

Question asked by Councillor Ruth Colbridge to Councillor Caroline Jackson

In my ward, blocks of flats on Shakespeare Road have been retrofitted with solar panels. In each block the control panels and other high voltage equipment for the solar array has been located at the bottom of the only stairwell. In the event of an electrical fire in this equipment, residents won't be able to use the only emergency escape route from the building.

Q1. *What fire risk assessments have been conducted in relation to these installations?*

Q2. *Have residents been informed of the potential danger?*

Q3. *Will the council take action to improve the fire safety standards in these flats?*

Councillor C Jackson responded:

The Council takes fire safety very seriously and undertakes a comprehensive fire risk assessment on each of these blocks. No issues have been identified through this in relation to the location of the control panels. Each of these blocks operate on a Stay Safe/Defend in Place fire (evacuation) strategy which means that even if this equipment caught fire within these control boxes the Residents would not be expected to evacuate & would be safer to stay within their Flats unless instructed to leave by the Fire Service. In the event of a fire, full simultaneous evacuation is unlikely to be necessary as compartmentation levels & fire stopping within the structure should contain the fire at source. The communal areas are kept "sterile" meaning that there are no combustible materials in these areas for the fire to spread and therefore in theory such a fire would burn itself-out quite quickly & products of combustion/smoke would naturally ventilate/escape via the open doorways on each floor level. However, in reality it, would be expected that control panels would not catch fire due to over-ride safety switches which would kick in if the equipment became too hot or overloaded.

We keep residents informed about health and safety through our Block Voice groups, whereby information about actual risks rather than perceived risks is shared.

We will continue to keep abreast of and implement enhanced safety measures identified as part of our robust Fire Risk Assessment process.

Supplementary question asked by Councillor Colbridge:

In context of Grenfell fire how reassured are residents likely to feel, for me if there was a fire I'd be looking to get out in context of recent events. Its important to make sure that residents have full and clear understanding and also that feedback is sought from them that they are comfortable. Can you reassure that has been done?

Councillor Caroline Jackson responded:

In terms of Grenfell councils have had to learn a great deal from that and have been required to spend a great deal to ensure fire risks have been undertaken. In terms of finding out how residents feel each block has its organisation where there's a block voice. Its part of our tenant voice strategy and it seems to work. It is worrying and tenants do worry but that's the point of block voice and fire risk assessments and hopefully tenants will be reassured by that.

Question asked by Councillor Catherine Potter to Councillor Paul Hart

During the spell of freezing weather that the district experienced earlier this month, I received several complaints from residents about the treacherous conditions underfoot and also when driving due to a lack of gritting by the Council. The places drawn to my attention were the car park at Salt Ayre leisure centre, car parks in Lancaster and the promenade in Morecambe. None of these were gritted, rendering them highly dangerous for pedestrians especially, but for drivers too.

Q.1 May I ask what is the Council's policy for making well-used public places under its ownership safe? After all, every single year, it is perfectly normal for our district to experience such freezing conditions a few times over the winter. It is not like there was two foot of snow – it was just a bit of frost.

Councillor Hart responded:

The pedestrian prom in Morecambe is managed by the public realm team and does not receive any gritting. Gritting of public spaces are not a statutory function.

Public Realm hold a winter gritting procedure, which aligns to the work within the Public Realm Agreement with Lancashire County Council.

The Public Realm in the district is vast and it is not possible, appropriate or financially viable to grit all areas in which the public access during cold weather conditions. Under the winter gritting protocol, Public Realm teams grit if temperatures have remained below zero temperature, and levels of ground frost are present for a prolonged period of time.

Prioritisation of gritting takes place on active travel routes under the Councils ownership between Morrisons and the Millenium Bridge, to ensure the link to Morecambe and Lancaster is available and accessible.

County Council, on occasions, request City Council teams to grit priority footways during prolonged spells of ground frost. These include Morecambe Town Centre, Lancaster City Centre, Ashton Road footways around the Hospital and pavements of Queen Street to Northumberland Avenue in Morecambe.

Supplementary question from Councillor Potter:

Does this council under its current leadership expect the whole district its economy, education, leisure pursuits to simply grind to a halt every time we have perfectly normal, wintry weather ?

Cllr Hart responded:

We can spend a lot more money on this but would have to perhaps decide what we will cut in order to do this. I agree with you I don't like the footways having ice on but to have the equipment and manpower available to maintain as you would wish is expensive. I can put it to cabinet and talk to chief officer.

