

Hitchin Town Centre

Churchgate Car Parking Assessment Findings



20th November 2025

Markides Associates are an independent transport planning consultancy, with many years of experience in transport projects including parking.

Our previous involvement with parking in Hitchin was as part of the District-wide parking review in 2017/2018, which gave us a good knowledge of the town.

What have we done for this study?

- We commissioned **detailed parking surveys** using cameras that recorded vehicles using the car parks in Hitchin on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday between 25th and 28th September– we also surveyed on-street parking in the core town centre.
- We also carried out **two other ‘snapshot’ survey visits** on Friday 7th November and Saturday 4th October to check conditions, confirm the total parking supply by type of bay, and provide another set of data. There was a high level of consistency between the demand recorded in both the ‘snapshot’ and detailed surveys.
- We reviewed the **consultation responses to the Churchgate project**, which gave us information on why respondents visited the town centre, where they came from and how they travelled there.
- We used the **North Herts Council (NHC) Retail Study** with the above information to estimate the overall spend by shoppers by mode of travel.
- **We have engaged with the project team and NHC parking and transport teams**, who also provided us with parking ticket data from 2018 to 2024.

Top reasons people travel to Hitchin town centre

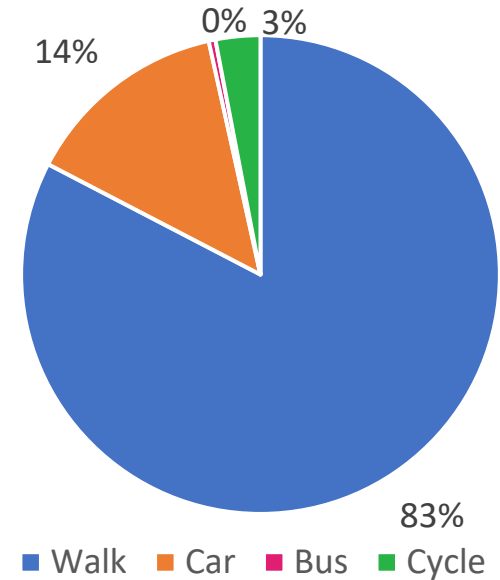
Activity	% of all visitors (multiple activities possible)
Non-food shopping	54.1
Food shopping	24.6
Window shopping/browse	20.0
Café/pub/restaurant	57.1
Visiting family/friends	11.9

Source: North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study

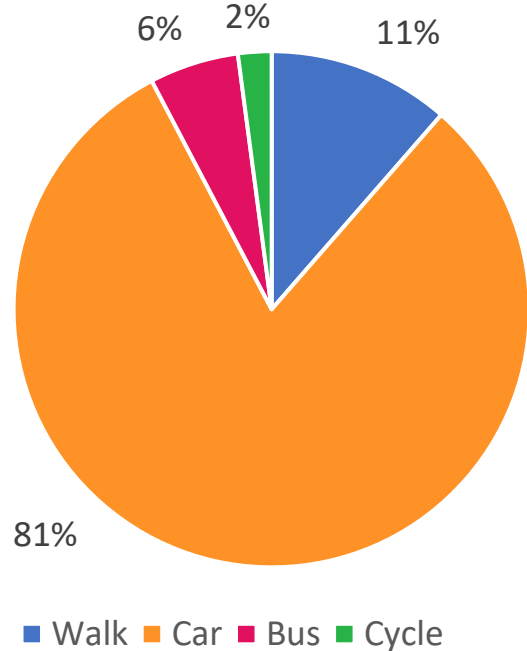
KEY POINTS :

- Hitchin has a particular town centre offer in which café/pub/restaurants and food shopping play a big part.
- Approximately 14% of Hitchin residents shop by car, 83% walk in, but 81% of visitors from outside of Hitchin drive.

