



Report to Cabinet

Date: 22 February 2024

Title: Parking Strategy

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Steven Broadbent

Contact officer: Julie Rushton, Head of Parking Services

Ward(s) affected: All wards

Recommendations:

1. To agree the Parking Strategy for Buckinghamshire which sets out the ambitions and vision for parking across Buckinghamshire.
2. Cabinet is also asked to note the following which are in motion:
 - a. Public consultation launched week commencing 15 January 2024 on the Traffic Regulation Order to make amendments to provide a more consistent customer experience by; removing unfunded free parking sessions, updating hours of control, including introducing hours and charges in preparation for the new Winslow Station Car Park, and making On-Street charging amendments.
 - b. Actions to strengthen the in-house parking team and increase enforcement capacity to drive up parking compliance.
 - c. In the process of joining the pilot of the National Parking Payment Platform – a pilot funded by the Department for Transport to increase flexibility to customers on how they choose to pay for parking and remove the subsidy for Wycombe RingGo fees.
 - d. A review of our parking estate, which may result in disposal of non-profit making car parks.
 - e. Preparation in the making to support transition to a digital strategy for payment for parking, as cash payment machines reach the end of life.

Reason for decision:

In order to ensure continued financial sustainability of the parking service, respond to driver behaviour trends, and provide a consistent service for residents and visitors to Buckinghamshire, it is key that the Council adopts an outline Parking Strategy which sets out the vision and ambitions for the parking service in the future. This will also address inconsistencies across the county in terms of car parking, which are a result of legacy arrangements. Additionally, Statutory Guidance for parking expects local authorities to establish parking operations that are self-financing - currently in Buckinghamshire, there is a forecasted shortfall against the budget.

Executive summary

- 1.1 Due to the arrangements made under legacy authorities, the parking service has historically been delivered through a split operating model - Off Street enforcement was delivered in house; On Street was outsourced. Following a Better Buckinghamshire Service Review an integrated parking service has been created which provides a more effective delivery model and aligns to national standards where parking enforcement for on and off street is delivered by one Council.
- 1.2 As a pre-cursor to the formulation of this strategy an informal review of the Parking Service was undertaken by a member working group at the request of the Cabinet Member for Transport. The purpose of the review was to assess what potential improvements could be made to better serve the residents of Buckinghamshire and to address legacy inconsistencies and outputs from the review have informed the development of this Strategy.
- 1.3 The proposals set out in this report, and in the draft Parking Strategy (Appendix A) set the strategic direction of travel for the service which will support the MTFP process and balance the Parking Account. The strategy will enable the Council to set out its aims and objectives for parking services, within the context of a rapidly changing industry, across Buckinghamshire and highlight the importance and value that parking services can provide for residents and local communities. Not least, to ensure the associated regulatory requirements are appropriately met for the Council, which includes compliance, but also how the parking estate will be financially managed to assess car parks as an asset, along with how parking supports the Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5).
- 1.4 The Parking Strategy sets out our vision for parking in Buckinghamshire across four themes: Technology & Innovation, Parking Charges, Enforcement, and Parking Assets. Within those themes there are a number of key proposals which are set out in detail below.

Technology & Innovation

Join the National Parking Platform and remove subsidy for Wycombe RingGo fees.