At this point the Chief Executive provided the following clarification on gritting:

Under the current two tier system we do have a confusing situation for the public where responsibility for winter maintenance of the majority of the highway network which includes footways is the responsibility of the county council . It's a statutory responsibility for county to fulfil so questions on this are best directed to the county council.

Question from Catherine Potter to Councillor Bottoms

Q2. *I have received complaints from local businesses about the way the economic benefit to the district of events is calculated. Surely, we should not be including money spent on out-of-town stallholders in the economic impact claims as this money simply leaves the District and can I ask that a new method of collecting spend data be implemented to exclude non-local spend?*

Councillor Bottoms responded:

We don't collect any economic data. The only event in the district for which a full, independently commissioned economic impact assessment is available is Light Up Lancaster. The Council does not hold equivalent economic impact reports for other events. It is important to note that Lancaster City Council does not commission any economic impact assessments directly.

Supplementary question from Councillor Potter

I have also been told that several well-known local cafes and restaurants have decided to close during some of our most high profile events because, despite the massive footfall, they had previously found that their takings did not justify them staying open. Can I ask that for future events in Lancaster and Morecambe out-of-town stallholders are banned, thereby ensuring that all the economic benefit is to our local economy?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

I've come to this meeting from Lancaster BID. They have no evidence of cafes or restaurants closing. There is a bit of contention with elements of businesses in Lancaster at the moment so I need to be careful what I say. Bella Italia were specific and wished for a daily Light up Lancaster as they were so busy. I'll take away what you're saying but with regard to those coming in hawkers licences only central govt can amend the law that will allow us to ban those people. Sad to see as the items they sell take over 100 years to degrade.

Question from Councillor Joanne Ainscough to Councillor Sam Riches

- Q1. *How many EV charging points available for public use are there in City Council owned car parks across our district?*
- Q2. *The upcoming budget proposals include plans to apply parking fees to EV vehicles that are charging in our car parks. I am concerned that this is a needless disincentive to EV drivers who are visiting our city, and to people considering switching to EV use generally. How much additional revenue is this measure expected to bring in, and...*
- Q3. *If truly necessary, why are we applying a second fee rather than amalgamating parking fees into the cost per kW for using the charger?*

Councillor Riches responded:

This information is available on the council website. Electric vehicle charging points - Lancaster City Council. In summary, 13 publicly available EV charge points are available in council off-street commercial car parks. Since 31/12/2025 five charge points have ceased to function due to the operator (BP Pulse) withdrawing from the marketplace. These charge points are anticipated as being replaced as soon as possible.

We have a proposal for 4 dual connection charging points to come into the car park at Thurnham Street.

Car parking charges for the parking of EV vehicles have always been in place since the initial devices were installed in 2019. The only exception is that the four Blink devices installed on council car parks provide a 1-hour free parking. Charges for the electricity provided to EV vehicles via the charge point devices were introduced on 1st April 2023.

The 2026 fees and charges report highlights that the new EV charge hub at Auction Mart car park in Lancaster will have an additional "overstay" mechanism added to the terms & conditions of the EV charge points at this location.

The level of revenue likely to be generated by the overstay mechanism tariff has not been modelled but in response to this question I would estimate less than £500 per annum.

The charging of EV vehicles for parking and for electricity has been established for a number of years and no negative feedback has been received by parking services on the principal of either charge.

The overstay charging mechanism is aimed at being a small financial disincentive to users to “hog” the EV bays and thus ensuring that the EV bays are used by as many people as possible. Many charge point operators across the UK utilise overstay penalty tariffs, i.e. Tesla.

Supplementary question from Councillor Potter:

Why are we installing 22s and 7.4s ?

Councillor Riches responded:

There is an additional aspect to the Thurnham street plan. We are aiming at resident who don't have off street parking where they live . There will be a special rate available to local residents through an app or physical card. Its not just about parking for an hour but for those who live locally and wish to leave their car for a few hours or overnight, similar to a home charging unit.

Question from Councillor Robert Redfern to Councillor Martin Bottoms

Q.1 How many 'parent and child' parking spaces are currently available in council operated car parks across the district? Which car parks are these located in?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Zero (None).

