

HEXHAM PARKING STUDY & ACTION PLAN - APRIL 2018

Introduction

Northumberland County Council (NCC) commissioned a study into the existing car park capacity and usage in the three town centres of Alnwick, Hexham and Morpeth and to produce a strategy for meeting future parking needs. Parking is considered to be a significant issue in the towns that is considered by some people to be a constraint on the growth of their economies and their sustainability. Free parking was introduced in 2014 but there is now a lack of parking capacity that has several consequences.

Much of the parking in the town centres is provided in car parks managed by NCC, plus some significant private car parks and on-street parking. On-street parking is the responsibility of the highway authority (NCC) which carries out the enforcement of the on-street and off-street parking restrictions.

The study report sets out details of the existing town centre car park provision, usage and issues and goes on to forecast how this is likely to change in the future and what measures could be adopted to tackle existing and future parking issues. As part of the study new data was collected and consultation was undertaken with local stakeholders in each town to gain an understanding of existing issues, future changes and potential solutions.

Parking surveys were carried out by a specialist supplier that carried out hourly beat surveys in each car park and on-street within the study area, where the registration numbers of vehicles were recorded in each parking space throughout each survey day (7am-7pm). This provides data on the duration of stay of each vehicle as well as arrival and departure times, occupancy levels and the turnover of each space. Some car parks could not be accessed on foot so cameras were used to record the entry and exit time of vehicles.

Surveys were carried out on three days in each town in Summer 2017 and another three days in Autumn 2017. These days were 'typical' weekdays, the Market Day and the Saturday of the same week.

In Hexham the survey dates were:

- Weekdays - 22, 23 August & 27, 28 September
- Saturday - 26 August & 30 September.

The full report can be viewed on the County Council's website.

Existing Parking in Hexham

There are 19 distinct car parks, although four of these are within the same large car park at Wentworth, plus various streets where parking is allowed. Parking is free of charge in all of the public car parks and streets managed by NCC (except for HGVs in Wentworth) but there are time restrictions in some locations and these are controlled by a disc system. Drivers have to indicate their time of arrival on a disc that can be purchased for £1.00 from many outlets across the county and they must leave before the stated time limit. The central car parks are limited to a maximum stay of between 1 and 4 hours.

Most public car parking is provided in the large Wentworth car park that is on the edge of the central retail area, which provides 655 spaces adjacent to the Leisure Centre and Waitrose supermarket, as well as a Coach/HGV park. There are a few other small public car parks in the town centre. Large private car parks are provided by Helen McArdle Group and Homebase, Tesco, Marks and Spencer and Aldi supermarkets for their customers and at the railway station and at Hexham General Hospital for their users and staff. M&S, Beales, Railway Station and the Hospital charge for parking. In total, there are an estimated 2,529 off-street parking spaces in the study area (some spaces are unmarked so it is necessary to estimate the number). In addition, the streets that were included in the study area survey contain an estimated 161 parking spaces. The total town centre parking capacity is therefore an estimated 2,690 spaces. This figure takes into account the loss of parking spaces that has occurred in recent years as a result of new developments, which has added to the parking pressures currently being faced.

In August across the combined town centre car parks there was some spare capacity at all times with an average occupancy of 70% at the busiest time (85% is the recommended maximum). The long stay parking in the central area was full all day. In September weekday occupancy was virtually the same (maximum of 71% across the combined town centre). However, there was much variation between car parks with most of the spare capacity being in private car parks and those in the outer area some distance from the town centre. When looking at the public car parks (excluding Tyne Green) the level of occupancy rises significantly to 89%, so above the recommended maximum.

