

CABINET

Lancaster City Centre Draft Car Parking Strategy - Consultation Report Update and Strategic Parking Numbers

22 October 2024

Report of Chief Officer Sustainable Growth

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To consider an initial specific issue of parking space numbers and policy implications arising from the public consultation on the Lancaster City Centre Draft Car Parking Strategy 2024.			
Key Decision		Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	October 2024		
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF Councillor Jean Parr

- (1) Future car parking policy options for Lancaster city centre are developed within a strategic context of providing between 1400 and 1500 council operated car parking spaces, with an ambition to achieve the higher figure.
- (2) The Lancaster City Centre Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan adopts this criteria and framework in any future Strategy iterations to be considered by Cabinet.
- (3) Maintaining an optimal and efficiently managed quantity of public car parking provision in and around Lancaster city centre is a key priority for the city council, and its long-term provision, location and typology should form an explicit part of the sustainable travel and transport policy agenda for the city.
- (4) The increase in strategic numbers provides Cabinet with further comfort, in terms of the ongoing maintenance of city centre economic health, city centre accessibility and car user utility, for the progression of the planned release of Nelson street car park for affordable housing.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At its meeting in March 2024 Cabinet considered a report on the draft Lancaster City Centre Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan 2024 (The Draft Parking Strategy) and the implications on achieving the city council's objectives as set out in the approved Council Plan 2024-27. Cabinet agreed that maintaining an optimal and efficiently managed quantity of public car parking provision in and around Lancaster city centre is a key priority, and its long-term provision, location and typology should form an explicit part of the sustainable travel and transport policy agenda for the city. It also resolved the following (in summary)

- The Draft Parking Strategy be issued for consultation with statutory and community stakeholders and a report on the outcomes presented to Cabinet.
- Development of a business case for introducing Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) across the city council's parking portfolio developed.
- A report on reopening of the city council's Castle car park is presented to Cabinet.
- The feasibility and implementation of temporary additional parking provision is undertaken at specific city council owned sites, to mitigate any short to medium term impacts arising from the potential disposal of the Nelson Street car park.
- £15,000 approved to fund the feasibility, design development and implementation of temporary car park provision and other short to medium term actions referred to in the Draft Parking Strategy.

1.2 Future proposed development/disposal of surface car parks for other use / development was to be considered against the objectives of the wider city council policy framework as well as the following specific matters:

- The aims and objectives of the Lancaster City Centre Draft Parking Strategy.
- The outcomes and direction of other related travel and transport policy and wider policy framework.
- Ongoing and improved monitoring of car park usage.
- Progress in design development and delivery of temporary and permanent parking provision.

1.3 Balancing the need and demand for accessible parking with the city's goals for sustainable transportation is a complex and multifaceted challenge. The Draft Parking Strategy sought to address business concerns, enable progress on and facilitate city council and wider public policy objectives, and to move the issue of car parking provision to the heart of the sustainable transport and travel discussion.

2.0 Consultation Report Update

2.1 The Draft Parking Strategy covered the following key elements:

- *Key Facts*: An overview of the evidence base on which the strategy relied.
- *Policy Framework*: An overview of national, regional, and local transport, travel, and movement policy impacting on the way car parking is provided currently and in the future.
- *Demand*: Recognising and assessing the drivers of future parking demand.
- *Supply*: Analysing current and future parking supply issues to balance demand.
- *Strategy Positioning*: Explaining the recognised approaches to setting car parking policy.
- *Key Aims*: What the strategy aims to achieve.
- *Action Plan*: The specific actions required in order to achieve the strategy aims.

2.2 A detailed report on the consultation outcomes will be available for consideration by Cabinet in December. The consultation received a significant number of responses from the community and stakeholders and demonstrates that local people have been informed about the issues. While most of the responses received were made online, there were several stakeholder in-person events/workshops.

2.3 Members have been briefed on the emerging outcomes of the feedback which, in summary, calls for:

- A clearer, phased, and pragmatic approach to provision of car parking if current car parking sites, particularly in the Canal Quarter, are to be released for housing and/or commercial uses.
- Improved data collection and analysis.
- Enhanced communication and transparency in the consultation process.
- Integration of parking strategy with broader city planning and transport initiatives.
- More certainty on location and feasibility of new parking provision and new green transport / Multi Storey Car Parking (MSCP) hubs if these are to play a role in future strategic parking provision.