Mode of Choice For Hitchin Residents



Mode of Choice for Outside of Hitchin



Source: Consultation responses to Churchgate regeneration –

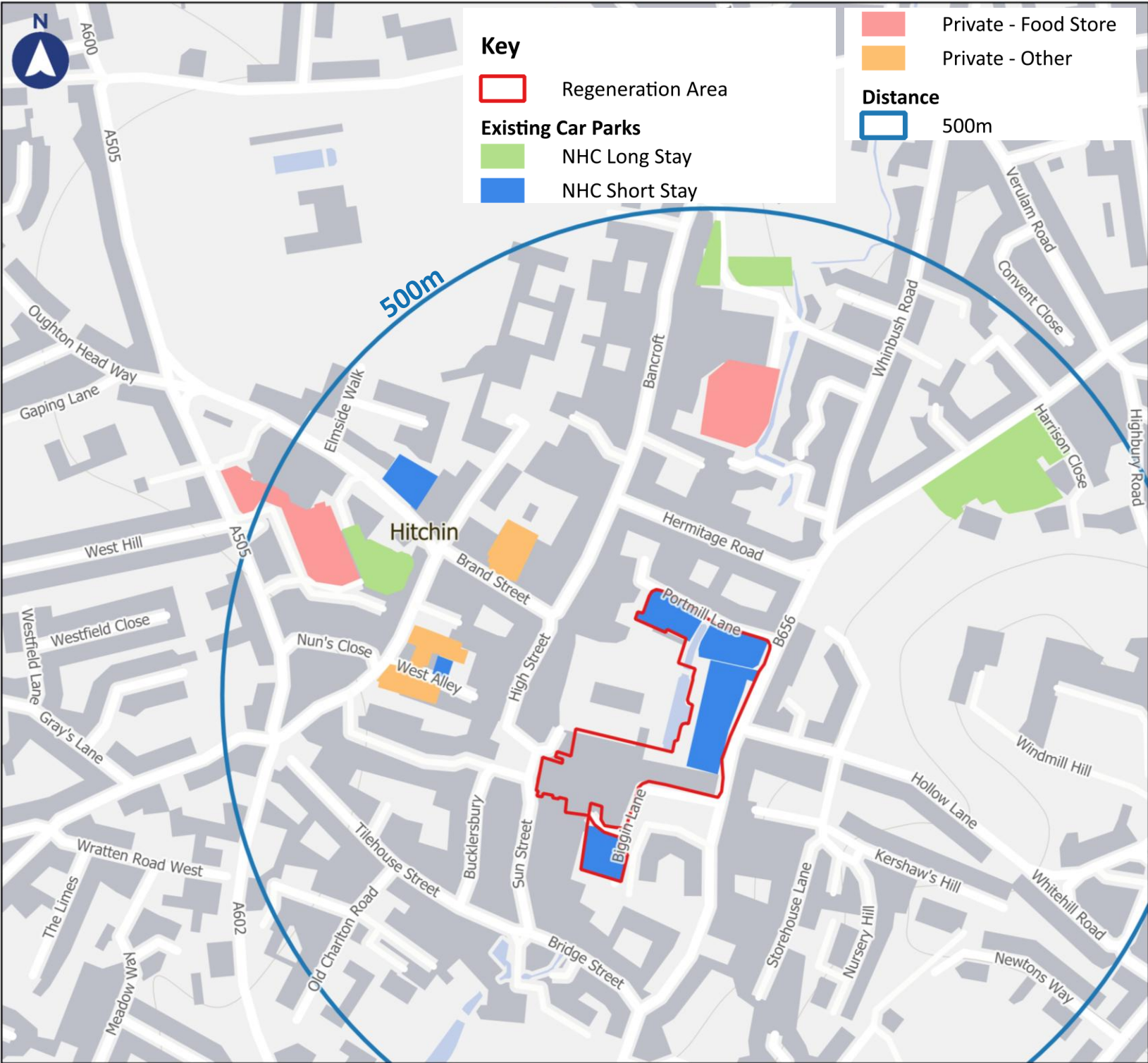
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Parking Supply

Parking beat survey results show that all on-street spaces are almost fully occupied by very short-stay parking. There is little opportunity to increase this supply.

EXISTING OFF-STREET SUPPLY

Type	Total Standard	Disabled Spaces	Electric Vehicles	Total
NHC - Long Stay	580	18	18	616
NHC - Short Stay	367	24	0	391
Private – Food Store	372	17	4	417
Private - Other	153	5	0	158
Total	1472	64	22	1582

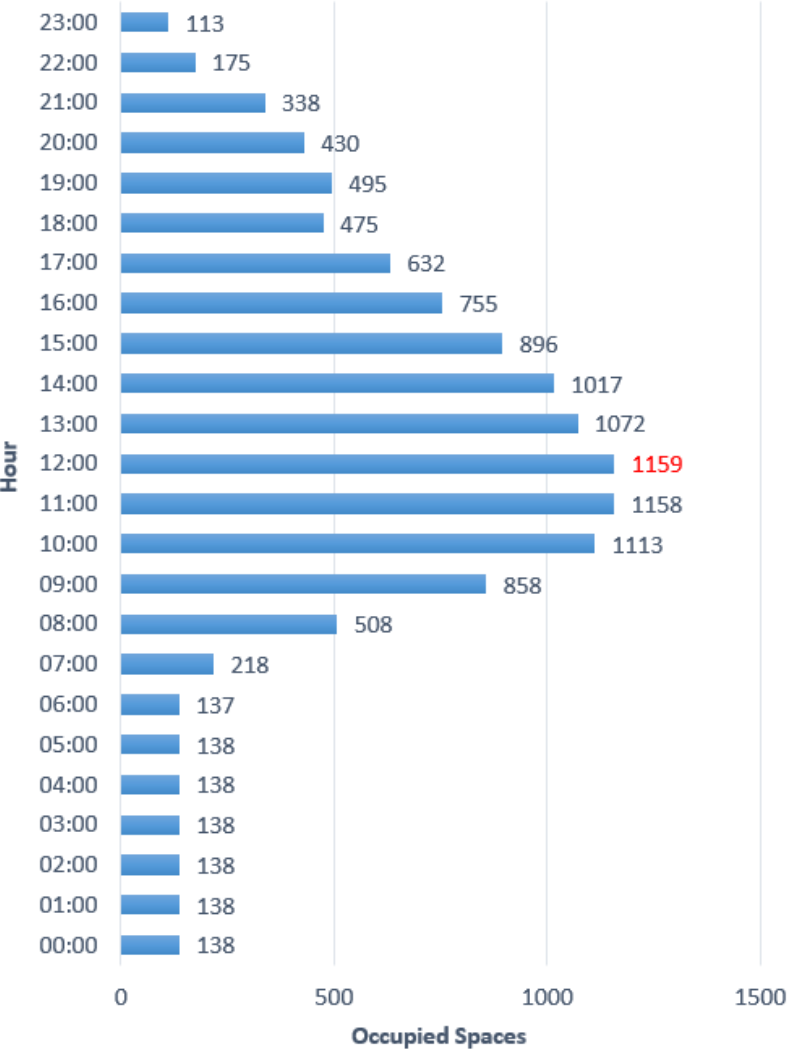


KEY POINTS:
 There are 1,582 parking spaces in the surveyed car parks – 36% are private – mainly food stores (Waitrose and Sainsburys).
 The car parks are all a short and easy walk from the town centre.

