

STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKING STRATEGY**Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration****1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 Whilst the Council's overall, long term strategic ambition is to reduce car usage in Stockport town centre by encouraging more sustainable transport modes such as bus, cycling and walking, parking provision is fundamental to the successful operation and function of any town centre and is intrinsically linked to wider transport and land use planning. Parking does not solely relate to the physical provision of parking facilities for cars, but the provision of sufficient attractive and efficient car parking in Stockport Town Centre is crucial in helping ensure that Stockport successfully continues to develop its role as a key urban centre within Greater Manchester. In addition, car parking provides the Council with a major source of income, with the Council operating 30 car parks and nearly 3,000 car parking spaces within Stockport Town Centre.
- 1.2 The current car parking strategy for Stockport Town Centre was adopted in 2012, and since then, there has been a period of change in which the nature of the town centre and local road network has changed significantly as a result of ongoing investment through programmes such as Town Centre Access Plan (TCAP), and schemes such as Redrock and Stockport Exchange.
- 1.3 However, there is still a need to provide car parking in Stockport Town Centre and a review of the car parking strategy has been undertaken to ensure that the Council's approach is fit for purpose in light of the level of change in the town centre; that the approach supports longer term aspirations for the town centre; and that it takes account of future developments and demand for parking.
- 1.4 The draft strategy provides an overarching framework and a proposed way forward in line with the identified objectives. The objectives, particularly those relating to tariff structures and income generation, are intrinsically linked to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Details of proposals relating to the MTFP have been reviewed by the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.5 Following review by Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in November, informal consultation on the draft strategy has been undertaken with key stakeholders in Stockport Town Centre to seek feedback on the proposals. The draft strategy has been revised to take account of the feedback received.
- 1.6 In light of this feedback, Cabinet are recommended to review and adopt the Stockport Town Centre Car Parking Strategy.

2. STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE PARKING CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Parking Strategy for Stockport Town Centre ("the strategy") is embedded within a wider Stockport context, including:

- A strategic aim (as included in the emerging SEMMM Strategy Refresh) to increase sustainable transport modes and reduce car use, particularly for short, local journeys
- A strategic aim to attract and support commercial investment in the town centre, in a competitive environment and against the offer at locations such as the Trafford Centre and Manchester Airport.
- A strategic aim to attract residential uses in the town centre, and develop a broader leisure offer through new developments such as Redrock and Stockport Exchange. This will reduce in increased demand for access to the Town Centre at different times of day compared to traditional business/commuter uses.
- The overall objective of the TCAP to reduce congestion in and around the town centre.
- The ongoing challenge of 'overspill' on-street parking in adjacent neighbourhoods around the Town Centre
- A challenge to capitalise on opportunities to generate income whilst balancing the achievement of long term income resulting from a more vibrant town centre, with any pressure for short term rises to meet the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

3. AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

3.1 In developing the Strategy, a full appraisal has been undertaken of existing car parking provision and demand in Stockport Town Centre, and also likely future demand based on the Council's wider strategic aims and ambitions.

3.2 The Strategy aims to:

- Review existing car parking provision within the town centre, including tariffs, payment methods and signage
- Consider future needs of retail, business, leisure and residential users for town centre parking facilities, including disabled spaces, electric vehicles, and bikes.
- Consider an approach to on and off street parking and permitting within the town centre, taking account of the impact of known new developments
- In light of future needs, and the potential impact of new technologies and lifestyle choices, review tariffs, payment methods and associated facilities, including signage, electric vehicle charging etc.
- Consider and recommend a future parking policy approach for the town centre.

3.3 The Strategy puts forward an overall approach to provide a car parking offer in Stockport that will attract and retain investment in the town centre by providing access to parking which supports sustainable growth. The following four objectives have been identified:

1. Ensure an appropriate supply of car parking to meet future demands in the town centre through the provision of flexible, adaptable multi-use parking solutions that suit the requirements of a variety of users
2. Optimise the usage of existing capacity whilst minimising displacement into adjacent residential neighbourhoods

3. Improve accessibility and signage to car parking within the town centre and from key surrounding routes so as to reduce the need for unnecessary traffic circulation in the town centre
4. Optimise income generation from car parking whilst supporting the vitality and economic attractiveness of the town centre to visitors, investors and developers.

