision of parking services, including the maintenance or replacement of existing parking revenue streams, to avoid the potential for collateral damage to wider Council services supported by off street parking revenue – critically, this requires a genuine joined-up approach by CBC and GCC in relation to both on and off street provision;
- Better and 'more customer friendly' parking facilities with efficient and reliable payment methods (e.g. automatic number plate recognition and smart phone/card technology) that are consistent with promoting and incentivising parking facility services and a better customer experience for those choosing to use them;
- Fewer, but more strategically positioned and better maintained larger off street parking facilities to match customer expectations; we need to set and deliver a consistent quality of parking provision in respect of access, signage, cleanliness, safety, reserved facilities for the

disabled and parent/toddlers, adequate lighting, access to toilet facilities etc;

- Improved level of payment compliance with a consequent reduction in the need for enforcement, which is a very negative customer experience.

3.2 It is recognised that there are a range of key customer groups accessing the town's facilities, including:-

- local residents;
- shoppers/day trippers;
- commuters;
- evening visitors taking advantage of Cheltenham's vibrant night-time economy.

The needs of these various interest groups should be balanced in such a way as to maximise 24 hour off street parking facility usage, thereby absorbing vehicles from elsewhere on the road network. This needs to be linked to a review of the existing charging & restriction times for both on & off-street parking; the review also needs to consider localised issues such as the retail and commercial offering, festivals and the night time economy to mention a few. Standardising time restrictions across the town is not considered to be an acceptable approach.

3.3 As evidenced via feedback from communities, engaged thus far, the parking strategy needs to acknowledge the opportunities for a range of localised and shared parking arrangements that supports local transport schemes, including car clubs, cycling, shuttle buses and community transport options. This also needs to be linked to smarter travel plans such as those adopted by several major local employers, but also those developed in the future in conjunction with community and other defined groups with structure and delivery mechanisms. This approach will encourage communities to work together in delivering sustainable transport choices aligned to both on and off-street parking provision. It should be acknowledged that parking schemes play a pivotal role in supporting a number of strategies and schemes, for example, The Agency Agreement, Sustainable Travel Towns, Community & Neighbourhood Management and DIY Street Schemes.

3.4 Urban design and public realm is another consideration that the parking strategy needs to take into account. Many of the existing street-scapes in the town have evolved organically over time in both their use and occupation. To accommodate future changes and in support of the overall economic well being of local communities, the parking strategy needs to take into account and where feasible act as an enabler, in managing and enhancing local parking space provision and associated amenities.

3.5 The strategy needs to be delivered at an affordable cost, preferably better than cost-neutral and yielding economic benefits from the development of sites and/or capital receipts from the release of any identified surplus assets.

4.0 Existing provision

- 4.1 Within the area mapped out by the Cheltenham Development Task Force as the 'Central Area Ambition' lie 19 parking facilities; 14 of which are in the ownership or direct control of CBC.
- 4.2 An analysis of each of these sites is set out at Appendix 1 and is referred to throughout this document.
- 4.3 Of the 13 parking facilities actually owned by CBC, two are already earmarked for development as part of the work under the Civic Pride banner, these being North Place and Portland Street. Analysis identifies a potential rationalisation strategy for the remainder, based upon a premise that at any time of the day or at the weekend, there is always surplus parking facility capacity within the town.
- 4.4 Whilst some of this capacity will be lost as a result of the proposed development of North Place and Portland Street (813 car spaces down to a target minimum of 300 car spaces) this can be readily absorbed by existing capacity. However, such a simplistic approach does not tackle the fundamental issues that have become clear from the traffic modelling work, namely, that there is a significant imbalance between parking facility provision and demand in the various quarters of the town.
- 4.5 The town has access points from all four compass points, but traffic flows are heaviest from the south and west, associated with the M5 corridor and junctions 9 and 10. Much of the traffic is forced to cross the town in order to access the majority of parking facility provision, as a result of both the physical locations of parking facilities and the inherent restrictions of the one-way inner ring road system.
- 4.6 Thus, a key factor is whether parking capacity is in the most appropriate locations to support the needs of the town. A significant issue is that the majority of provision is to the north and east of the town centre, but the majority of the traffic generation is from the south and west (notably via the M5 corridor). It is this factor that generates a lot of traffic movements across town, as motorists are forced to use the one way system to access a parking facility. Return journeys add to this congestion problem. Additionally, the Festivals, an important dimension of the "Cheltenham offer", are located in the heart of the town and not particularly close to many of the major parking facilities.
- 4.7 Providing new parking facilities (either above or below ground) in "required" locations is likely to be problematic, due to the lack of available open or surface sites and the likely cost and sensitivities associated with this type of development in a town of significant heritage value.
- 4.8 An alternative would be to increase the capacity of existing parking facilities already owned by the Borough Council. This could be by adding extra tiers or decks to existing surface parking facilities, or by being more radical and providing underground provision in areas not currently considered as parking facility space, such as Imperial Gardens.