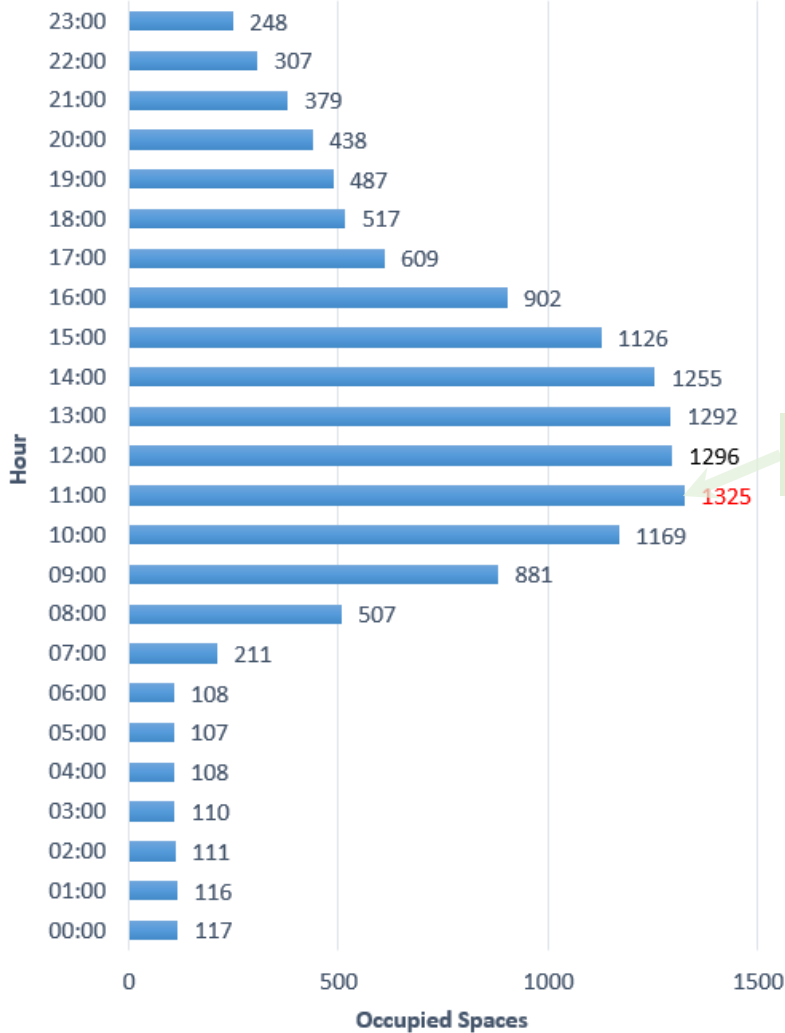
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Existing Parking Demand

Peak Accumulation - Weekday



Peak Accumulation - Saturday



Key: Saturday is the peak with demand highest between 11am - 12pm

KEY POINTS
 Parking demand varies by day of week, NHC short-stay car parks are very well used on all survey days, peaking at 96% occupancy on Saturday and Sunday.

 Weekday peak demand was 73% of total supply, Saturday was 84% and Sunday 66%. Saturday has therefore been the focus of our assessment.

Type	Supply	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
		Peak Occupancy		
NHC - Long Stay	616	64%	75%	37%
NHC - Short Stay	391	86%	96%	96%
Private – Food Store	417	84%	96%	94%
Private - Other	158	46%	57%	27%
Total (% of supply)	1582	73%	84%	66%