Supplementary question from Councillor Redfern:

Have seen parents struggling to get prams out of cars because spaces not wide enough. Have a re-think. You could put 6 at the car park near the Grand theatre and make everyone happy please just do it.

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide parent & child car parking spaces. As a father of 6 children I appreciate the points you're making. Im not aware of other local authorities providing this but if you can provide evidence of other local authorities doing so I will look at it.

Question from Councillor Louise Belcher to Councillor Martin Bottoms

The closure of Nelson St car park has removed a number of well used designated blue badge holder car parking spaces from the city centre. Those lost spaces were the closest to the Town Hall, including the City Council Customer Service Centre, thus very important for disabled service users.

Q1. *How many blue-badge spaces were lost when Nelson St car park closed?*

Q2. *Have these lost blue-badge spaces all been replaced and..*

Q3. *In which car parks are the new blue-badge spaces?*

Councillor Bottoms responded:

As at 27/1/2026 Nelson St is still open and available to the public. The car park has eight blue badge bays. Blue badge holders are entitled to use any bays within the car park and are not limited to the extra wide lined specific blue badge bays.

The blue badge parking provision is operated on a per car park basis of 5% rather than a specific quantum of blue badge bays. When Nelson St closes all the parking bays and the blue badge bays will be removed from portfolio. Each of the other car parks in Lancaster will remain at their existing blue badge provision percentage and it is not anticipated that any extra blue badge bays are to be provided in response to the closure of Nelson St.

The new Moor Mills 4 car park that opened in December 2025 (evening, weekends & bank holidays) has six blue badges bays.

From early April when Bulk St permit only car park converts to short stay parking one blue badge bay will be provided.

As at 27/1/2026 the vicinity of Nelson St/Bulk St has an extra six blue badge bays in operation with Nelson St still trading.

Im serious about providing blue badge spaces and am currently gathering evidence and will pursue the creation of extra spaces within the town hall area.

Supplementary question from Councillor Belcher:

Im confused by your numbers; are you saying all have been replaced or will be?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

There were 8 blue badge spaces, we have lost 2 so now there are 6 but these are only available during the evening, weekend and bank holiday, not during the day so it is so essential that we get extra blue badge spaces for the day.

Question from Councillor Matthew Black to Martin Bottoms

The Castle car park, formerly Park Safe, located just off the one-way system on Damside Street is an important component of the car parking strategy. This site is in a prime location to provide city centre parking and needs to be open in order to ensure we meet our commitment to provide more than 1400 parking spaces in the city centre.

Q1. *Please remind us how long has it now been closed?*

Q2. *When will it reopen?*

Q3. *How much revenue has been lost due to this prolonged closure?*

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Castle car park closed to the public on Tuesday 6th June 2023.

The reopening of the car park is difficult to estimate due to the number of outstanding legal issues with the landlord, the quantum of concrete repairs and the procurement of the reopening works.

The landlord is proposing to repair its own staff car park and the council's car park in three phases with the council's own fourth phase taking place after the landlord has completed the repair works.

Phase 1 – DWP staff car park repairs are scheduled to commence in March 2026 for a 22-week period.

Phase 2 – Mitre House pedestrian over-path repairs. Due to commence after phase 1 has started but scheduled to complete around the same time as phase 1.

Phase 3 – The Council car park concrete repairs and electrical system reinstatement. The landlord's specialist concrete testing consultants (VCS) report is due to be released to the council by March 2026, and this report is meant to shape the level of repairs needed to resolve the concrete issues within the council's car park. The legal liability for the council to pay some or all of these costs have not been resolved. Once legal liability has been resolved the landlord will undertake the necessary repairs. The council's position is also that the landlord also bears responsibility to repair/reinstate the electrical system with these works needed to be added to the scope of works. Legal liability for the electrical works is not resolved either. Depending on the quantum of concrete repairs and repairs to the electrical system a time frame of a further 22 weeks would not be unexpected.

Phase 4 – Over and above the concrete & electrical repairs the council is required to undertake a number of other works to reopen to the public. These works are scoped from a high level but procurement, pricing and approvals have not commenced due to

the unknown factors relating to phases 1 to 3. A guestimate of a further 12 weeks to undertake the councils reopening works would not be unreasonable.

Thus, assuming legals are resolved satisfactorily, then a reopening date of around 56 weeks from Jan 2026 could be expected but significant caution should be used using this as an opening date.