3.0 Proposal Details

3.1 In order for officers to deliver against this call for certainty, the critical framing of strategic parking space numbers needs to be agreed. The Draft Parking Strategy issued suggested between 1300 and 1400 council operated off-street parking bays could be considered optimal provision to meet strategic general use and peak demand.

3.2 The evidence provided in the consultation has led to officers recommending consideration of increasing the strategic number of car parking spaces regarded as optimal for the city centre to between 1,400 and 1,500, with an ambition to achieve the higher number in the long-term. This arises from:

- Evidence / comment from the consultation around parking difficulties and space availability.
- The need to take account of parking permit current and future use.
- The lack of city council control over the major transport public improvement policy levers.
- Difficulty in judging timing and impact of future parking space demand drivers - either those potentially reducing demand (in the sense of policy action to mitigate number of car journeys) and those potentially increasing demand (for example general economic/housing growth and strategic interventions such as Eden Morecambe).

3.3 Following current approved policy, impacts on the Lancaster parking portfolio in 2025 are likely to be:

- *The Castle Car Park is brought back into use (reinstatement of 287 spaces):* Closed for some time due to defects, the council leases the car park from the Department of Work & Pensions who have responsibility for the structure. The landlord has undertaken initial assessment of the building condition and have now engaged technical engineering experts to investigate the works needed to bring the car park back into use. The city council is in continued dialogue with the landlord on programming the required works.
- *Nelson Street released for affordable housing development (loss of 120 spaces):* Following procurement phase the city council has appointed RP Tyson/South Lakes as its preferred housing developer partner and is working towards finalising a development agreement which could see a start on site during mid-2025.

If the above are progressed achieved the parking portfolio for general use would then stand at 1469 spaces. This is within the revised recommended optimal range and exceeding current space availability, which is 1302 spaces by 167 bays.

3.4 Agreement on the increase in numbers will provide the critical context for officers to further develop the options for delivering the short, medium, and long-term actions identified in the Draft Strategy and immediately addresses a key concern expressed in the consultation. It should also provide Cabinet with further comfort in terms of the ongoing maintenance of city centre economic health, city centre accessibility and car user utility, to continue to progress the release of the Nelson Street car park for affordable housing purposes.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1 A summary of the options and analysis is presented below:

	<p>Option 1: Progressing Lancaster city centre parking policy options within the context of providing between 1400 and 1500 council</p>	<p>Option 2: Progressing Lancaster city centre parking policy options with the intention of retaining the Draft Strategy recommendation of between</p>
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	operated car parking spaces.	1300 and 1400 council operated car parking spaces.
Advantages	<p>Provides additional comfort, in terms of the ongoing maintenance of city centre economic health, city centre accessibility and car user utility, for the release of the Nelson street car park for housing to be progressed.</p> <p>Provides a more flexible benchmark for future specific policy considerations to inform decisions on the city council's car parking portfolio.</p> <p>Regarded as an optimal number of city centre parking spaces provided by the city council to continue to meet general and peak demand periods for the immediate future.</p> <p>Provides further comfort to business and community stakeholders that the council impacts from any current and future proposed surface car park disposal policies.</p> <p>Provides critical context, certainty, and impetus to improve and develop the council's asset management strategy and future car parking portfolio.</p>	<p>Provides some certainty and a as benchmark for future specific policy considerations to inform decisions on the city council's car parking portfolio</p>
Disadvantages	<p>Requires increased mitigation and planning for additional car parking numbers when considering future strategy and any proposed surface car park disposal decisions.</p>	<p>Provides less comfort to business and community stakeholders that accessibility and car user utility can be delivered.</p> <p>Regarded by officers as a sub-optimal number of city centre parking spaces provided by the city council to meet general and peak demand periods for the immediate future.</p>

Risks/ Mitigation	<p>Officers are dealing with imperfect information and future demand and supply variables are hard to predict.</p> <p>Ongoing and improved monitoring of car park usage to inform future decisions is essential to mitigate and review any impacts on car parking portfolio decisions</p>	<p>As Option 1.</p> <p>Potential future issues in managing car parking demand in terms of highway and other impacts.</p>

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

5.1 Following Members' consideration and confirmation that the increase in strategic parking numbers meets the council's objectives and its wider policy aspirations, **Option 1** is preferred.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Concerns from the business community, about the long-term provision of public parking, and general parking are understood. Through the draft Lancaster City Centre Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan, alongside ongoing work with county council, the issue will be addressed at a strategic city-wide level, with appreciation of the statutory strategic policy imperatives the city council is working within.