- 1.5 The National Parking Platform (NPP) is a pilot supported and funded by the Department for Transport, which creates a platform to provide a better service to customers and at a reduced cost to the Council. Benefits are:
- Improved customer experience: competition between suppliers for customers - enabling customers to choose the supplier that best meets their needs at any participating location; competitive pricing - suppliers must compete for customers, thus resulting in service fees that are reasonable; wider access to parking availability data leading to better journey planning and better data for the local authority; greater competition will drive innovation.
 - Reduced costs: reduced requirement for payment equipment - improved customer experience, and more choice, is proven to encourage greater use of cashless payment; Simplified procurement process - removes the requirement for procurement of payment providers; inexpensive to set up and operate.
 - Easy implementation of advanced, digitised services: Information from all payment providers in one data stream for use by enforcement; data is still owned and controlled by the Council; payments from all payment providers aggregated into a single, auditable session payment schedule.
- 1.6 Due to the arrangements made under legacy authorities, the Council currently has two 'contract types' with the existing pay by phone provider, RingGo. For Wycombe car parks (excluding The Swan, Easton Street, Handy Cross), the service fee to use RingGo is paid for by the Council. For all other areas, including On-Street, the service fee is paid for by the customer. NPP will enable a consistent approach across the county and for the choice to be with the customer on which supplier to use, and subsequently the fee they pay. The current cost to the Council for the Wycombe service fees is £169k which would be saved going forward.
- 1.7 Councils participating in the Pilot will not be required to pay a joining fee (between £10-15k). Funding in the longer term is yet to be established, however early indications are that Local Authorities joining after the pilot would be charged a joining fee (between £10-15k), suppliers could be asked to contribute to join the platform, ongoing contributions from Local Authorities of between 0.05 and 1.5p per transaction.
- 1.8 Initially, the adoption of the NPP platform would be in the old Wycombe district area car parks. Based on the current Wycombe RingGo transactions, the net saving to the Council after the contribution to the NPP at the higher rate of 1.5 pence per transaction, is £156k. It is recommended that other areas across Buckinghamshire are included in the pilot in stages following the initial roll out in Wycombe.

Parking Payment Methods

- 1.9 The Council has a range of parking payment machines many of which are more than 10 years old. Currently out of the 104 On Street machines, 51 are not working and are at end of life. The current annual cost for servicing and repairs is £220k per annum with further expense incurred for cash collection and bank charges. Following COVID, there has been an increase in customers choosing to pay by phone – 79% who previously paid by cash are now using alternative payment methods. The cost to replace the 51 machines On Street would be in the region of £321k; these would require funding.
- 1.10 Given the above, it is recommended to transition towards digital payment methods only over time. As machines reach the end of life, they should not be replaced like for like and we should continue to and increase promotion of cashless and ultimately digital payment methods. Where new chargeable parking arrangements are put into place, such as Winslow Station Car Park and Quoiting Square, Marlow, it is recommended that these do not include payment machine options. This would not only reduce the costs of delivering the service but would also provide more consistency for customers and reflects societal trends.

Enforcement

- 1.11 The Parking Service supports the reduction of congestion, promotes safety, and encourages modal shift to alternative transport options using a range of enforcement methods. This includes patrol of over 426 miles of on street restrictions, incorporating 328 schools and 7,400 on street parking bays, along with off street parking equating to 10,988 parking spaces. Based on 22/23 figures, the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued was 32,291 and recovery rate was 72%.
- 1.12 Following a service review, the parking service is delivered in an integrated in-house model which aligns to national standards. A 'one year on' review advised that it was too early at this stage to go back out to market, advising that it normally takes two years for a new operation to fully bed in.
- 1.13 As part of the review, benchmarking exercises were also undertaken to assess how Buckinghamshire Council Parking Service performs compared to other local authorities. These results show that the Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) error cancellation, challenge, appeal, and cancellation rates are all below average, indicating that the service is, in the main, achieving good quality standards. BC issuing rates were also benchmarked which showed that Buckinghamshire is operating above average.
- 1.14 A compliance study conducted in March 2023 and sampling streets across Amersham, Chesham, Marlow, Aylesbury, and High Wycombe, showed that on average across Buckinghamshire compliance of the On-Street restrictions was c. 84% and Off-Street was 92%. The same study was undertaken in October 2023 as part of the recent review

which shows that across the areas collectively there is an increase in compliance of 0.04%. The biggest change is across the car parks in these areas where compliance has increase from 92.73% to 95.13%

- 1.15 While identifying a number of successes and improvements that have been delivered following the service review in 2022, there are further areas for improvement through increasing capacity and strengthening the leadership team to include project management functions particularly as MTC activity sets to grow, and increasing the number of CEOs by a minimum of 10 FTE, along with a greater resource capacity for maintenance of equipment/car parks and the management of suspensions which currently impacts the time CEOs spend on enforcement.
- 1.16 The cost of these improvements is estimated at around £381k and would deliver an increase in income of around £590k, creating an uplift of £209k per annum to the parking account. There would also be a saving on external Project Management costs resulting in total uplift of £240k.
- 1.17 Where there is a request by Community Boards, Town/Parish Councils, and town committees to have more control over the enforcement of an area, such as dedicated patrols including input into what locations are patrolled at which times and on what days, there is the option for the Town/Parish Councils, and town committees to fund the cost of a dedicated resource.