4 SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

4.1 In line with the identified objectives, and recognising that a bespoke approach is needed to reflect the specific Stockport context, the Strategy makes the following conclusions regarding the outcomes which should be achieved through delivery of the Strategy:

- A competitive and attractive car parking offer can be used to support and encourage particular activities or uses in the town centre, such as family leisure activities in the evenings. There is, therefore, **an opportunity to introduce tariff offers to support particular uses which contribute to wider economic ambitions for the town centre**, such as annual discounted parking tariffs during the busy Christmas period, and concessionary offers for users of the Redrock Cinema and Stockport Plaza.
- Investment aspirations for Stockport Town Centre will create significant pressure on car parking capacity, not only through increased demand for car parking, but also reduced supply as existing surface car parks are under pressure for development. If development ambitions for the town centre are delivered, there will be a shortfall of car parking spaces in the short term, particularly in the south east of the town centre. There is, therefore, **a need to develop additional spaces but in key locations, which take account of future growth aspirations and differing parking requirements**, particularly as residential and leisure uses in the town centre increase.
- The quality of existing car parking provision is variable and **some facilities need to be improved to ensure that the overall offer is consistent**.
- There is a need to **improve access and signage to car parks** from all routes to improve accessibility, and this needs to complement wider ambitions for the town centre
- There is a need to **minimise displacement and overspill on-street parking into adjacent neighbourhoods** which may result through any changes to tariffs or provision.
- There is a need to review current permitting arrangements for residents in the town centre to ensure that the approach is working effectively.
- There is no empirical evidence that free parking offers automatically lead to more successful local economies. As part of the Council's MTFP, there is a need to **generate additional income but this needs to be balanced against impeding long term income growth associated with the increased vitality of the town centre**.

- Finally, there is a need to continue to review pricing strategies so that the Council can continue to balance the various needs of the town centre.

5 FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Following review of the draft strategy by Scrutiny in November, further work has been undertaken to engage fully with local members via Central Area Committee to explore in more detail any parking issues experienced by local residents and to review these in light of the recommendations made in the Strategy. Views have also been sought from Housing Associations operating in the town centre. In addition, dialogue and engagement has been undertaken with retailers, businesses and stakeholder groups in the Town Centre to get feedback on the recommendations, including the Town Centre Management Board, Town Centre Business and Retail Forum, and the Business Improvement District. Feedback received includes:

- A view that the draft strategy should be more explicit regarding the Council's overall aspiration to reduce the number of cars by encouraging increasing use of public transport and walking and cycling.
- Overall support for ambitions in the strategy to increase provision of electric vehicle charging points
- A comment that opportunities for increasing the number of disabled spaces and electric vehicle charging points are not mutually exclusive
- A comment that the strategy needed to be more explicit about the fact that space in the town centre is finite and consideration should be given to whether space for car parking could be used for other land uses (such as greenspace and play areas).
- A comment that consideration should be given to opportunities to generate income for Airport parking, but also a number of comments that this is not a good use of space in Stockport town centre and should be avoided.
- A view that the draft strategy should consider how the Council can support major employers in the town centre to encourage their employees to travel by public transport and more sustainable modes of travel, including Car Clubs.
- A comment expressing concern that increasing the minimum visit time in Council car parks will deter people from visiting the town centre for short (i.e. less than 1 hour) visits.
- A view that the strategy should promote high quality design for any new parking facilities and that consideration should be given to integrating them within new greenspace and public realm planting. It was emphasised that car parking facilities should add rather than detract from the quality of environment in the town centre.
- A view that reviews of tariffs should be undertaken more frequently than an annual basis to ensure that any negative impacts can be addressed quickly
- A view that the draft strategy needed to be clearer about whether it is exclusively a car parking strategy or whether it covers parking for all modes (including bikes etc.)
- A request that the revised strategy be re-submitted to Central Area Committee for review before adoption.

- Following comments from Scrutiny in November, it is also proposed that work be undertaken to review the current car parking strategy for the district centres.

As a result of the feedback received the following amendments have been made to the draft strategy:

- Additional references added to sections 1.1 and 1.2 regarding the Council's overall ambition to encourage more sustainable transport modes.
- Additional references added to section 1.1 clarifying that parking does not solely relate to the provision of facilities for cars and that this car parking strategy does not sit in isolation but is part of a wider package of transport related-strategies.
- Additional reference added to section 1.2 regarding the importance of having an approach which can respond to expected future increases in demand for electric vehicle charging.
- Additional reference added to section 1.2 stressing that land in the town centre is finite and any new allocation of land for car parking needs to be balanced against other demands for space.
- Additional reference added to section 2.1.1 and additional recommendation added to section 4.3.3 to highlight the opportunity for the Council to work with major employers to encourage modal shift amongst staff working in the town centre.
- Additional reference added to sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 to highlight need to ensure that high quality design is considered for any new multi-storey facilities.
- Additional reference added to section 4.3.2 regarding disabled bays and electric vehicle charging bays
- Additional reference added to recommendations in section 4.5 highlighting need to regularly monitor impacts of tariffs in addition to formal reviews on an annual basis.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 In light of the feedback received from stakeholders and the resulting revisions made to the strategy, Cabinet are recommended to:

- Note the feedback received from stakeholders and the changes made to the draft strategy as a result
- Endorse the adoption of the revised strategy
- Consider the proposals identified by Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny to undertake a similar review of current parking policy for the district centres.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Sue Stevenson on Tel: 0161-474-4351 or by email on sue.stevenson@stockport.gov.uk