

MORPETH 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 perceived 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 Morpeth the survey dates were:

- Weekdays - 03, 31 August & 20, 21 September
- Saturday - 26 August & 23 September.

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

Existing Parking in Morpeth

There are 18 car parks, plus various streets where parking is allowed. Parking is free of charge in all the public car parks and streets managed by NCC but there are time restrictions in some locations that are controlled by a disc system. Drivers must 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.

Car parks are spread around the town centre with the largest being those adjacent to the retail developments along Stanley Terrace and Staithes Lane. A large customer car park is provided by Morrisons on a deck above the NCC Staithes Lane long stay car park (that also contains some Morrisons staff parking) and the two car parks at the railway station are included in the study area. In total, there are an estimated 1,673 off-street parking spaces in the town centre study area (some spaces are unmarked so it is necessary to estimate the number). The total town centre parking capacity is therefore 1,843 spaces.

In August across the combined town centre car parks there is very little spare capacity during the weekday lunchtime peaks with an average occupancy of up to 88% at the busiest times. This average includes the Morrisons staff parking that was found to be very little used, so the occupancy of the publicly available parking spaces is well over 90%. Saturdays have a significantly lower occupancy than the weekdays. The lack of parking in the railway station car parks is thought to be the main reason for this as these are overcapacity on weekdays. In September weekday and weekend car park occupancies were very similar and on-street parking was similar to August.

Growth in Parking Demand

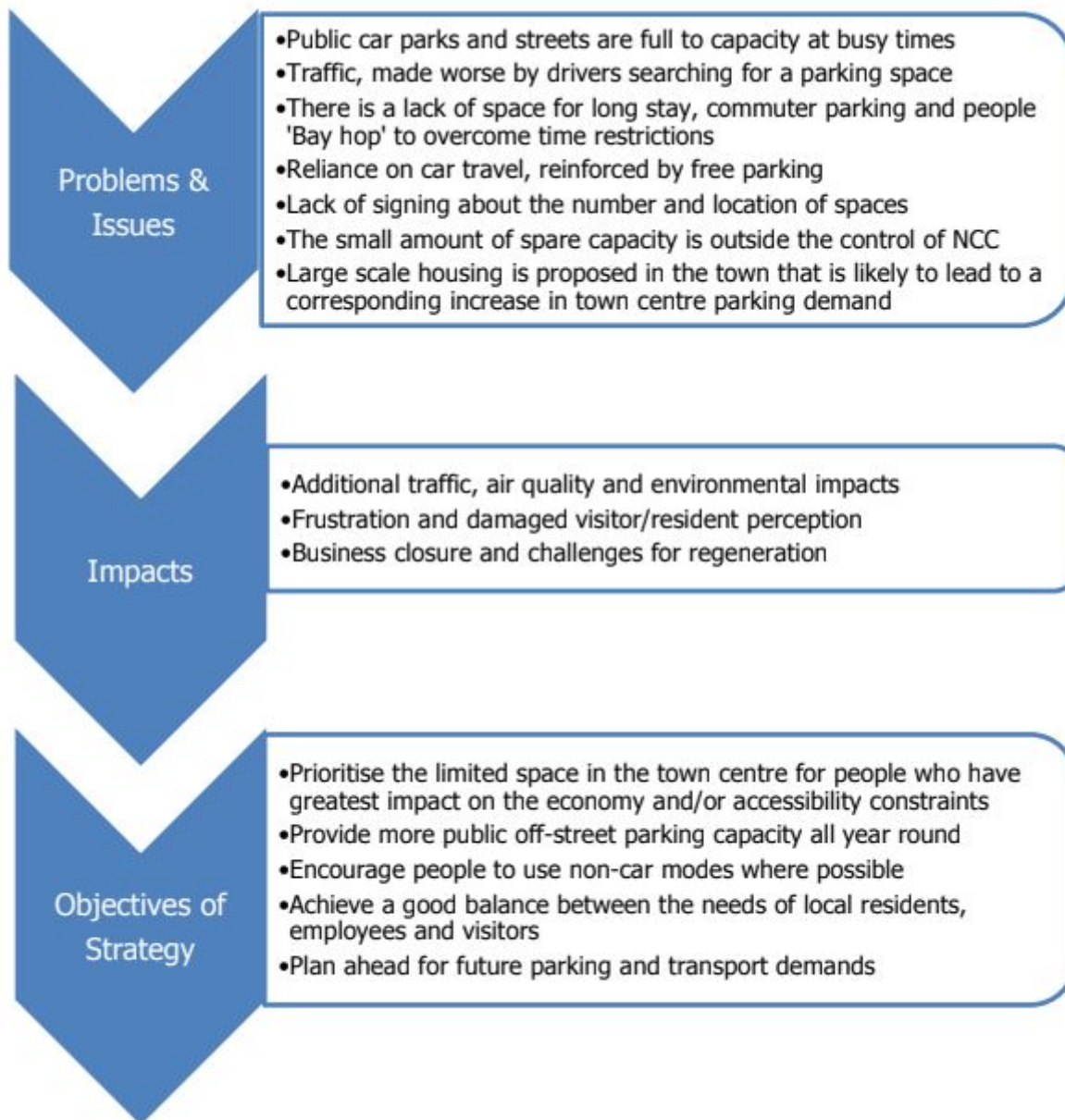
New parking demand is expected to be generated by further development in the town and the surrounding area. New homes and the growth of the town centre will increase the demand for parking.