Parking Charges

- 1.18 The changes to parking charges relating to Hours of Control, Removal of unfunded free parking sessions, Winslow Station Car Park, and on street charging amendments (as further detailed below) require an amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order and therefore require statutory consultation. The intention is to launch this consultation in December 2023.

Hours of Control

- 1.19 Parking charges contribute to the Council's revenue income. Where car parking charges are in place, the upkeep and maintenance of the car parks is funded by the users, thus reducing the need to draw down from other funding pots within the Council. Where parking charges are not in place, usage still causes wear and tear which reduces the life expectancy of the car park if not fully maintained. While the customer does not contribute towards the space they are using and therefore see the parking as 'free,' this is not the case as the maintenance requires funding.
- 1.20 Across Buckinghamshire there is a disparity between the charging periods, which stems from legacy arrangements. Furthermore, we are seeing an increase in the take up of the parking spaces on evenings, Sundays, and Bank Holidays. A survey of neighbouring authorities shows that many charge late into the evening and on Sunday/bank holidays. The results of the survey are provided in table 1.

Table 1 Neighbouring Authorities Charging Periods

Local Authority	Latest Charging Time (outside of 24hr charging)	Charge Sun/B.Hol
Buckinghamshire		
Aylesbury	21:00	Yes
Chilterns	18:00	No
South Bucks	20:00	Yes
Wycombe	19:00/20:00	Yes
Bracknell Forest	Specific evening charge applies 18:00 to 06:00	Yes
Oxford City	20:00	Yes
Oxfordshire South	18:00	Yes
Slough	22:00	Yes
St Albans	22:00	Yes
Three Rivers	18:30	No
Watford	22:00	Yes
Windsor & Maidenhead	21:00	Yes
Woking	Specific evening charge applies 18:00 to 06:00	Yes

1.21 In order to achieve consistency across Buckinghamshire, the first planned step is to align Sunday charging rates and charging start times, and to extend the charging end time to 19:00 for all car parks that currently cease charging before this time. At the same time, extension of On Street charging periods will continue to encourage customers into the car parks. The Off-Street changes can be seen at **Appendix B**. On Street is provided in **Appendix C**. The existing charging periods are included within the Appendices.

1.22 It is anticipated that extending the charging periods will generate additional income in the region of £147k.

Removal of unfunded free parking sessions

1.23 Across Buckinghamshire there are a number of one-hour free parking schemes that are paid for by the Parish Councils. There are also a number of free parking sessions that are not funded and these are therefore subsidised by Buckinghamshire Council. Introducing charges in these areas will create income in the region of £32,518 based on current usage levels.

1.24 The locations, along with the proposed tariffs are provided in table 2.

Table 2 Charges for currently non funded free parking sessions

Car park	Parking Period	Tariff	Comments
Wendover - Library	Up to 1 hr	£0.50	
Winslow - Market Square	Up to 1 hr	£0.50	
Amersham - KGVH	Up to 30 mins	£0.60	KGVH is being developed resulting in the car park moving out of BC control at some point

1.25 Whilst the charges for these locations will be included in the consultation to amend the Traffic Regulation Order, the relevant Town and Parish Councils will be given the opportunity to fund the charges to enable the free element to be retained. This is similar to the other funded free parking schemes.

Winslow Station Car Park.

1.26 The new Railway Station and associated car park is due to complete in 2024. The car park will be two storeys consisting of 365 spaces including 19 disabled bays, 13 electric vehicle re-charging points (equating to 26 spaces), 3 motorcycle spaces and a taxi rank with 3 spaces. The number of disabled bays is based on national standards¹, which provides that car parks with over 200 bays should include four disabled bays plus 4% of the total capacity.

