



North Hertfordshire District Council Parking Strategy Review

Phase 1 report

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Report: R01

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) have commissioned Markides Associates (supported by Civix) to review its current Parking Strategy (2009–2019), adopted in 2009 and revised in 2012. The Strategy seeks to provide and manage car parking in the district over a 10-year period.

This report covers Phase 1 of the study, the purpose of which is to review and provide advice on parking tariffs to inform the Council's budget setting process for 2017/18. The report presents a range of car parking survey and attitudinal data has been analysed to present the baseline situation. An assessment of tariff setting options is discussed for four towns (Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston) and the larger settlement of Knebworth individually and collectively.

BALDOCK

The town centre is performing well (low vacancy rates) and has benefited from a major town centre enhancement scheme in 2008. It has a stronger evening economy than Letchworth or Royston.

There is one small NHDC car park (The Twitchell - 35 spaces) which is mainly used for long-stay visits. It is generally full during the weekday but is little used on Saturdays. The Tesco car park (690 spaces) is free and unrestricted and has substantial spare capacity. Utilisation of the NHDC car park appears to be sensitive to price changes, presumably due to the availability of alternative free parking at Tesco.

There is limited waiting on-street parking for around 250 cars (including bays shared with permit holders). This parking was observed to be fully occupied on weekdays and Saturdays.

Off-street parking charges are lower than in the larger centres in Hertfordshire and adjacent counties. The limited short-stay off-street parking tends to be more expensive than in comparable smaller centres, although there is considerable free on-street visitor parking. Long-stay parking is cheaper than in comparable centres.

Interview survey respondents were evenly split on whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied overall with parking in the town centre. The majority of those responding thought there was enough short-stay parking but a majority thought there was not enough long-stay parking.

This report does not propose any increase or decrease to parking tariffs in 2017/18. Adjustments in line with inflation should be considered in subsequent years.

Substantial growth in population and employment is planned for the town. Phase 2 of the study will address current issues with commuter parking, and a parking strategy to cater for future growth.

HITCHIN

The town centre is performing well, with low vacancy rates. Hitchin has the strongest evening economy of the NHDC towns.

There are 16 car parks in Hitchin with a total off-street parking capacity of 1,850 parking spaces. 12 of these car parks are operated by NHDC. Six are for short-stay use (418 spaces) and six are for short and long-stay (844 spaces). The four privately operated car parks have a total of 588 spaces. Three are short-stay/customer only and one (42 spaces) can also be used for long-stay. On-street parking within the town centre is limited.

There is high demand for short-stay parking in the town centre with the most central car parks operating at or near capacity during busy shopping periods. There is also high demand for the popular car parks in the evening and at the weekend. The sales data shows that the number of short-stay visits in Hitchin has not been elastic to price changes in the past, but that there has been a shift to shorter price bands over the last two years.

The long-stay car parks, especially the Lairage multi-storey, are less well-utilised and much of the use is short-stay visits.

The charges for short-stay parking in the NHDC car parks are generally comparable to those in comparable/competing centres in Hertfordshire and adjacent counties. Long-stay parking, however, tends to be cheaper in Hitchin. Due to the way tariffs are structured, medium stay parking (say for four hours) can be more expensive in Hitchin than in comparable centres.

There is considerable variation in utilisation rates between car parks, and this report proposes tariff changes for 2017/18 to enhance the efficiency with which car parks are used.

KNEBORTH

Knebworth's shopping facilities are generally in good health, with no reported vacancies in shop premises in 2015. It has 39 shops and two food and beverage establishments. There are also several pubs just beyond the village centres boundaries.

There is one short-stay public car park in Knebworth (maximum stay four hours). This is operated by NHDC and has 30 spaces. Average usage of the car park is in the range of 50-100 short-stay visits per day. There is controlled on-street parking providing approximately 120 spaces in the main retail area, with a maximum stay of one hour.

This report does not propose any increase or decrease to parking tariffs in 2017/18. Adjustments in line with inflation should be considered in subsequent years.

Commuter parking is a very contentious issue in Knebworth, and Phase 2 of the study will address potential strategies to manage increasing commuter parking demand.

LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

Letchworth town centre is under-performing, with high vacancy rates (the highest of the North Hertfordshire towns). The town has a lower proportion of evening economy uses than either Baldock or Hitchin, although it does have the cinema/theatre. A significant increase in retail floorspace in the centre is projected up to 2031 as part of the NHDC Local Plan Proposed Submission Draft. Significant growth in population is also planned for the town, while projected growth in employment up to 2031 is only around 5%.

There are ten car parks in Letchworth, with a total off-street parking capacity of 1,496 spaces. Five of these car parks are operated by NHDC. Three are for short-stay use (182 spaces) and one is for short-stay and long-stay (71 spaces). The Garden Square multi-storey car park provides 114 spaces for short-stay and 244 for long-stay. The five privately operated car parks (which include the two station car parks) have a total of 885 spaces. Three are short-stay and one (42 spaces) can also be used for long-stay. The station car parks provide for short and long-stay parking while the other three (794 spaces) are short-stay.

The overall occupancy level of short-stay car parks was observed to peak at around 60% on the weekday and 45% on the Saturday. The corresponding occupancy levels for the long-stay parking were 65% and 20% (noting that this includes a significant element of short-stay visits in long-stay car parks).

The cost of short-stay parking is lower in Letchworth than in Hitchin and in the larger competing centres. Short-stay parking charges in the NHDC car parks are higher than in Bishop's Stortford, which also offers half an hour free car parking. However, charges in the private car parks are considerably lower than Bishop's Stortford. Charges for long-stay parking are generally comparable to other centres.

On-street parking with a maximum stay of one hour is provided along the main shopping streets. In previous surveys this has been observed to be fully utilised.

There is considerable spare capacity in Letchworth overall. There would be a case for increasing the cost of parking in the most popular car parks to encourage greater use of the Garden Square multi-storey. Yet, while NHDC controls the majority of parking that is available for long-stay use, it is the minority supplier for short-stay parking and cannot implement this strategy unilaterally.

ROYSTON

The retail vacancy rate in Royston town centre is high, indicating that the centre may be underperforming. The town has a lower proportion of evening economy uses than either Baldock or Hitchin. The NHDC Local Plan Proposed Submission Draft proposes a significant increase in retail floorspace in the centre up to 2031. Significant growth in housing and population is also planned for the town, while it is also expected to receive around a third of the planned growth in employment in the district.

There are seven public car parks in Royston, all operated by NHDC and with a total capacity of 507 spaces. Five are short-stay car parks with a total capacity of 161 spaces. The two long-stay car parks have a total capacity of 346 spaces. There is on-street parking along High Street, which allows free parking for a maximum of 20 minutes, as well as on-street parking on Fish Hill which allows free parking for a maximum of 1 hour.

While 40% of town centre users interviewed were satisfied overall with parking facilities in the town centre, a similar proportion (37%) expressed dissatisfaction. Only a small proportion of users who expressed a view considered that there was enough short-stay or long-stay parking (21% and 33% respectively).

In practice, however, parking utilisation rates range from full occupancy around the market place for much of the day to only half-full in the long-stay car parks. The on-street and off-street parking spaces around Market Hill and Fish Hill are operating at capacity during the week, both in the morning and after 3pm when the 'free after three' policy is in operation. The short-stay car parks in Princes Mews are less popular, with an occupancy level peaking at around 60% on weekdays.

Occupancy in the two long-stay car parks is just over 50% during the week, although the spare capacity in the Warren is used on market days to compensate for the loss of the Market Place and Angel Pavement car parks.

This report proposes measures to enhance short-stay turnover in the popular car parks around the market and balance demand between the car parks.

SUMMARY OF TARIFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 – Maintain tariff bands at the current level in Baldock and Knebworth in the short-term

There is no case for tariff changes in 2017/18 in Baldock and Knebworth. Increases in line with inflation may be considered in subsequent years.

Recommendation 2 – Improve car park utilisation by increasing the differential between more and less popular car parks within Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston

In order to manage demand between the car parks in Hitchin, all price bands in the more popular short-stay car parks should be increased to create a greater price differential to the less well-utilised car parks.

The same principle can be applied in Royston where there is a stark difference between the three most popular car parks around the market place and the remaining short and long-stay facilities.

The same principle is valid in Letchworth Garden City, although the total car park utilisation in the town is lower. In the short-term NHDC may only achieve these aims through coordination with external parties because the most popular car parks are not within NHDC control.