The loss of revenue at the Castle car park is difficult to estimate as it is probable that most of the ex-Castle car park patronage transferred to one of the other city centre off-street car parks of which the city council operates the majority of these car parks.

Supplementary question from Councillor Matthew Black:

Closure has harmed foot fall and city centre business. If this is ever sorted will the administration commit to offering discounted parking permits to workers in the city centre to free up spaces in the other public car parks?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

There are no plans to do that at the moment but it is something that could be considered. It has been a real inconvenience having this car park closed.

Question from Councillor Claire Cozler to Councillor Martin Bottoms

Q1. *Can the cabinet member provide details of the safest routes and the time it would take to walk them for visitors parking at the Kingsway car park to walk to a) the Grand theatre, b) the Dukes theatre and c) Market Square (i.e. the centre of our retail offer)?*

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Walking speeds vary but it is anticipated that the following times may apply from Kingsway:

A) The Grand – 10 mins.

B) The Dukes – 13 mins.

C) Market Square – 14 mins.

Walking times are included in the map in the car parking strategy.

Supplementary question from Councillor Cozler:

That's a considerable amount of time and its not a viable option so are there any proposals to provide closer parking spaces?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

It is not a viable alternative. That's why we've extended the opening times on St Nics car park, have car park opposite Sainsburys and there are no plans to close Upper or Lower St Leonardsgate before 2027 at the earliest and hope to have a solution.

Question from Councillor Phillip Black to Martin Bottoms

New student accommodation blocks are currently being built between Parliament Street and Caton Road. During the fitting-out of this accommodation dozens of trades people parked their vehicles along the highway nearby on Kingsway and Caton Road. They did not park on the Council owned Kingsway carpark.

Q1. Does the cabinet member accept that this is an indicator that plans to increase the capacity of the Kingsway car park need to be reconsidered?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Some of the trades vehicles did use the Kingsway car park. Visual observations by the enforcement team plus the revenue collected at the car park indicate increased usage.

Kingsway is integral to the adopted parking strategy for the relocation of the council off-street coach park plus the provision of long stay commuter parking capacity at affordable rates.

The reason the tradespeople parked on the road is because "they could" as there are no TRO's on that part of the highway after the box junction.

Question from Councillor Phillip Black to Councillor Martin Bottoms

Q2. How much revenue will the Council lose on an annual basis following the intended closure of the St Leonards Gate car parks?

Q3. Please can the portfolio holder share with council the feedback we have had from the cultural organisations (such as theatres) and businesses in the city centre about the council's intentions to close the car parks on St Leonards Gate?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

I've been in constant dialogue with both the Grand and Dukes to make sure their needs are met and have offered them reassurance that there will be parking spaces available for them in close proximity.

Parking revenue is not a “zero sum game” and we have intentions and a planned series of interventions to create temporary spaces. The loss of revenue is likely to be not much, if any. The impact of the additional private sector spaces (Axis Re & NCP) may however have an impact, although not possible to assess at the moment.

The feedback was included in a detailed consultation report (attached with Appendix B full comments) presented to Cabinet and comments assessed and taken on board in developing the Parking Strategy.

https://modgov.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s91093/08_07_25_Lancaster_City_Centre_Car_Parking_Strategy_v1.00.pdf

Supplementary question from Councillor Phillip Black

Is the unofficial policy of this administration to sacrifice our theatres, kill off our high street businesses and undermine tourism because of an ideological opposition to owning cars and using them for private transport?

Councillor Bottoms responded:

If the Grand theatre still have a problem with the situation they need to be more honest with me. I do meet with them on a regular basis.

I'd rather leave it at that than say what I would need to say to address the other issue that has been raised about parking tonight.

Councillor Jean Parr to Councillor Martin Bottoms (in the absence of Councillor Parr the Mayor read out her question to the meeting)

- Q1. *How often were the upper and lower car parks on St Leonards Gate more than 50% full over the Xmas period 1st October to 24th December?*
- Q2. *What was the peak occupancy of the upper and lower carparks on St Leonards Gate over the Xmas period 1st October to 24th December?*
- Q3. *Can a fully breakdown of car park occupancy for all city centre car parks for the Xmas period be shared with all councillors?*

Councillor Bottoms responded:

Clarification will be sought from Councillor Parr regarding the dates. Once that has been confirmed the response to the questions will be shared with all members.