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Future demand and supply

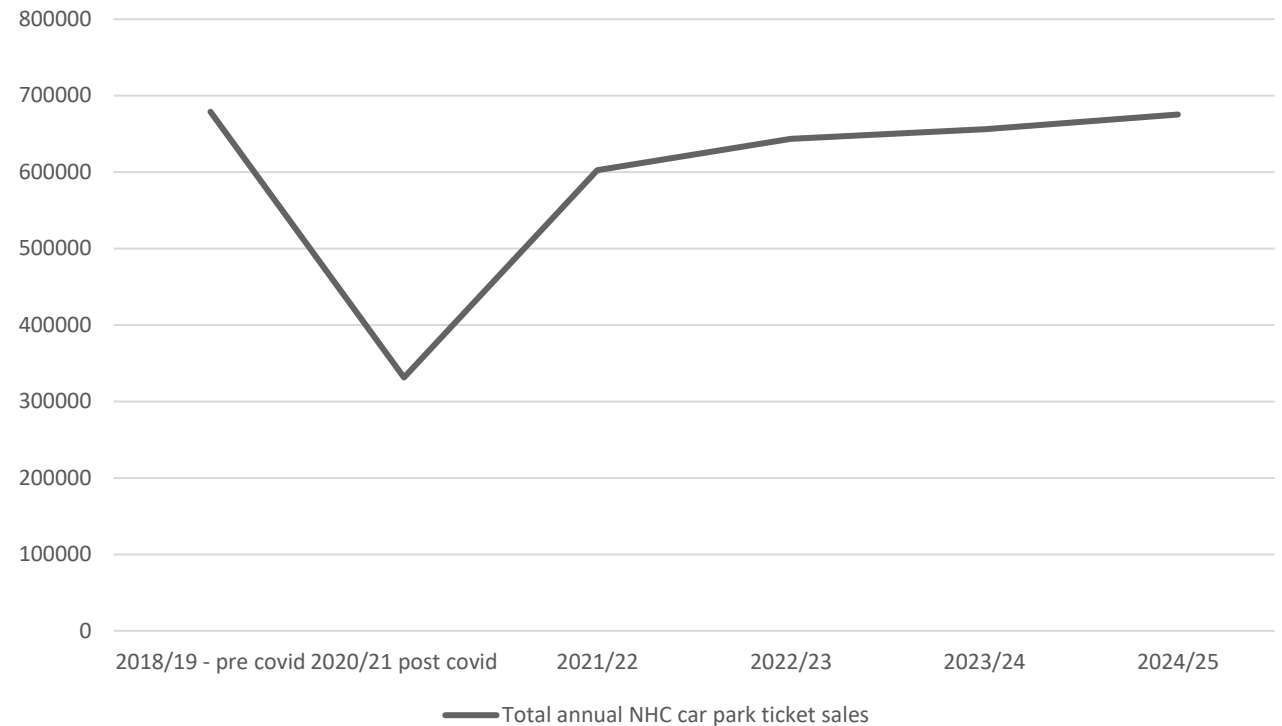
Future demand may be affected by:

- The general economy
- Changes in retail/leisure activity
- Growth in population in and around Hitchin

Future supply may be affected by:

- **The Churchgate options:**
 - **No food store option** – 219 parking spaces removed
 - **Food store option** – 151 parking spaces removed; this assumes that Biggin Lane car park would remain available at all times for the general public, not allocated to specific store
- **Changes to any private parking** – in this study we have assumed that these private spaces will remain for public parking as now, but if this does change it could have a significant impact on future parking supply.

Total annual NHC car park ticket sales



KEY POINTS

Hitchin parking demand reduced over COVID and has been increasing since but remains lower than 2018/19 levels. During this time there were 2,400 new housing completions, approximately 405 dwellings per year.

The data does not show significant **growth in demand**, but it is prudent to allow for some. This study assumed growth of 5% between 2025 and 2031 only, based on DfT travel predictions.

It is best practice to have some **spare parking capacity** in the system at peaks – otherwise motorists would wait in aisles and need to travel between multiple car parks and may be deterred from visiting. In our view this spare capacity at peak times should be 10% or more – **this is lower than existing Saturday peak spare capacity (16%).**

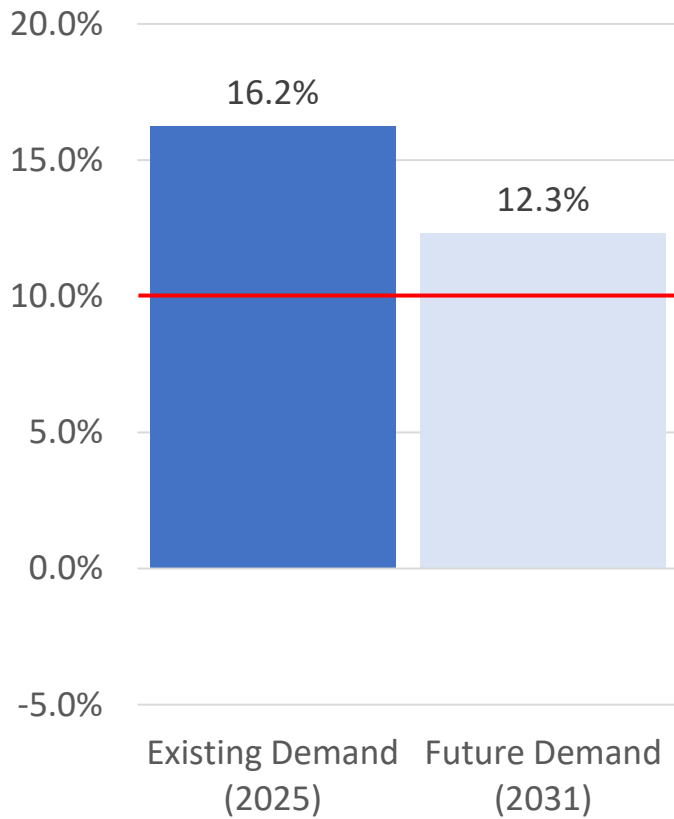
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Spare Capacity on Saturday – Existing and Churchgate options

Existing – No change

Parking Supply: 1,582 spaces

Spare Capacity (Sat)