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- 4.9 Either option will require careful and sensitive cost benefit analysis, as the combination of planning constraints and recent public discontent with the proposed General Hospital multi-storey parking facility have shown. Any proposals for either creating new or increased capacity from existing parking facilities will need early input from the planning team and any feasibility assessments for “decking” will need to incorporate best practice elevational treatments.
- 4.10 Critical to the analysis is parking facility usage data. This identifies not only spare capacity, but also evidences some key issues regarding behaviour. There tends to be a presumption in favour of surface parking facilities by users and yet, where multi-storey provision is well located and managed, it is equally well used. This suggests that we need to achieve better utilisation of some of the existing multi-storey provision such as Grosvenor Terrace, through improving access (linked to traffic modelling), signage (for both vehicles and pedestrians), general state of cleanliness and décor, with dealing with perceived safety issues and access to other facilities.
- 4.11 Equally, notwithstanding the locations or capacities, there are marked variations in both the quality of parking provision and its associated facilities. For this reason, it is proposed to set a parking facility “standard” which will outline what is acceptable to CBC. This will detail not only quality requirements within the parking facility (such as surfacing and disabled bays) but also vehicle signage to the parking facility, pedestrian signage from the parking facility, location of nearest toilet facilities etc.
- The analysis identifies short term and long term costs for achieving the acceptable standard at the parking facilities to be retained.
- 4.12 A major component of the strategy must be the approach to revenue generation, both in terms of payment structures (which need to be carefully related to the on-street parking charges regime administered by GCC) but also payment collection. The analysis identifies the current payment method at each of the 19 parking facilities and any underlying problems associated with existing ageing technology.
- 4.13 The focus will be to consider a single payment software package, applicable to all CBC off street parking facilities. The initial findings of the parking project group investigation into payment technologies, suggest that CBC should be implementing a smart card and barrier less system as a potential solution.
- 4.14 Any solution must be sustainable and able to both support and potentially influence the outputs of the traffic modelling currently being undertaken e.g. two way travel on certain streets which are currently designated as one-way (e.g. Albion Street).
- 4.15 Multiple use of a parking facility could be a solution to emerging problems associated with additional on-street parking facility restrictions where demand outstrips supply.
- 4.16 By this we mean utilising car spaces for shoppers, visitors and possibly some commuters during the day, but utilising the same spaces for residents and evening visitors during the evening/night. For this to be effective, further investigation of acceptable charging regimes and night time safety is

required

5.0 **Headline outputs**

- 5.1 The evidence set out in this report supports the challenges identified and provides a sound platform against which the desired outcomes identified in 3.0 above can be delivered.

6.0 **Proposed Solutions**

- 6.1 These fall into distinct phases on the assumption that we determine the long term strategy and then have a series of steps towards achieving the range of priority outcomes identified. It may however be both desirable and possible to release some 'surplus to requirement' sites early in the process, in order to ease cash flow and facilitate investment or development in the retained parking facilities.
- Phase 1 – implement a coherent pricing strategy for park and ride and on/off street provision and appropriate signage, quality standards and payment collection in all parking facilities identified as part of the long term solution and not likely to be subject to significant structural works in the near future – assumed to be Regent Street, Grosvenor Terrace, Brewery NCP and Beechwood.
 - Phase 2 - commission study and works to increase capacity at St Georges Road car park (potential for additional tiers);
 - Phase 3 – deliver the new parking facility on North Place/Portland Street in conjunction with wider redevelopment scheme;
 - Phase 4 – deliver additional parking facility decks at Rodney Road and/or Chelt Walk / underground parking facility at Imperial Square (subject to business case and sustainability implications) against the quality standards agreed;
 - Phase 5 – release surplus sites for alternative uses – potentially, St.James Street, Sherborne Place and/or Chelt Walk.
- 6.2 It is recognised that some smaller sites will probably be released as proposals progress. This would include the 23 spaces at the Brewery and 47 spaces at Chapel Walk (Royal Well).
- 6.3 Essentially, this would obviate the need to cross town in pursuit of a parking space, unless a specific destination was being sought. All parking facilities would become accessible from the point of entry to the town, from the north: 3 - North Place, Portland Street and Sherborne Place from the east: 2 - St James and Bath Parade, from the west: 2 – West End and High Street ('Henrietta Street') from the south 5 – Rodney road, Regent Arcade, Royal Well, St George's Road and Chelt Walk, providing a total of 12 against an existing total of 18 Pay & Display or Pay on Foot sites.