Recommendation 3 – Offer off-peak incentives for users to stay for longer in Hitchin town centre

While the performance of Hitchin town centre remains strong, a reduction in parking duration of short-stay users has been observed. Incentives should be offered at less busy times to encourage town centre users to spend more than one hour in the town centre. The Lairage remains under-utilised and it is proposed that a £1 for two hours and £2 for four hours tariff structure is used to attract medium stay demand into the multi-storey. There is also spare capacity in the short-stay car parks in the afternoon, and it is therefore recommended that a 'cheaper after three' offer is introduced with up to three hours for the price of one to encourage visitors to spend longer in the town centre.

Recommendation 4 – Encourage a higher turnover in the most popular short-stay car parks in Royston

The three car parks around the market place are very popular and are operating at capacity for much of the day. Before considering a price increase to manage demand, space for short-stay parking can be freed up by introducing a maximum stay of three hours. Likewise, if the 'free after 3' policy is taken forward, it should also be applied with a maximum stay of one hour in short-stay car parks. Furthermore, a discounted two-hour parking tariff in the Town Hall car park can be used to draw visitors staying longer to this side of the town centre.

Recommendation 5 – Introduce a trial of Sunday parking charges in all car parks in Hitchin town centre

The popular town centre car parks in Hitchin are operating at or near capacity on Sundays, and benchmarking shows that competing town centres charge for parking on Sundays. A flat charge could therefore be introduced on Sunday. Phase 2 of the study will examine the practical considerations about trialling the Sunday charge, the operational consequences in terms of staffing and enforcement, as well as the mitigation measures on surrounding streets. The trial should be monitored closely to ensure that any displacement to local residential streets can be managed.

Recommendation 6 – Investigate a trial of evening parking charges in Biggin Lane in Hitchin and the Town Hall car park in Letchworth

Hitchin and Letchworth both have car parks that are operating at or above capacity in the evening due to their location. The Town Hall car park in Letchworth is popular in the evening due its proximity to restaurants and the theatre, while in Hitchin the Biggin Lane car park is located nearest to the area with the most restaurants.

In order to better manage demand in these car parks, it is proposed that consideration be given to extend the charging at Biggin Lane in Hitchin and the Town Hall car park in Letchworth on a trial basis from 1800 to 2000. Phase 2 of the study will examine the practical considerations about trialling selective evening charges, the operational consequences in terms of staffing and enforcement, as well as the mitigation measures on surrounding streets. It is recommended that the trials are evaluated to assess user behaviour, and any displacement effects.

PROPOSED HITCHIN TARIFFS 2017/18 (£)

Car parks	Time period	1hr	2hr	3hr	4hr	>3hr	>4hr
Short-stay (St Mary's Square, Portmill Lane East and West, Biggin Lane, Christchurch)	Weekday before 3pm	1.20	2.20	3.50	5.00	-	-
	Weekday 3-6pm	1.20	1.20	1.20	-	-	-
	Saturday	1.20	2.20	3.50	5.00	-	-
Lairage multi-storey	Weekday before 3pm	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	-	4.20
	Weekday 3-6pm	1.00	1.00	1.20	-	-	-
	Saturday	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	-	4.20
Long-stay (Bancroft East & West, Woodside)	Weekday before 3pm	1.00	2.00	2.50	-	4.70	-
	Weekday 3-6pm	1.00	1.20	1.20	-	-	-
	Saturday	1.00	2.00	2.50	-	4.70	-

PROPOSED ROYSTON TARIFFS 2017/18 (£)

Car parks	Time period	1hr	2hr	3hr	>3hr
Angel Pavement / Market Place / Priory Gardens	Weekday / Saturday before 3pm	0.50	1.20	3.50	-
	Weekday / Saturday 3-6pm	0.50	1.20	1.20	-
Princes Mews East and West	Weekday / Saturday before 3pm	0.50	1.20	4.70	7.00
	Weekday / Saturday 3-6pm	0.50	1.20	1.20	-
The Warren	Weekday / Saturday before 3pm	0.50	1.00	1.70	3.60
	Weekday / Saturday 3-6pm	0.50	1.00	1.20	-
Town Hall	Weekday / Saturday before 3pm	0.50	0.50	1.00	3.20
	Weekday / Saturday 3-6pm	0.50	0.50	1.00	-