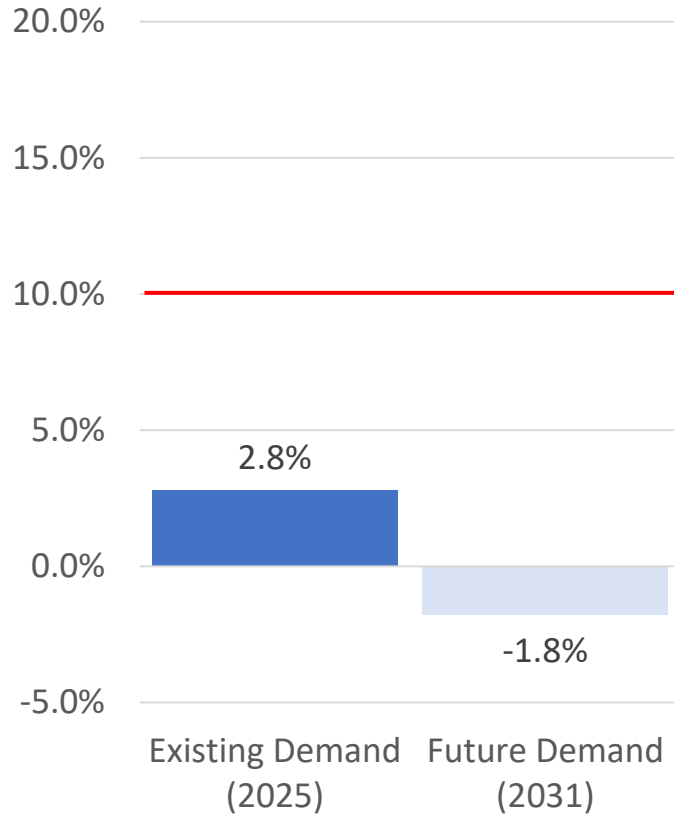
FINDINGS:

Existing supply will meet operational spare capacity (10%) with expected growth

Churchgate – No Food Store

Parking Supply: 1,363 spaces (-219 spaces)

Spare Capacity (Sat)



FINDINGS:

Requires an 'additional' 163 spaces to meet 10% spare capacity in 2031

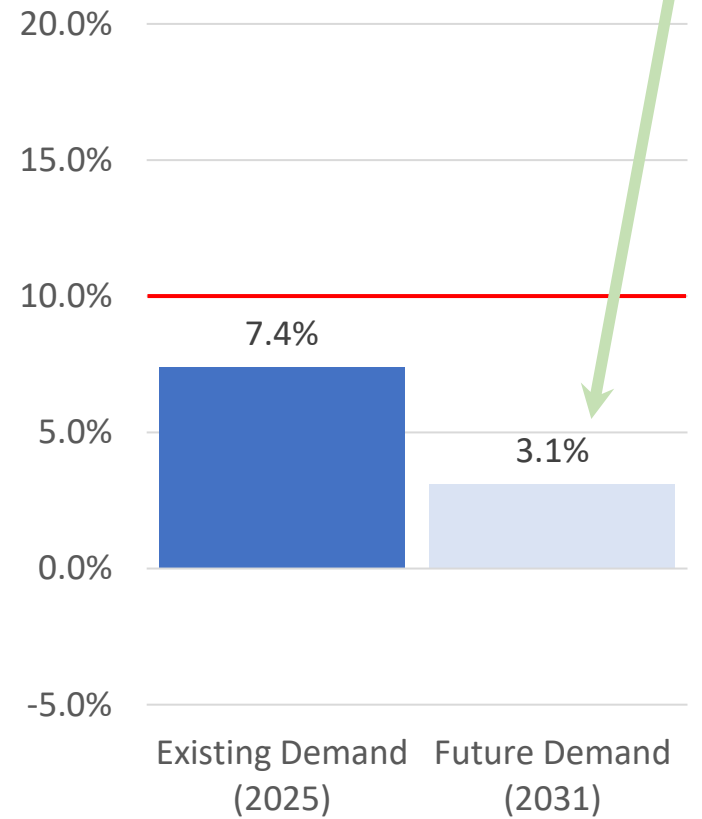
NOT RECOMMENDED

Churchgate – With Food Store

Parking Supply: 1,431 spaces (-151 spaces)

This estimated spare capacity is only 3%, it should be around 10% at least

Spare Capacity (Sat)



FINDINGS:

Requires an 'additional' 100 spaces to meet 10% spare capacity in 2031

ONLY RECOMMENDED IF MEASURES IMPLEMENTED TO IMPROVE 'CAPACITY'

The parking reduction for the Churchgate option with food store will only be a Saturday issue, the rest of the week should have sufficient spare capacity. On a Saturday, the system will need more spare capacity. How can this be created ?

1. Increase physical supply

- Introduce Variable Message Signing (VMS) in the town and Lairage car park
- Park and Cycle
- Park and Walk
- Another deck at Woodside

2. Reduce future demand

- Encourage non-car travel
- Relocate long-stay parking to park and walk/ride, on-street or other modes of travel
- Shifting peak demand on a Saturday

Increasing charges between 11:00am – 2:00pm, and reducing outside of these times – *but not expected to have much scope for this*

No single measure is likely to provide all of the solution – needs a combination.

Reducing overall levels of travel by car is the longer-term aim of the council – this focuses on healthy and active modes of travel and improved walking, cycling facilities and bus/rail services.