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- 6.4 The costs of rebalancing provision in this manner and upgrading parking facilities to improve utilisation needs to be determined, but subject to identifying the resourcing plan, could be implemented in phases as set out in 6.0 above.

Current issues for discussion

- GCC & CBC have shown a willingness to engage in discussions about a holistic parking strategy (through the Cheltenham Parking Board), it is clear that the strategy needs to ensure where increased on-street parking is introduced both on and off-street parking revenue supports the wider customer and environmental considerations;
- There is a need for clarity about the aspirations for park and ride – for example, what ongoing support will remain for the racecourse park and ride facility;
- Investment in the off-street parking facilities is necessary to underpin current customer demands and revenue to enable ongoing management and support, following years of limited investment in the service. CBC wants to retain control of off-street parking provision and ensure that this is linked to the increasing on-street provision as part of a holistic parking facility strategy;
- Should CBC be planning for the provision of additional off-street parking to rebalance geographic provision on a ‘demand-led’ basis, or should the principal driver be around environmental quality and reducing unnecessary car trips into the town centre? – We can not do this unless we define the long term strategy for the demands of on-street parking?
- How would this link in the control of private Off-street Parking facilities? – in 2010 a Private Members Bill concerning off-street parking was introduced into Parliament by the Hon Member for Crawley, Henry Smith MP. The Bill, if enacted, would place a duty on local authorities to licence all publicly available off-street parking facility where a fee was charged.

The Bill is currently being considered by Parliament, although there is existing provision for local authorities to use discretionary powers in relation to off-street parking facility places.

CBC may wish to consider the use of these powers to licence off-street parking places. The powers allow, following appropriate consultation with stakeholders, for local authorities to establish controlled areas within which no person other than the local authority may operate a public off-street parking place of a prescribed description, except under and in accordance with the terms and conditions of a licence granted to that person by the local authority.

- How much investment risk is CBC willing to take in relation to taking forward asset management proposals that might see some parking facilities ‘decked’ and others prioritised for disposal for redevelopment? Given the current proposals at North Place / Portland Street, how cautious or ambitious should the timetable be?

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- In terms of the enforcement service itself, should CBC and GCC be focussing on a supportive neighbourhood management approach, minimising costs with a balanced approach to income generation supported by effective and localised enforcement?
 - Having a modern and forward thinking enforcement regime is critical in both supporting the emerging Localism Bill and the agenda for creating the Big Society. It is recognised that an effective local authority enforcement service needs to be capable of adapting to the ever increasing demands, expectations and perceptions that local communities and identified key stakeholders have, not only in relation to the emerging changes to legislation and statutory guidance, but the broader issues linked to the localism agenda.

The civil enforcement service currently issues some 20,000+ PCN's (Penalty Charge Notices) and manages some 60,000+ unsolicited engagements per annum, ranging from community and neighbourhood management issues, parking, utility street works to tourism.

This reinforces the fact (as previously stated) that the service already plays a pivotal role in it's support for a number of strategies and schemes such as; The Agency Agreement, Sustainable Travel Towns, Community & Neighbourhood Management and, DIY Street Schemes to name but a few.

This demonstrates the need to evolve the service so that it is capable of delivering an efficient enforcement regime, together with supporting the eyes and ears approach to street-scape and highways management, for the following town-wide benefits:

1. A greener, healthier Cheltenham
2. Sustainable economic growth
3. A safe and secure integrated transport and highway system.
4. Good access to services.