

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 SEPTEMBER 2025

TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE ON PAY ON EXIT PARKING IN COUNCIL OPERATED CAR PARKS.

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH: *DIRECTOR - PLACE*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *CLLR DONNA WRIGHT: EXEC MEMBER FOR PLACE*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES/ SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide the Committee with an update on the status of the Pay on Exit Parking Project and to provide a comparison between 2025/26 Quarter 1 and 2024/25 Quarter 1 parking transaction figures and the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued per car park.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the Quarter 1 update of the Pay on Exit Parking Project.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This report is following the request of the Committee for an update on the Pay on Exit Parking Project and to provide a comparison between 2025/26 Quarter 1 and 2024/25 Quarter 1 parking transaction figures and the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued per car park.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Place is kept updated and briefed on the status and any issues regarding the Pay on Exit Parking project.
- 5.2 Shadow executives are invited to attend quarterly briefings on Planning & Transport matters which has included updates on the status of the Pay on Exit Parking project. A PowerPoint presentation is circulated after the meeting for dissemination to the Groups. In addition, two MIS notes have been published informing all Members on the status of the project (dated 14 February and 17 April 2025).

- 5.3 External organisations including the BID Managers for Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston and Royston Town Council have been kept informed, and officers have met with the various organisations regarding any concerns raised over the usage of the new parking machines.
- 5.4 Two press releases were issued in February and in May informing people about the new machines and in Outlook Magazine published in December 2024, including the recent 2025 summer edition.
- 5.5 There is a [‘Pay for parking at the payment machines’](#) guide on the Council’s website together with a number of FAQs to help assist our customers. The FAQs are reviewed and updated as new issues/queries arise.
- 5.6 The Communications Team also review and address any queries through our social media channels. In some cases, we have had to engage with more active social media groups such as in Royston which have been raising the profile of the parking issues in this area notably beyond others in the District, where we have needed to address some misunderstandings and encouraged residents to rather contact the Council with concerns and queries.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The Council commissioned Flowbird UK (now Arrive) in mid-2024 to replace the parking machines across all its car parks within Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Knebworth.
- 7.2 The installation of the new machines was completed by mid to end March in all the Town Centre Car Parks except for the Norton Common and Hitchin Swim Centre Car Parks. Installation of new machines in these latter car parks is delayed due to the requirement to update the necessary off-street traffic regulation orders. Work has commenced on the review of the relevant Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) with the intention for these new machines to be installed later in the year. The revised TRO for Norton Common has recently been completed and came into force from mid-July.
- 7.3 Signage informing people how to pay and reminder signs were also installed across all car parks alongside the installation programme of the new machines.
- 7.4 The new payment machines, are equipped with full-colour touch screens and support various contactless payment options, including Apple Pay and Google Pay.
- 7.5 Visitors can either prepay for their parking session by cash or card or make use of the 'Check In' and 'Check Out' functionality, which allows users to pay only for the actual time parked up to the maximum stay of the car park, thereby eliminating the need to predict parking duration. One of the new machines within each car park, with the exception of Woodside in Hitchin, provides a cash payment option. Woodside is the only Council car park that doesn’t take cash due to previous issues with vandalism and has taken only contactless payments over the last few years.

- 7.6 The system introduces a ticketless system, which eliminates the need for paper tickets and the requirement for users to return to their vehicle to display a ticket, thereby enabling visitors to continue with their journey into the town centre. Receipts are available on request for card payments.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Issues, Steps Taken and Remaining Actions:

- 8.1 As with any new technology we have been experiencing minor issues with some of the new machines which have had an impact on our customers in making payment resulting in a number of calls and negative feedback.