The study concludes that the demand for parking in Morpeth is assumed to increase by approximately 2.7% 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 Morpeth. 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 Morpeth 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. A minimum increase of 150 spaces is recommended in order to bring current occupancy levels down to an acceptable level.
- 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. Direction signs should be reviewed and improved where necessary.
- 6) *Operations, Management & Enforcement*: Management and enforcement is considered to be reasonable. 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. 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:

- There is a lack of long stay provision. This leads to 'bay hopping' by staff who need to move their cars several times a day.
- There is confusion over on street dual use bays i.e. time limited and residents permit parking. Many drivers are unsure whether they can use these bays which means they can be underutilised.
- There may be need to cater for tourists and campervans as visits by tourists are increasing.
- Prioritise short stay in the town centre to encourage turnover and benefit the local economy.
- Identify an option for short stay parking e.g. 90 mins to encourage greater turnover to benefit local shops and businesses.
- Benchmarking by the Town Team shows that Morpeth has an above average dissatisfaction with parking.
- Long stay can be full due to residents which limits capacity for shoppers and visitors.
- Long stay parking should be on the edge of town, with short stay in the centre to encourage turnover to benefit shops and businesses.
- No support for parking charges in the town centre.

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 Morpeth Parking Action Plan which is set out below.

MORPETH 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.	M01 - Carry out an assessment of all potential sites for additional car parking and engage with landowners.	Oct 2018
	M02 - Provide temporary parking capacity at the former Morpeth Library site pending its redevelopment.	Complete
	M03 - Progress feasibility designs for the former Morpeth First School (Goosehill) site for provision of additional long stay town centre car park capacity.	Oct 2018
	M04 - Progress development of additional long stay car parking capacity at the former Morpeth First School 'Goosehill' site to secure approximately 150 spaces.	April 2019
	M05 - Introduce shorter time limits of 2 hours in Back Riggs and Corporation Yard car parks to increase turnover.	tbc
Reserved parking spaces	M06 - Continue discussions with Morrisons to make more efficient use of the spaces in Staithes Lane car park. Consider moving the staff bays so it is clearer where the public can park.	June 2018
On-street parking	M07 - Investigate opportunities for increasing on-street parking, including making best use of existing provision through clearer signage/ information.	October 2018
Convert long stay to short stay parking.	M08 - Introduce a 24 hour maximum stay in long stay car parks.	Sept 2018
Disabled parking spaces	M09 - Undertake periodic review of disabled provision	Ongoing
Direction signage.	M10 - Review fixed direction signage and improve	Oct 2018

	where necessary.	
Sustainable transport	<p>M11 - Investigate the potential for providing additional EV charging points.</p> <p>M12 - Ensure new developments make suitable provision for public transport through the planning process, e.g. road layouts that facilitate local bus services.</p> <p>M13 - 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>Oct 2018</p> <p>Immediate</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Consider reintroduction of parking charges.	M14 - Periodically review the position and options on charging in light of progress being made to address parking issues in Morpeth.	Annually Nov to Dec
Railway Station parking	<p>M15 - Introduce a maximum 72 hours (3 day) stay at the railway station car park to help manage demand and prioritise use by commuters.</p> <p>M16 - Investigate the potential for additional parking at the railway station to include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Expansion of existing NCC car park, including potential decking to provide a second tier. B. Feasibility of a new car park on the landscaped area opposite the station building. C. Engagement with Network Rail and franchise operator for development of new car park on railway land to the north side of the station. 	<p>Sept 2018</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Monitor and Review	M17 - 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