For most residents of Hitchin itself, the evidence is that car use to the town centre is relatively low (14% of consultation respondents) and that some 81% walk while others use the bus or train. This can and should be encouraged even more, but there will still be some Hitchin residents who will want to come by car due to e.g. disability or carrying bulky items and food shopping. However there is some scope for change in car demand from Hitchin itself as the Council implements sustainable travel improvements.

For residents outside of Hitchin, walking and cycling is much more difficult due to distances - bus and rail services do offer an alternative for some, and there are plans to improve these.

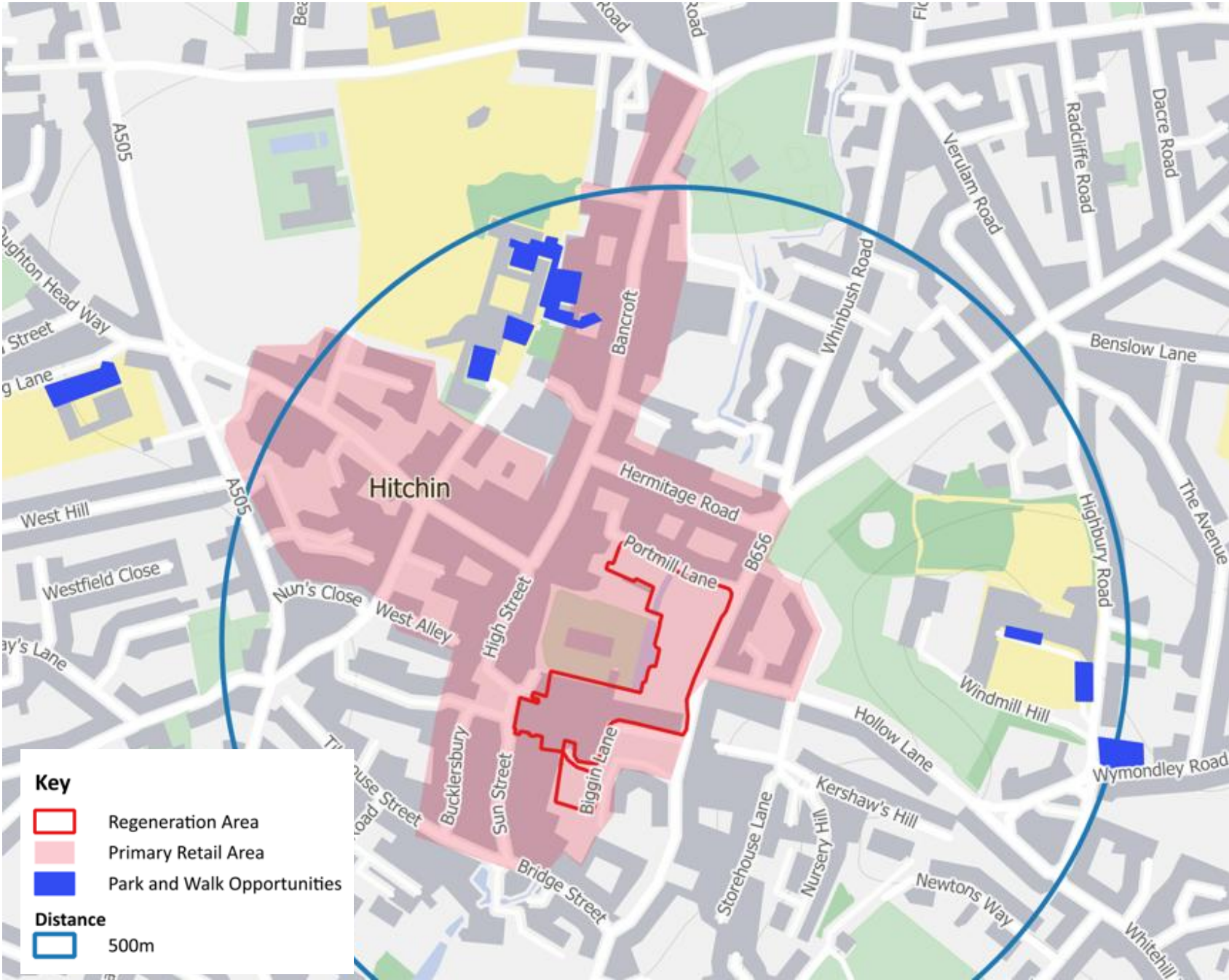
KEY POINTS

There remain opportunities to encourage mode shift away from the car for journeys to Hitchin town centre, this is already a popular option for Hitchin residents but the potential is more limited for residents from other areas.

There is probably some opportunity to change long-stay user behaviour, particularly of workers.

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Park and walk options



- Some opportunities:**
- Railway station (352 spaces)
 - Bancroft Medical Centre (40 spaces)
 - Hitchin Boys School (20 spaces)
 - NHS Bedford Road (40 spaces)
 - Hitchin Girls School (20-30 spaces)
 - Wymondley Sports (15 spaces)

