

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 12/23

Date: August 2023

Briefing note to: All Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To advise Members of the Committee of work undertaken on strategic parking issues in town centres across Medway

1 Background

- 1.1 At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2022, the Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services was asked if a strategic review of parking in town centres could be undertaken. This briefing note outlines the work undertaken to date.
- 1.2 In 2020/21, the Council commissioned a strategic assessment of parking in Medway, focussing on Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham and Strood. This work was intended to support and inform a wider Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) that would accompany the new Medway Local Plan.
- 1.3 The strategic assessment of parking in Medway comprised:
 - A baseline assessment of car parking facilities, identification of key issues and opportunities for enhancement.
 - The identification of strategic objectives and the development of potential options for delivery of these against identified issues and opportunities.
 - An Action Plan comprising the identification of measures against short, medium, and long-term delivery, with measures categorised by theme and set against the four towns of focus.

2 Baseline Assessment

- 2.1 A detailed baseline assessment (for 2019/20) of the supply of parking, demand for parking, and the potential future impact of development proposals was undertaken. This work recognised that each of the towns has its own identity and different needs in terms of parking provision and priorities. Key themes and priorities were therefore identified for Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham and Strood to ensure the local context was understood.
- 2.2 The baseline assessment reached several conclusions in relation to parking provision across Medway:
 - the current total supply of parking is sufficient for demand.
 - there is a mix of different parking types, and the distribution of car parks makes it possible to park near key destinations.

- car parking that is removed to facilitate residential or commercial development may not need to be re-provided to meet current parking demand, subject to assessment on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration car park location, proximity to other parking opportunities and public transport accessibility.
- the total supply of off-street parking across Medway can, overall, accommodate future growth, although a change in user behaviour will be necessary as demand for individual car parks is likely to exceed capacity.

2.3 Overarching issues and opportunities were then identified, which act as the principles for developing and evaluating potential policy interventions and scheme measures.

Issues:

- Variances in occupation: whilst several car parks operate close to or at capacity, others experience significant levels of spare capacity.
- Projected residential and employment growth is likely to increase parking demand.
- The road network has limited capacity to accommodate additional private car trips associated with forecast growth.
- The relationship between on-street and off-street provision, where changes to the latter may impact on demand for the former
- Achieving an appropriate balance between short-stay and long-stay commuter parking

Opportunities:

- Enhancement of facilities in some car parks to address under-occupancy and anti-social behaviour.
- The introduction of further 'Pay on Exit' payment systems and enhanced back-office technologies.
- Increased provision of EV charging points (on and off-street)
- Enhanced wayfinding and signage infrastructure to improve navigation.
- Effective enforcement to support the operational efficiency and management of parking.

3 Strategic Objectives and option development

3.1 To guide the development of options for addressing the issues and opportunities identified by the baseline assessment, the following strategic objectives were identified:

- Ensure adequate quality, safety, and security of all Council-operated car parks.
- Manage and optimise existing car parking provision to best meet the needs of the local community and economy, considering both short-stay and long-stay parking, local employers and employees, and commuters.
- Provide sufficient car parking and appropriate management solutions to help meet additional parking demand generated by projected future housing, employment, and commercial growth.
- Ensure there is sufficient and appropriately located parking provision for Blue Badge holders.
- Integrate parking management with active travel and public transport promotion through the provision of secured and sheltered cycle parking provision within Council-operated car parks and promoting public transport facilities across Medway.
- Ensure tariff structures, payment systems and permitted durations of stay promote the user behaviours required to accommodate future growth and help to encourage activity in town centres.

- Promote enhanced back-office technology and data collection systems, helping to improve management and enforcement practices, capture robust and efficient data on parking trends and usage, and to enhance the user experience of car parking in Medway.
- Ensure effective enforcement of parking to maximise available supply and minimise traffic disruption and congestion on the local highway network.
- Improve signage and wayfinding infrastructure in the four towns to facilitate efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians to and from car parking provision.