6.2 Principally these are: its declared Climate Emergency, the Lancaster Highways and Transport Masterplan 2016, and the need to promote modal shift towards sustainable forms of transport such as cycling, walking and public transport. All of these matters have to be balanced pragmatically with the need to maintain sufficient car parking for general city centre economic health and accessibility.

6.3 The council recognises that having an appropriate level of car parking in the city is important to support the economy and provide a range and choice of transport options and to ensure accessibility for the less mobile and populations underserved by public transport. An agreed increase in optimal strategic parking numbers to up to 1500 provides critical context and framing for the council's ambitions to provide parking provision that is fit for purpose and fit for the future.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

A Sustainable District – car parking provision and car use is a consideration in meeting the challenges of the council's declared Climate Emergency and a range of other council objectives.

An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy – building a sustainable and just local

economy that benefits people and organisations needs to consider car parking provision as a key feature of accessibility for certain groups and communities.

Healthy and Happy Communities – tackling car parking provision and some of the negative consequences inherent in the current portfolio will contribute to healthy and happy community objectives

A Co-Operative, Kind and Responsible Council – further consultation and ongoing discussion with stakeholders will achieve the best outcomes for in tandem with running efficient quality public services, of which car parking provision is a key service provision.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Asset health and safety and community safety should be improved with progression of the draft strategy Action Plan in the short, medium, and long-term. There are clear equity, sustainability, and rural proofing considerations when discussing elements of car park provision and the council's own car parking assets in particular given the intersection with public transport policy and issues with public transport availability and the sustainable travel and transport / Climate Emergency discussion.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No specific legal implications or legal risk arising from the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no other specific financial considerations arising from the adoption of this context for developing future options around the car parking portfolio at this stage.

The main future financial implications lie in managing the cost/income impacts on the General Fund arising from any decision to remove or add city council car park assets across the city centre area over the next 15 years – in effect the balance between capital and revenue implications of any reduced or increased provision.

The assumption in the report is that any potential negative impact on the General Fund of removing car parking assets will not be a short to medium term concern given that enough capacity is believed to exist in the council car parking portfolio to absorb current car park users for most periods of time across the year. This would mean broadly that net income would be maintained against fewer physical spaces. When combined with the impact of potential capital receipts and potential efficiency savings the General Fund position is likely to be cost neutral with some car parking space loss.

The longer-term net income position may, however, be affected as other car parks may be brought forward under development over the next 7 to 15 years. The financial impact of any future decisions within this timeframe will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis and this will be assisted by better information on use and turnover within the car parking asset portfolio.

The assumption in the report is that for any new (permanent or temporary) car parking provision a commercial business case would be put forward demonstrating that borrowing costs for capital expenditure and ongoing revenue running costs would be covered by gross income with the potential to also deliver a net surplus. Such future business cases would be a matter for consideration as part of the development of the council's future capital programme.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human resources: No HR implications arising from this report.

Information Services: No Information Service implications arising from this report.

Property: No Property implications arising from this report.

Open Space Implications: No open space implications arising from this report.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Within the 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget gross car parking income amounts to approximately £3.89M and represents the largest single item of council, excluding Core Funding at around 20% of the council's total Fees & Charges gross income. In addition, there would also be a reasonable expectation that this would increase as the charges are reviewed. Whilst noted that there are no specific financial implications arising from this report care needs to be taken when considering car parking across the district in the longer term and future decisions.

New or revised proposals will need to be carefully considered, not only from a financial perspective to maximise any future opportunities as they arise but also how it balances the various council priorities and objectives.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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