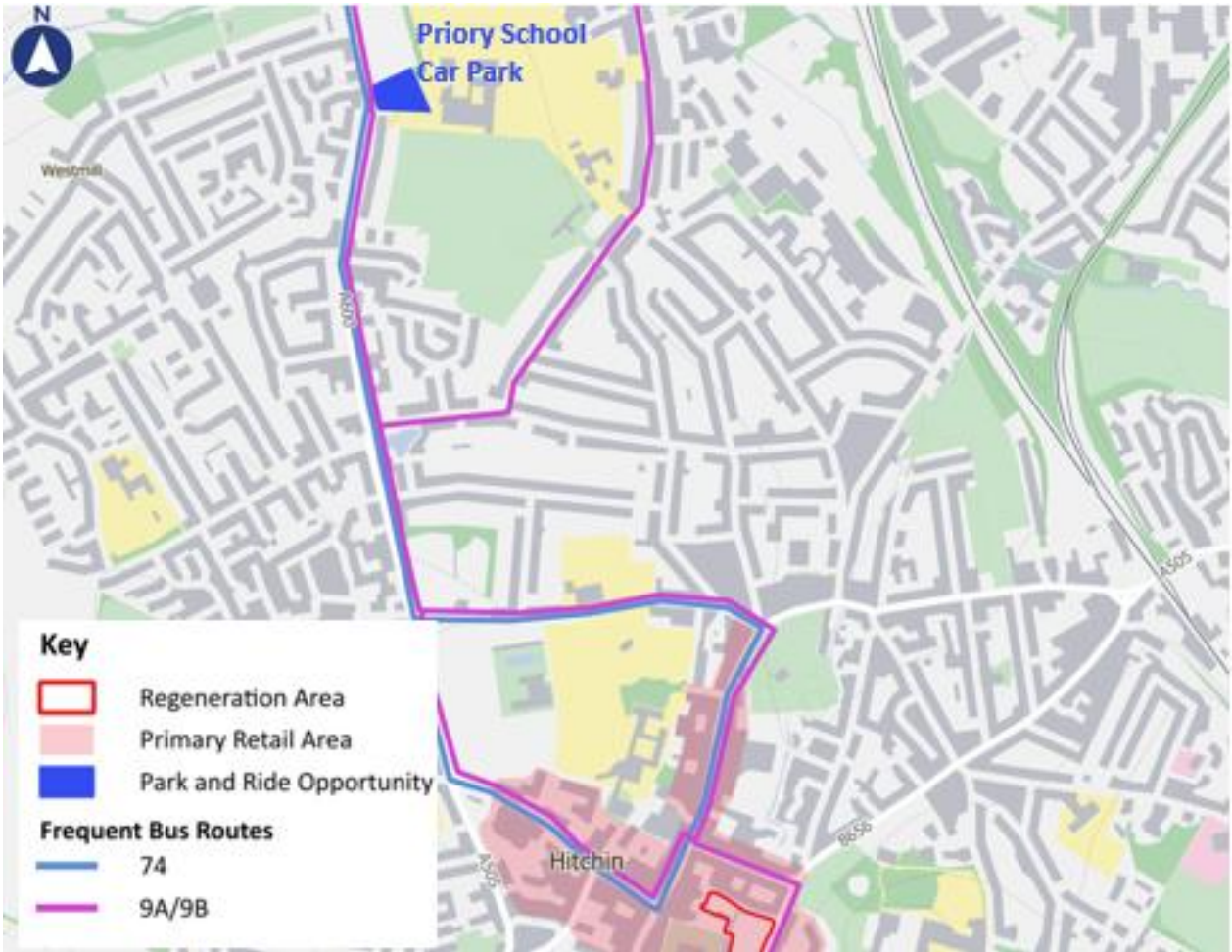
- Some issues to consider for each
- Landowner views
 - Financial viability
 - Whether planning consent needed
 - Payment mechanisms
 - Use on a Saturday
 - But use of current private car parks shows that small car parks can be viable.

Opportunity to use private car parks not in use on the weekend
 e.g. Bancroft Medical Centre (+ 40 spaces), offices and nearby schools (some may be in use for Saturday sports events). Car park owner receives additional income, but would need to spend some money on payments etc. There could be co-ordination with NHC parking.