- 8.2 These have included:

- *Searching for network connections* - which can cause the machine to go offline for a few minutes. This can impact on visitors wishing to make payment or complete their 'Check Out' session. The network connections have been improved in most car parks with the roll out of replacement high quality industrial sim cards in each machine and should be completed in the next 2 weeks. The contractors will be undertaking post-implementation signal testing of the machines to address any further outstanding issues.
- *Delay in payments made being registered on the Civil Enforcement Officers handheld device* - resulting in some Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) being issued for non-payment. This software issue has been resolved and the challenges raised by the public have been addressed.
- *Other ways to pay when a machine is off-line or out of order* – consideration is also been given to the possibility of zoning our busier car parks that are adjacent to each other allowing people to use an alternative machine in the case of a machine going off-line or in the case of peak usage, for example zoning:
 - The Portmill Lane East and West Car parks in Hitchin
 - Angel Pavement and Market Place Car Parks in Royston.

In the larger car parks where there is more than one machine, people can make payment at either machine. Alternatively, visitors can 'PayByPhone' and use the accompanying app if they don't want to use the machines or in the case of when a machine is offline.

- *Difficulty in reading the screens in bright sunlight* - the screens are regularly cleaned by our Civil Enforcement Officers to ensure all finger and other marks are removed which can make the screens difficult to read.
- *Confusion between pre-pay and post payment (Check In/Check Out) options* - Whilst payments are being made successfully, there is confusion amongst some visitors between pre-pay and post payment in the case of customers attempting to check out when they have pre-paid. Officers are reviewing the signage in order to address this confusion and have recently reviewed and replaced the signage

in the Hitchin town centre car parks as a trial which will be assessed over August and September to see if this helps reduce the number of calls and complaints being received by the Council's back office.

- *Confusion between blue badge and Season Ticket holders having to register for a parking session* – signage is being installed adjacent to disable bays in the car parks informing blue badge holders that they do not need to register for a parking session and across all the long stay car parks informing season ticket holders that they do not need to register for a parking session. This task will be completed within the next 4 to 6 weeks.

- 8.3 It is to be noted that any customers requiring assistance can speak to our Civil Enforcement Officers when present in the car parks, or they can call the Council using the Parking Services number on our tariff boards (01462 474631) and the Council's Customer Service Centre (01462 474000). As mentioned in paragraph 5.5 above, the Council has a dedicated webpage on its website for the new machines together with a FAQs which seek to address the concerns raised by our customers.

Ticket Sales and Penalty Charge Notices

- 8.4 O&S committee have requested a breakdown of the following key data points by locality and comparison for April to June 2025 versus the same period last year since the installation of the new machines:
- Ticket sales
 - PCNs issued
 - PCNs subsequently cancelled/rescinded
- 8.5 The tables below provide the information requested for all off-street car parks operated by the Council where people pay for parking for the current 2025/26 Quarter 1 financial period compared to same period for Quarter 1 in 2024/25.

Table 1: Total Number of Ticket Sales by Locality:

Off-Street Car Parks Pay for Parking by Town	Q1 2024/25 Total Number of Ticket sales/transactions April to June 2024	Q1 2025/26 Total Number of Ticket sales/transactions April to June 2025	Q1 2025/26 % Increase on previous year
Baldock	1,820	2,142	18%
Hitchin	172,608	174,006	1%
Knebworth	3,649	3,063	-16%
Letchworth Garden City	46,251	52,138	13%
Royston	57,021	67,542	18%
Total all car parks	281,349	298,891	6%

- 8.5.1 *It is noted the figures in Table 1 include all off-street car parks where people pay for parking and all forms of payment options, i.e. those at the machines and PayByPhone.*

Table 2: Total Number of PCNs issued by Locality for All Contraventions

Off-Street Car Parks Pay for Parking by Town	Q1 2024/25 Total Number of PCNs Issued April to June 2024	Q1 2025/26 Total Number of PCNs issued April to June 2025	Q1 2025/26 % Increase on previous year
Baldock	12	31	158%
Hitchin	1042	1656	59%
Knebworth	11	15	36%
Letchworth Garden City	270	519	92%
Royston	250	332	33%
Total all car parks	1585	2553	61%