1.27 The charges being consulted on are displayed in table 3. When considering charges, a review was undertaken of the surrounding station car park charges. The closest station is Bletchley, 6.34 miles away, charging £6.40 before 10am and £4.60 after 10am. The second closest is Milton Keynes Central, 7.02 miles away, charging for varied periods with long stay charges being up to 6hr £9.00, Up to 7hr £10.50, Over 7hr £11.70. The charges being consulted on for Winslow sit comfortably between the car park charges that are applied at Bletchley and Milton Keynes Central. The wider review of station car park charges is provided at **Appendix D**.

Table 2 Charges and Hours of Control for Winslow Station Car Park

Tariffs	Up to 1hr £0.90, Up to 2hr £1.70, Up to 3hr £2.20, Up to 4hr £2.70, Up to 9hr £6.10, Over 9hr £8.10.		
Season Tickets	1 month	3 months	12 months
	£143.00	£284.00	£1065
Hours of Control	Mon-Sun (incl bank holidays 07:00 to 21:00 Standard charges apply at all times.		

1.28 It is difficult to predict demand for the car park due to changes in commuter numbers post-COVID and this being a new un-tested route. Based on pre-COVID data, along with post covid data for car parks across Buckinghamshire that serve commuters, and EWR input on growth, it estimated that the net income could be between £60k and £165k per year, potentially rising to £235k per annum by year 5. A Parking Management Plan for the On Street parking restrictions, is under development. Proposals for parking restrictions on local roads to prevent station related parking by rail users will be consulted upon through the statutory process during 2024.

On Street Charges Amendments

¹ <https://tsrgd.co.uk/pdf/tal/1995/tal-5-95.pdf>

- 1.29 At the bottom of Oxford Road, High Wycombe, at the junction with the A4155 Marlow Road, there is an unregulated On Street parking area. The area can accommodate parking for up to 17 vehicles and is currently used all day free of charge. Introducing charges in this area will enable a greater turnover of space, thus support parking needs and create income in the region of £20k per annum, based on 80% occupancy. The charges being put forward are displayed in table 4. These align to the nearby West Street Car Park for Monday to Saturday, and the wider approach for Marlow of a flat day rate for Sunday and bank holidays.

Table 3 Charges and Hours of Control for Oxford Road

Hours of Control	Tariffs
Mon-Sat 07:00-19:00	Up to 30min £0.70, Up to 1hr £1.00, Up to 2hr £1.80, Up to 3hr £2.70, Up to 4hr £3.20, Up to 6hr £4.20, Over 6hr £6.70
Sun/B.Hol	All day £1.20

Free parking Day Allocation

- 1.30 Historically and to date, Town, and Parish Councils and HWBidCo have been permitted a variety of free parking periods/days each year in certain car parks. The legacy arrangements range from free after 3.30pm every Thursday in December to five free parking days per annum. **Appendix E** provides a summary of the legacy arrangements. In addition, since 2021 Buckinghamshire Council has offered free parking days on car parks that serve the high streets for the second and third Saturday in December.
- 1.31 In order to continue to offer free parking and to ensure consistency going forward, it is recommended that four free parking days are permitted per annum: two for Buckinghamshire Council to commit to Christmas free parking, and the remaining two to be used at the discretion of the Community Boards. The proposal in full is provided at **Appendix F**. **Appendix G** sets out which car parks are included/excluded for use with the proposal. The impact on the budget for four free days, considering car park inclusion and exclusions lists, is a saving of £25k.
- 1.32 The decision on when to use the two remaining days will be designated to the Community Boards in consultation with Town and Parish Councils or Town Committee. Allocating the decision to the Community Boards will enable wider engagement and support for local areas, whereas previously, Buckinghamshire Council ward members were not consulted.
- 1.33 Community Boards, Town and Parish councils, and HWBidCo will also be able to fund additional free parking days, and/or, evenings/weekends. This will be on a cost neutral basis for Buckinghamshire Council with the funding value being based on ticket sales data to enable accuracy around recharging and transparency on costs. Additionally, it enables ball point costs to be provided upfront.