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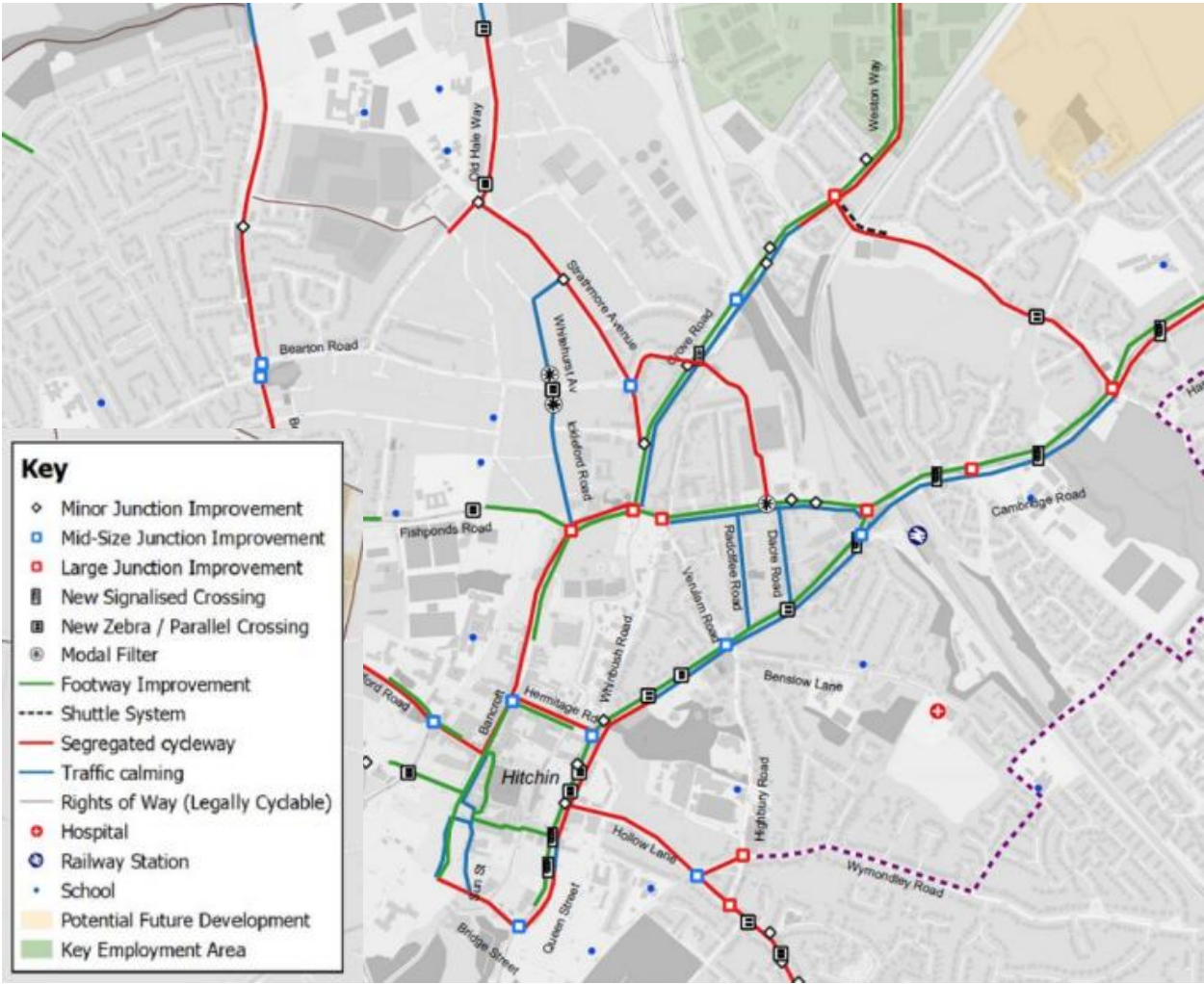
Park and Ride and Park and Cycle options

Potential Park & Ride



Opportunity to use any available car parks (or on-street) with existing buses

Potential- Park and Cycle



Tie in potential parking outside of the town centre to the future LCWIP cycle network, encouraging travel by cycle into the town centre

Churchgate Car Parking Assessment

Increasing Supply

Adding deck to Woodside Car Park



Conclusion: High cost that is possibly disproportionate given the potential car parking impact is a Saturday issue only (£1.5M) but if there is expected to be increasing growth in Hitchin, is a medium-term option

Variable Message Signing



Conclusion: Will improve operation and efficiency of car parking system. Necessary to help visitors when parking demand is high on a Saturday and at other peak times of year. (Cost circa £150k-£200k install + operation)

Also necessary to install a VMS system in the Lairage car park to show visitors how many spaces are free on lower levels. (circa £30-£50k = operation)

What will the effect of the Churchgate option with food store be?

- Loss of 151 prime spaces
- There are an existing 265 spare spaces, so in theory there will be adequate capacity at present
- **BUT – when growth in demand and the need for 10% spare capacity is considered , the car parking system will be under high pressure, and the conclusion is that effective capacity needs to be improved by circa 100 ‘spaces’.**

This can be achieved by

- (1) reducing future Saturday parking demand
 - (2) improving future Saturday parking supply
- in practice probably a combination of both.

The parking issue will be on a Saturday only, so any solutions need to be proportionate.

NHC policy is to encourage active and healthy travel and public transport, so this must be part of the solution and building more parking capacity might work against this.

But Churchgate would bring new residents into the town and enhance the retail offer – it will help to revitalise the town centre.

An initial economic assessment of the ‘worst case’ costs and benefits of ‘losing ‘ 100 Saturday car visitors against the likely benefits of the Churchgate scheme with new residents and better retail/market facilities, indicates that the overall impact to the centre would probably be neutral.

Suggested measures to be investigated and implemented , in order of priority:

- Introduce bay monitoring signing in Lairage Car Park (circa £30-£50k)
- Improve enforcement of long-stay parking in short-stay car parks
- Investigate potential for shifting some Saturday demand to weekdays or off-peak
- Investigate promotional measures and physical changes to encourage walking into the town centre
- Consider reducing all long-stay parking on Saturdays in NHC car parks
- Investigate costs/feasibility of town-wide variable signing scheme
- Discuss with landowners' options to permit some public parking on Saturdays (park and walk, cycle and walk) including Network Rail (possible Christmas trial on a Saturday with shuttle bus to station?)
- Review likely outcome of measures and monitor parking demand
- Should these measures not be likely to deliver approximately 100 spaces 'capacity' consider potential for Woodside additional deck

Other Considerations

- Include in Churchgate project any required mitigation such as VMS and potentially costs of use of private car parks
- 36% of existing parking supply are private car parks – monitor any changes to them, and possibly consider planning controls. Should this provision be controlled differently or removed, there will be much higher changes to parking supply