Growth in Parking Demand

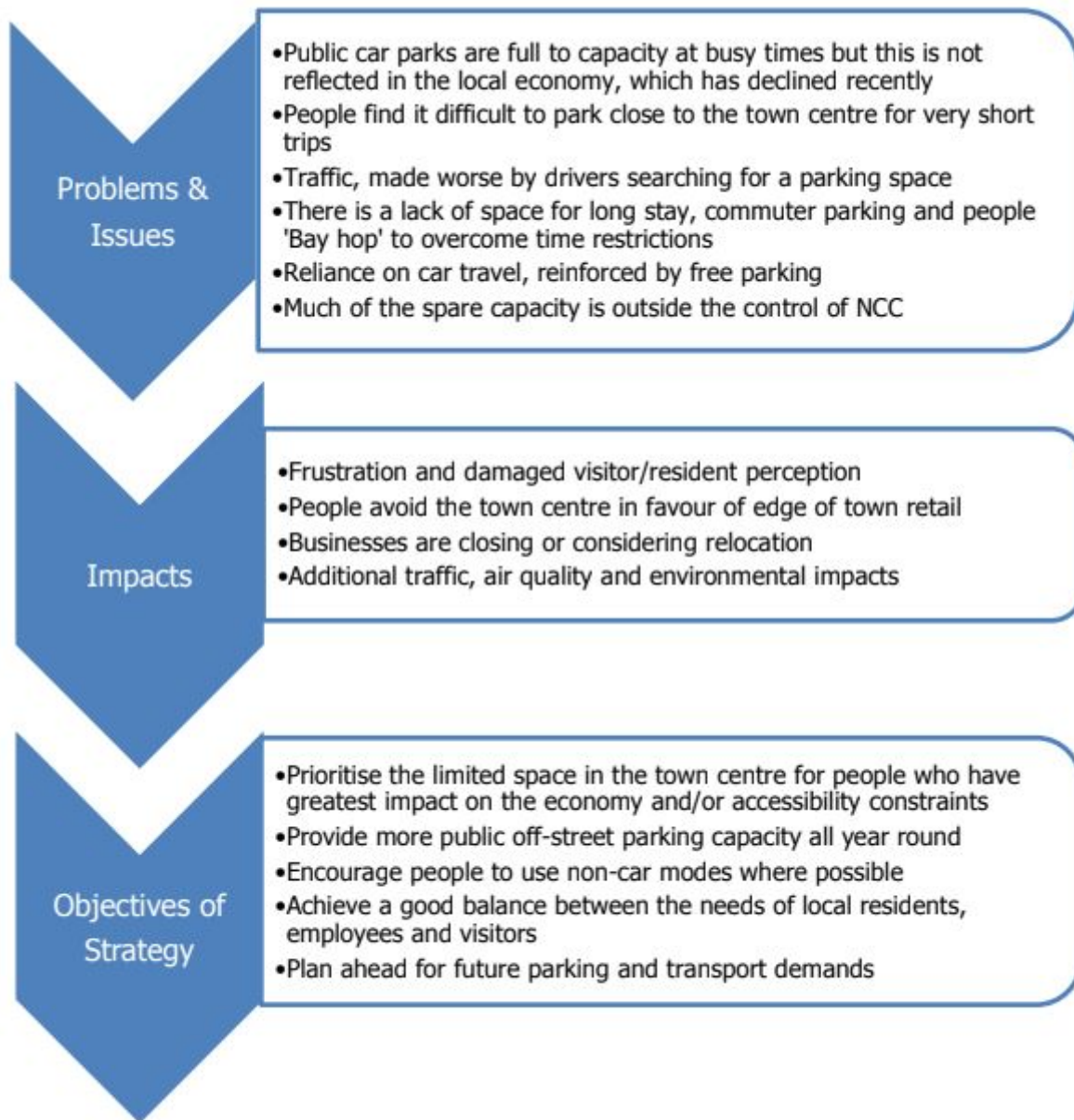
New parking demand is expected to be generated by further development in the town and the surrounding area. New homes and the growth of the town centre will increase the demand for parking.

The study concludes that the demand for parking in Hexham is assumed to increase by approximately 0.9% per year in the future years, based on housing and traffic growth forecasts. This is expected to lead to further capacity issues and overspill of parking into other locations, including surrounding streets.

Issues & Objectives

As part of the study process, consultation events were held with local stakeholders who were invited to give their views on parking in Hexham. The information gathered from these events, along with the data gathered from the surveys, was used to develop a list of problems and issues, associated impacts and suggested objectives. The list is shown in Figure 1, below.

Fig.1 Hexham Issues & Objectives Summary



Interventions

The study then suggests the following interventions to address the problems and issues:

- 1) *Car Park Capacity:* Increase car park capacity to ease the current situation and provide for future expansion. An increase of 247 spaces is recommended.

- 2) *On-Street Parking Capacity*: Ensure changes elsewhere do not increase demand unless this can be mitigated through parking restrictions.
- 3) *Long & Short Stay Parking*: Long stay parking is restricting capacity for short stay trips which may damage the local economy. This is an inefficient use of a scarce resource and encourages reliance on the car. The reallocation of all day car parks to serve the short stay demand should be considered, subject to finding alternative long stay provision elsewhere.
- 4) *Sustainable Transport*: Greater use of sustainable transport would help reduce demand for parking in the town.
- 5) *Condition, Facilities, Technology, Security & Maintenance*: The existing car parks were found to be in a reasonable condition with good facilities in most locations. However, facilities for HGVs in Wentworth were found to be poor and relocating HGV parking should be considered. Direction signs should be reviewed and improved where necessary.
- 6) *Operations, Management & Enforcement*: Management and enforcement is considered to be reasonable although some consultees suggested that the various time limits in place can be confusing, particularly in Wentworth. One issue is overnight and long-term parking but this is now being addressed.
- 7) *Marketing & Promotions*: Measures to spread parking demand and encourage people to visit the town at different times of the day and the year would be beneficial to the local economy.
- 8) *Parking Charges*: Free parking has had a major impact on travel and parking behaviour. There are benefits to free parking but it may have also increased reliance on car travel and contributed to congestion in car parks and on streets. This issue should therefore be explored and either discounted or pursued to give clarity and guidance on the other interventions listed.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Consultant's report was made available to local County and Town councillors, local stakeholders, other Town and Parish Council's and the general public. This wider circulation was in recognition that Hexham acts as both a service centre for the Tyne Valley and is also a tourism destination. A number of engagement sessions were then held throughout January 2018 with County and Town Councillors and other stakeholders to gather their feedback on the study report. The main comments were:

- Long stay parking is an issue. More spaces are required to satisfy demand, particularly from staff who work in the town.
- All day parking in Wentworth by workers in the town reduces capacity for shoppers and visitors to the detriment of the local economy.
- Direction signage needs to be improved to ensure visitors can find the appropriate car parks.
- Hexham has a large hinterland and sustainable travel options are limited for some so travel by car is often necessary.
- The topography of the town with significant height differences between the 'lower' area around Wentworth car park and the 'upper' area covering the main town centre

makes access difficult for people with mobility issues and this is compounded by having an ageing population.

- Short time limits can restrict shoppers who could otherwise spend longer in the town to the benefit of local shops and businesses.
- Some agreement that parking charges were a useful policy tool to change behaviours, but would only consider if this proved necessary after other options had been implemented. Some support for a free 2 hour free period and annual permits.
- Free parking has led to less car sharing and walking. Since the removal of charging people are more likely to take their own car into town whereas previously people made alternative arrangements to avoid parking charges.

A record of the views received is attached in Annex 1.

Further comments have been received via a dedicated Parking Study email address. A summary of these comments is attached in Annex 2.

Action Plan

The recommendations from the study and the feedback from stakeholders has informed the Hexham Parking Action Plan which is set out below.

HEXHAM PARKING ACTION PLAN

The following table sets out the actions to be taken following the completion of the study report and stakeholder engagement. It describes the specific measures to be implemented with an indicative timescale. The County Council has allocated £10m in its Medium Term Financial Plan to fund a programme of improvements to parking provision in the county, which can be used to support the implementation of the proposed actions. The Action Plan will be reviewed annually.

Study Recommendation	Action	Time scale
Increase off street car park capacity.	<p>H01 - Carry out an assessment of all potential sites for additional parking identified within the Consultant's study and during stakeholder engagement and engage with landowners:-</p> <p>H01a - Lookers Garage Site - unsuccessful negotiations with landowner, site being disposed of for higher value commercial use.</p> <p>H01b - Dale Garage Site - landowner unwilling to dispose of site, unsuccessful negotiations over potential temporary use for parking as incompatible with landowners requirements.</p> <p>H01c - Old BT Site - landowner unwilling to dispose of site.</p>	Complete

	<p>H01d - Dysart / Old Bus Station - successfully secured additional town centre parking capacity on a temporary basis pending its redevelopment.</p> <p>H01e - Former Fire Station site - successfully secured additional long stay parking capacity on a temporary basis.</p> <p>H01f - Bunker Site off Alemouth Road - submitted detailed bid for the site in response to marketing exercise, awaiting confirmation of the outcome.</p> <p>H02 - If successful with acquisition of the Bunker Site progress development of additional long stay capacity.</p> <p>H03 - Progress detailed feasibility for alternative options in case the acquisition of The Bunker site is not successful, to include a multi-storey car park at Wentworth car park to secure ~250 spaces.</p> <p>H04 - Remove HGV parking from Wentworth car park to increase capacity.</p> <p>H05 - Liaise with M&S and Aldi to establish whether the underutilised sections of their car parks could be converted to long stay parking.</p>	<p>Subject to H01f</p> <p>April 2018</p> <p>Mar 2019</p> <p>June 2018</p>
Convert long stay to short stay parking.	<p>H06 - Reduce overnight and long stay parking by residents and businesses with a 24 hour maximum stay, with consideration of the lease arrangements in place with residents of Hallstile Bank (East side) who have access over the Wentworth car park to the rear of their properties.</p> <p>H07 - Consider conversion of part of the Wentworth long stay car park to short stay if alternative locations for the long stay parking can be found.</p>	<p>Sept 2018</p> <p>Subject to H03 & H04</p>
Direction signing	<p>H08 - Review fixed direction signing and improve where necessary and share proposals with Hexham Town Council.</p> <p>H08a - Implement agreed signage changes.</p>	<p>Sept 2018</p> <p>Nov 2018</p>
Consider reintroduction of parking charges.	H9 - Review the position and options for charging in light of progress being made to address parking issues in Hexham.	Annually Nov to Dec
Sustainable transport	H10 - Investigate the feasibility of providing more EV charging points through a combination of	Oct 2018

	<p>direct provision, by encouraging provision by private sector car park owners and, where appropriate, through the planning process for new developments.</p> <p>H11 - Continue to promote and provide infrastructure to encourage sustainable modes of transport through the Council's usual programmes, as a way of reducing demand for parking.</p> <p>H12 - Consider expansion of the town bus service routes to include other parts of the town / estates where improved access to public transport could help reduce car travel and demand for parking.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Monitor and Review	H13 - Monitor progress with the action plan and undertake a detailed annual review to evaluate its effectiveness and update and consider additional actions as appropriate.	Annually Nov to Dec