3.2 Options for the delivery of the strategic objectives can be grouped under seven main themes:

- **Parking provision:** measures that ensure off-street parking supply is safe, secure, and able to meet current parking demand and future growth, along with changes in travel patterns. These include consideration of parking classifications, tariffs and duration of stays, payment mechanisms, season tickets and information provision. A key decision will be whether new parking supply should be regarded as an automatic solution to meet rising demand, and how this would relate to the Council's Climate Change and sustainability priorities.
- **Technology:** this considers existing, emerging, and future technologies that could be utilised to enhance user experience as well as improving management and enforcement practices. Potential measures include Variable Message Signs (VMS) to display occupancy levels, ANPR and pay on exit systems, parking bay sensors and a Medway Parking app.
- **Wayfinding and signage:** improved wayfinding would improve visitor experience and help reduce unnecessary circulation within the town centres, particularly around the gyratory systems of Chatham and Gillingham. Improvements to pedestrian signage can enhance user experience and encourage greater use of locations with lower levels of pedestrian footfall.
- **Active travel:** there is an opportunity for car parking policies to incentivise mode shift. Measures to enhance pedestrian wayfinding could encourage people to park further from their destination and complete their journey on foot, rather than driving and parking within the town centres. They may also encourage use of underutilised car parks not considered to be in convenient locations. A reliable and high-quality bus network may encourage long-stay commuter parking to take place away from the town centres and connect residents and employees from riverside locations. This could support the relocation of car parks to periphery locations to facilitate redevelopment of the town centres, whilst also providing benefits in terms of air quality and congestion. Options for consideration include the installation of cycle parking in car parks, mapping/signage providing walking and cycle isochrones and travel times, and workplace parking levies.
- **Future mobility:** the nature of vehicle ownership and use is likely to change significantly in the medium and long-term with the development of electric vehicles, automated vehicles and ride sharing. Options to consider include additional electric vehicle charging points in public car parks, developing policies that encourage car sharing, provision of parking bays for car clubs and monitoring future trends for connected and autonomous vehicles.
- **Management and enforcement:** effective enforcement ensures that car parks are used as intended. Options to consider include a review of existing enforcement practices, adoption of technological improvements, targeted activity, and an assessment of the scope for increasing resources dedicated to enforcement.
- **User prioritisation:** The prioritisation of parking provision across different user groups is an important policy tool where parking demand is high, or supply is restricted, to ensure the parking needs of all users is met as far as possible. Options include a review

of provision for Blue Badge holders, prioritisation of enforcement activity in relation to Blue Badge parking bays and improved provision for parents and guardians.

- 3.3 A 'Climate Emergency' approach to future parking provision could be considered, whereby the Council does not construct additional parking facilities in the main town centres and prioritises measures most likely to deliver environmental and sustainability benefits. This approach takes into consideration the Council's climate change agenda, which promotes sustainable transport and active travel. It also acknowledges that existing traffic congestion may be exacerbated by the provision of additional car parking. The 'Climate Emergency' approach would consider how the nature and cost of car parking could incentivise a reduction to overall parking demand, displace parking to outer locations and encourage modal shift by promoting the use of public transport over the private car for part of the journey, or the whole journey. Of the options set out above, this approach would prioritise wayfinding, supporting active travel and public transport and the effective enforcement of parking controls to minimise congestion and improve air quality.
- 3.4 Following the identification of themed options for delivering the strategic objectives, it is possible to identify a series of actions that could be implemented across a short, medium, and long-term timeframe. This would reflect an 'umbrella' strategy to improve the overall condition and management of off-street parking provision across Medway to help maximise the efficiency of car parks and the operation of the local highway network. It is recognised, however, that specific options could be considered for each town, reflecting their individual characteristics, issues, and priorities:

Chatham

- Consolidating parking to larger scale car parks on the edge of town may help with congestion and allow existing car parks to be freed up for sustainable development.
- Improvements at The Brook and Market Hall car parks, which are currently subject to lower levels of utilisation than other town centre car parks.
- Improved pedestrian routes to the town centre.
- Real-time occupancy signage and changes to tariffs to direct users to alternative car parks
- Enhanced pedestrian, cycle and public transport links between the town centre and new large-scale development at Chatham Maritime and Chatham Waters to encourage sustainable travel.

Rochester

- Consider changes to short-stay maximum durations to promote turnover of visitors and revenue.
- Allowing flexibility of stay duration may support increased use of the underutilised Corporation Street and Easons Yard car parks, helping to manage a demand for parking that could outstrip supply over the lifespan of a new Local Plan
- Consider improved pedestrian links from car parks further away from the centre.
- Review the range of parking arrangements provided, along with pedestrian wayfinding information, taking into consideration the variety of different user groups, particularly new and infrequent visitors.

Gillingham

- Target key pedestrian routes from popular on-street locations to incentivise increased footfall and improve pedestrian and cycle links to encourage use of alternative car parks.
- Bench-mark parking tariffs against those for privately operated car parks
- Consider alternative parking tariffs and durations of stay to encourage the night-time economy.

Strood

- Consider additional parking capacity adjacent to the station if future growth generates increased commuter trips.
- Consider relocating parking outside of the core retail area to minimise trip generation through the town and help reduce congestion and air quality issues.

5. Summary

- 5.1 This briefing note outlines the strategic assessment of car parking in Medway that was undertaken in 2020/21, which was intended to support a new Local Plan. This comprised a baseline assessment and an indicative action plan for taking forward a range of options that would deliver against identified strategic objectives.
- 5.2 Delays to the Local Plan process meant that this strategic assessment did not move beyond a draft format, and it is likely this work will be revisited in due course. Many of the principles remain valid however, both strategically and operationally, and some of the options have been developed independently of this assessment; improvements to pedestrian routes and wayfinding in Chatham, for example, and the implementation of EV charging points and ANPR systems.

Michael Edwards, Head of Transport & Parking