DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT
SPOTLIGHT REVIEW – North Herts Council Parking Strategy

A review has been requested to ensure that the council's car parking strategy reflects current practice and meets the needs of the residents and business of North Hertfordshire, as well as North Herts Council itself.

The aim of this review is:

To assess the continuing relevance and effectiveness of the Parking Strategy 2019–2031; and

To inform the scope, direction and objectives of any future update.

Review

Background

The council's parking strategy was published in 2019 and covers the period 2019–2031, which we are now over half-way through. Moreover, the wider context has changed due to the legacy and impact of COVID-19, wider policies and strategies relating to climate change and sustainable travel, and work such as the Churchgate redevelopment project in Hitchin is applying new pressure to the existing provision. It is therefore a timely moment to review the strategy in light of these changes.

Establishing and maintaining the correct balance between overarching transport strategy, parking provision and charging presents several challenges. Underprovisioned parking, excessive charges or changes to subsidy schemes have the potential to dissuade visits to population centres, reducing the community feel associated with them and threatening the viability of local businesses. On the other hand, overprovisioned or very cheap parking may be expensive to the council in maintenance, reduce the income available to fund other services and discourage "modal shift" towards sustainable transport alternatives.

The review will consider evidence on public provision and permit parking, on-street electric car charging, inconsiderate parking and transient congestion (notably around schools), without assuming that these things occur uniformly across the district.

Key issues / areas of investigation:

- Effectiveness of the existing parking strategy and progress in implementing its actions since 2019
- Provision and usage of regulated parking since the current strategy began, including car parks, on street permit schemes, season tickets and resident permits, assessed through the available data on location, capacity, utilisation, tariffs, penalty notices and impact of free parking sessions

- Impact and suitability of parking arrangements for each major population centre in the district (Baldock, Hitchin, Knebworth, Letchworth, Royston) including local decision making, planned development, business needs, resident parking behaviours and relationship with sustainable travel

Key questions to be answered:

- What revisions to the existing parking strategy and/or its action plan needed to reflect current conditions?
- How will the council balance parking demand against the needs of existing and future residents and businesses, taking into consideration there are wider policies, strategies and sustainability modes that link into this?

Areas of investigation and scope:

1) Parking strategy and data review

a) To review the parking strategy 2019–2031, consistent with its medium-term action plan and alongside the service-led strategy

b) To review data on parking usage and income

2) Wider strategy and 'fit' review

a) To consider the key aims of wider corporate, local and national strategies and policies

3) Direct evidence gathering

a) To gather evidence from business and parish council representatives, and other stakeholders

b) To receive the perspectives of the police and county council

Exclusions

- Any function entirely under the purview of Herts County Council
- Speeding, fly-tipping, active travel and other highway-related issues

Anticipated Benefits

- Informing the scope of the planned update to the existing parking strategy
- Clarity on how short-term, demand-led and operational parking considerations should be balanced against broader, longer-term policy objectives and priorities

- Deepen understanding of parking policy among members, the public and stakeholders

Indicators of success for the Spotlight Review

- Parking strategy is up-to-date and fit for purpose (tested by making recommendations to Cabinet and/or Council and having them be taken forward)
- Members are clear on the council's parking strategy, its relationship to broader policy and priorities, and its effectiveness to date (tested by asking about confidence before and after the review)
- The council's car parks are well-utilised (tested by periodic review of data)

Link with Council Priorities

- Thriving Communities
- Accessible Services
- Responsible Growth
- Sustainability

Potential Witnesses and Contributors

- Director, service managers and transport and parking leads within the Place Directorate
- BID managers
- Other business group representatives, e.g., Herts Chamber of Commerce
- Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives
- HCC Highways representatives
- Council and county officers with responsibility for sustainability, climate policy and sustainable transport
- Town/parish council representatives
- Members of the public
- Civil Enforcement Officers

Methodology

- Review papers provided in advance; ask questions of officers in live session
- Hear evidence in person from stakeholders in live session, supplemented by written representations where needed
- Propose and discuss ideas for change in live session; finalise through written follow-up with officer support

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Information documents

- Existing parking strategy 2019–2031
- Parking survey data, where available
- Recent historical data (since 2019) on sessions, parking charges and income by car park
- Recent historical data (since 2019) on parking permits issued and spaces available by zone
- Data on capacity, resident permits, penalty notices, tariffs, time limits and impact of 'free parking' windows on local businesses

Membership

- Executive Member for Place
- Witnesses/contributors as listed above

Members

- To be confirmed

Lead Support Officer

- To be confirmed

Support Officer

- Jeevan Mann, Scrutiny Officer, Jeevan.Mann@north-herts.gov.uk