Parking Assets Review

- 1.34 Parking provision and management is a key element of the Local Transport Plan and can also be used to support other corporate objectives around supporting our high streets, regeneration and improving travel choices for those seeking to travel in and around Buckinghamshire. It affects everyone in the community whether customers are looking for somewhere to park or are impacted by other people's parked vehicles. Additionally, it can influence the vitality and viability of local towns/villages, along with the attractiveness of tourist spots and residential areas. Parking features at the beginning and end of a visit for those customers using the car parks, and as such, the car parks are the first and last impression of a given area.
- 1.35 It is however widely recognised that parking takes up a lot of land and costs money to provide and to maintain. Currently, the Council owns / manages 96 car parks, 74 of which are managed by Parking Services with others managed by other Council services. These are a mixture of chargeable and free car parks.
- 1.36 To provide quality public parking facilities it is essential that the assets are financially healthy and managed in a way that provides additional income, or savings through responsive change. To support this objective, a financial review of the car parks is underway to determine which ones are best serving the community and which ones are running at a loss. The outcome will determine whether to retain a car park, repurpose, devolve, or dispose of either in full or in part. Financial analysis is in the early stages as the previous budget arrangements in SAP did not allow for profit and loss scrutiny per car park, however, for 2024/25 the savings are in the region of £299k.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.37 In 23/24, there is a 20% reduction on the Off-Street income budget and the reduction for 2022/23 was 35%. The forecast deficit as at the end of Q3 against the budget for 23/24 is c.£0.7m. There are a number of challenges that have contributed towards the current year deficit including CEO vacancy rates (though these have now reduced), changes in driver behaviour, closure of and repairs to car parks due to anti-social behaviour and tree fire, and maintenance cost to aging payment machines. The proposals highlighted in this report and set out in the draft Parking Strategy will reduce the deficit and enable financial sustainability of the service going forward.
- 1.38 Table 5 sets out the actual income pre-COVID, versus 23/24 budget and forecast.

Table 5 Income Pre and Post Covid

Income	2019/20	2023/24		Variance (Surplus) / Deficit £'000
	Outturn £'000	Budget £'000	Forecast as at Q3 £'000	
Total Parking Income	(12,507)	(11,351)	(10,136)	1,215
Off-Street	(10,162)	(8,624)	(8,009)	615
Pay & Display	(8,355)	(7,378)	(6,892)	486
PCN	(646)	(405)	(435)	(30)
Season Tickets	(695)	(518)	(437)	81
Other Income	(466)	(323)	(245)	78
On-Street	(2,345)	(2,727)	(2,127)	600
Pay & Display	(619)	(620)	(550)	70
PCN	(1,430)	(1,750)	(1,236)	514
Permit & Dispensation	(296)	(357)	(341)	16
Total Parking Expenditure	8,407	7,936	7,405	(531)
Net Parking Account	(4,100)	(3,415)	(2,731)	684

1.39 The Medium-Term Financial plan revenue proposals anticipate net savings and income, net of growth and inflation of £1,247k for 2024/25. From year 2025/26 onwards there is an expectation of recovery of parking income. This will however be down to many factors such as, driver behaviour and whether a hybrid working model continues to be the norm nationally. From FY 25/26 onwards, the net savings and income target, is expected to increase to £1,945k.

NB. The figures above will not agree exactly to the Budget Scrutiny/Cabinet pack produced for January Budget meetings as the Budget Scrutiny/Cabinet pack presentation includes consolidated figures for similar line items (savings, growth, income, inflation) for all services within Highways & Technical Services rather than just for Parking Operations. The individual line items are consistent with what has been discussed.

1.40 Implementation of the Parking Strategy proposals creates an uplift of £1,139k, against the Revenue budget and meets the inflation pressures included in the MTFP. The value is a combination of additional income and savings on expenditure; Table 6 provides the breakdown. Additionally, one off savings of £346k against Capital.