Table 3: Total Number of PCNs Challenged and Rescinded for All Contraventions

Off-Street Car Parks All PCN Contraventions	Q1 2024/25 Total Number of PCNs Issued April to June 2024	Q1 2025/26 Total Number of PCNs issued April to June 2025
Number of PCNs issued	1585	2553
Number of PCNs Challenged	502	1114
Percentage of PCNs Challenged	32%	44%
Number of PCNs challenges responded to	502	1035
Number of PCNs challenges resulting in cancellation	332	806
Percentage of challenges responded to that have been cancelled/rescinded	66%	78%

8.5.2 It is noted the PCN figures in Tables 2 and 3 include all types of contraventions that are legally enforced within the off-street car parks, this includes:

- Parked without payment,
- Parked after expiry of paid for time,
- Parked in electric vehicle charging place without charging
- Parked for longer than permitted
- Parked in restricted area of car park
- Not parked correctly within markings of bay
- Parked in disabled space without a valid blue badge
- Parked in car park or area not designated for class of vehicle
- Parked in a car park when closed

8.5.3 The 'parked without payment' contraventions include not displaying a pay and display ticket; and parked without payment of a parking charge. Customers who have either failed to pay or have made an error in their payment at a machine or on PayByPhone, are included in these contraventions.

- 8.6 It is to be noted that visitors are using the machines and making payments successfully. The number of ticket sales/transactions made at the machines since the new machines were installed for 2025/26 Q1 compared to Q1 for 2024/25 for the same period has increased overall by 6% (See Table 1 above). But caution is expressed when looking at only a few months of data. As the weather, special events, economic climate etc, can impact customer behaviour and number of visitors to our town centres which could impact on the number of transactions made per locality.
- 8.7 It is to be noted that the figures quoted in Tables 2 and 3 above include all types of contravention codes in car parks (see note at para 8.5.2 above). As indicated in Table 2, the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued has increased in Q1 2025/26 by 61% compared to the same period last year. This increase is mostly due to the introduction of the new form of payment methods at the new machines and the requirement for people to enter their Vehicle Registration Mark (VRM) number correctly. By not entering this correctly, means their VRM is not registered on the CEO handheld and a PCN is issued for 'parked without payment of the parking charge' (see explanation at para 8.5.3 above).
- 8.8 It is also to be noted that at Q1 in 2025/26 the Parking Enforcement Service had a full complement of CEOs staff compared to Q1 in 2024/25, where the team were down by 4 officers. This means the general coverage of both on and off street parking restrictions has increased, – but the ratio of PCNs issued between on and off street has remained similar – i.e.: 59% for on-street PCNs issued vs 41% for PCNs issued in off-street car parks in Q1 2024/25 compared to 56% on-street PCNs issued vs 44% off-street car park PCNs issued in Q1 2025/26.
- 8.9 This increase in PCNs has resulted in an increase in the total number of PCN challenges received against notices issued for Q1 2025/26. i.e. 44% compared to 32% in Q1 2024/25 as indicated in Table 3. Table 3 also shows the percentage number of challenges that have been cancelled/rescinded, the percentage increase in 2025/26 Q1 i.e. 78% compared to 66% in Q1 2024/25 is mostly attributed to people not entering their VRM number correctly where the Council has taken a more lenient approach on the first occasion that a customer makes such an error and has rescinded the PCN.
- 8.10 It is noted that the number of PCNs being issued since April to July 2025 against the 'parked without payment of a parking charge' contravention code is reducing, i.e. by 26% over the last 4 months, this means people are getting used to the form of payment and making less errors when entering their VRM number and should result in less challenges being made. It is assumed that this trend will continue and will bring the figures back in line by the end of the financial year as people become more familiar with the machines when registering their parking session.
- 8.11 There is an outstanding matter regarding the requirement for visitors to enter a VRM number for the separate post '3pm free' subsidised parking session in the Royston car parks and how this can be adequately enforced, which may require the need for issuing a voucher and at the time of writing this report is currently under investigation. This data is required as part of the agreement between the Council and the Royston Town Council and RoystonFirst Bid in subsidising the Free after 3pm scheme. At present we are reminding visitors by way of notice on their windscreens to register their VRM number when parked after 3pm in the Royston car parks. PCNs are not presently being issued for any failure to comply with this request.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications from this report which is an update to the Committee.

However, section 14.6.10(b) of the Council Constitution provides delegation to the Service Director, Place to exercise the following functions powers and duties except those reserved to Council, Cabinet or a Committee in relation to:

“(ii) Car Parking including enforcement of on and off-street parking orders including residential parking zones”.

- 9.2 Further, pursuant to the Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny committee found in section 6 of the constitution and in particular paragraph (s), the committee can:

‘...review performance against the Council’s agreed objectives / priorities and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or service areas. To consider risk to the achievement of those objectives/ priorities. To make recommendations to Cabinet’

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A capital budget of £300 000 has been set aside for the implementation of the Pay on Exit Parking project. This budget will cover the full installation and set up costs associated with the new machines, the associated signage, replacement of the tariff boards and associated lighting across all car parks. This Budget is profiled over 2 years 2024/25 and 2025/26. The Project is anticipated to be completed by March 2026.

- 10.2 The ongoing maintenance of the new machines will be funded through an existing revenue budget which covered the old machines and will be rolled forward as part of the new contract.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 Pay on Exit Parking is listed as a Corporate Risk relating to a key project in the Council Delivery Plan. The main risks are around failing to bring the separate project elements together, negative public reaction to the changes in payment options and disruption during works on site, and potential impact on income with technology issues during the bedding in period. These risks are reviewed and updated each quarter, to feed into quarterly Council Delivery Plan monitoring reports.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment,

victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 12.2. While there are no equalities implications associated with this report, an equalities assessment was undertaken as part of the initial project proposal, this considered the different payment options , particularly around retaining the cash payment option, which would be monitored for a 12-month period following the implementation of the new machines together with additional payment options to determine if there is a downward trend in cash payments. The outcome of this monitoring will be reported initially to the Executive Member for consideration of next steps.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report, although an Environmental Impact Assessment was taken into consideration as part of letting the initial contract for the replacement and installation of the new parking machines.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 As with any new project there has been some impact on existing staff resources both within the Parking Enforcement Team and the Management Support Unit Parking Services Team in responding to public queries, processing the increased number of PCNs issued and addressing the increased number of PCN challenges. These issues are being addressed through senior management, and it is anticipated that the impact will reduce as the public become more familiar with the new machines.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 None

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Report Authors:

- 17.1 Nigel Smith, Service Director - Place
01462 474847 nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.2 Louise Symes, Strategic Infrastructure & Projects Manager
01462 474359 louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk

Contributors:

- 17.3 Adriana Garcia, Team Leader MSU (Parking) 01462 474329 adriana.garcia@north-herts.gov.uk

- 17.4 Amanda Machin, Team Leader Parking Enforcement 07899 745738
amanda.machin@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.5 Shah Mohammed, Group Accountant, Ext 4240 shah.mohammed@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.6 Natasha Jindal, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Legal Services, Ext 4430
natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.7 Tim Everitt, Performance and Risk Officer, Ext 4646 tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.8 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Community Engagement Manager, Ext 4212
reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.9 Jo Keshishian Human Resources Operations Manager, Ext 4414 jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 The following background papers relating to the implementation of the Pay on Exit project are available on request:
- Cabinet Report 16th March 2021
 - Car Park Payment Options Feasibility Study July 2022
 - Political liaison Board Report 1st November 2022
 - Political liaison Board Report 7th February 2023
 - Record of Decision Made under Delegated Authority dated 15 April 2024 to award Flowbird UK Ltd the contract for the replacement of payment parking machines and associated back-office software across all Council operated car parks.