Table 6 Overview of Additional Income and Savings (already included in the MTFP)

Revenue (2024/25)	Itemised in report £'000	

Join NPP and remove subsidy for Wycombe RingGo fees	£156	Saving
Parking Payment Methods (Cashless Approach)	£220	Saving
Delivery Resource Model – Inhouse	£240	Add Inc.
Pathway to consistent charging:		
Hours of Control	£147	Add Inc.
Remove free parking sessions	£32	Add Inc.
Winslow Station Car Park (income starts 2025/26)	£0	
On Street Charges Amendments – Oxford Road	£20	Add Inc.
Free parking Day Allocation	£25	Saving
	£224	
Parking Asset Review	£299	
Total		£1,139

One off Capital Savings Description	Saving £'000
Winslow Station – opt to not install payment machines.	£25
On Street – opt to not replace 51 end of life machines.	£321
Total	£346

- 1.41 The above capital savings are yet to be factored into the capital programme.
- 1.42 The service will continue to monitor and manage budgets within the overall service and directorate cash envelope.
- 1.43 The changes to parking charges stated in this report require an amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order and therefore require statutory consultation. Following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, officers have commenced the consultation which runs from 23 January 2024 to 18 February 2024.
- 1.44 An Equality Impact Assessment screening is being carried to support the parking strategy. Further detailed equalities impact assessments will be completed for each of the programmes of activities referred to above which would result in a service change.

Section 151 Officer Comments

- 1.45 The s151 Officer has read and noted the report.

Director of Legal and Democratic Services Comments

- 1.46 The Director has read and approved the report.

Corporate implications

- 1.47 Buckinghamshire Council delivers the parking service to comply with the network management duties set out in the Traffic Management Act 2004. The enforcement side specifically helps reduce congestion, promote safety, and encourage modal shift

to alternative transport options, additionally supporting active travel measures and delivery of a sustainable transport network.

- 1.48 The ambitions within the draft Parking Strategy support the Corporate Plan objectives of the Council, as well as a number of our key adopted strategies including the Regeneration Framework, Local Transport Plan, and Climate Change & Air Quality Strategy. Our ambitions support local businesses and communities, by managing parking supply and implementing parking charging regimes that facilitate economic, social, transport and environmental objectives, whilst supporting a self-funding service, to help reduce impact in other areas.

Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 1.49 As the Parking Strategy is a Buckinghamshire wide document, there has not been specific local member engagement on it. However, should Cabinet adopt the Parking Strategy, there would be engagement with Community Boards and Local Members through the implementation of these recommendations. The strategy opens opportunities for Community Boards and Local Councils to fund additional enforcement and free parking for their areas.
- 1.50 As set out on the draft Strategy, in the coming year, it is our intention to reflect on our existing charges, season tickets and permits on a local basis. Engagement at a local level with Council Members will form part of those reviews.

Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 1.51 There are no statutory or constitutional requirements to publicly consult on the Parking Strategy. However, the implementation of a number of the proposals detailed in this paper require amendments to the Traffic Regulation Order which do require public consultation.

Next steps and timescales

- 1.52 A number of proposals in this report have been agreed in principle for early delivery which are being progressed through the Council's MTFP process. These include closure of car parks that are not profitable, changes to the hours of control for car parks county wide, including the removal of free parking periods at certain car parks, and a commitment to join the National Parking Platform (NPP) to provide choice to customers using digital payment methods, and remove the subsidy for Wycombe RingGo fees. Membership of the NPP will be completed early 2024.
- 1.53 Changes to the hours of control are subject to a statutory consultation to amend the Traffic Regulation Order. The outcome of the consultation and to seek a decision, will be brought back to Cabinet March/April 2024. .

Background papers

Appendix A	Draft Parking Strategy
Appendix B	Off Street charging period changes
Appendix C	On Street charging period changes
Appendix D	Station Car Park Charges - Surrounding Areas
Appendix E	Legacy Free Parking Days
Appendix F	Free Parking Days Proposal
Appendix G	Free Parking Days-Car Parks (included/excluded)

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 1.54 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please contact the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team by 5pm on 20 February 2024. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.