

FINAL PLAN



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Scope

- 1.1.1 **SYSTRA** has been commissioned by **Mid & East Antrim** Borough Council (the Council) to conduct a review of Council-operated off-street parking facilities in **Mid & East Antrim** (the Borough). The work involves providing technical support and peer review to ensure that Council-operated car parking delivers the optimal impact and efficiency for **the Borough**.
- 1.1.2 The study requires a detailed assessment of existing off-street parking provision across the Borough, with a focus on the three areas of Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne. The assessment incorporates a review of the physical condition of car parks, management and enforcement, use and revenue generation, and perceptions of car parking facilities in the locations. An assessment of the potential impact that projected housing and employment growth will have upon future off-street car parking demand has also been undertaken.
- 1.1.3 As part of this study, a set of key objectives will be identified that aim to help optimise future car parking provision and management. Individual strategy options will subsequently be developed and tested to address identified issues and meet the identified objectives. These will then be packaged together to form the basis of a final Parking Strategy and Action Plan for the Borough.
- 1.1.4 The study is being completed in three phases:
- **Phase 1:** Baseline Review;
 - **Phase 2:** Stakeholder Engagement; and
 - **Phase 3:** Option Development and Strategy Development.

1.2 Strategy and Action Plan Report

- 1.2.1 This Strategy and Action Plan Report represents the final output of the study and presents the range the emerging strategy and Action Plan. Following this introductory section, the remainder of the report is structured as follows:
- **Section 2: Evidence Base & Options** – provides a high-level summary of the outputs from the two associated Baseline Report and Options Development Report that form the basis for the development of the Strategy and Action Plan;
 - **Section 3: Strategy Development** – sets out of the process of developing the strategy, with a focus on short and medium to long term measures; and
 - **Section 4: Action Plan** – presents the final set of proposed measures for inclusion within the Action Plan.

2. EVIDENCE BASE AND OPTIONS

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 This section provides a very short overview of the collated evidence base and established objectives for the strategy, as well as an overview of the options development process.
- 2.1.2 These are reported in full within the associated 'Baseline Report' and 'Options Development Report'.

2.2 Evidence Base

- 2.2.1 A number of key issues and opportunities have been identified during the baseline assessment process, as set out below:
- Whilst the general condition of most Council-operated car parks is fair, there are a number of locations that require improvements in order to provide a high quality, safe and secure environment. Tower Centre multi-storey was a notable example but since SYSTRA undertook the on-site surveys the Council has taken steps to bring the Tower Centre car park very close to ParkMark standards, however, other car parks are still in need of improvement works including Saint Brides Street;
 - There are constraints on the level of free parking provision within Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne, particularly during events, with a number of car parks operating close to or at capacity. Projected future employment and housing growth is likely to increase parking demand within Ballymena;
 - Improved wayfinding and signage infrastructure can help to improve navigation for visitors and help to identify the location of all car parks;
 - Improvements in technology is needed to make it as easy as possible for businesses, residents and visitors to pay for their parking. A review of the My Park app is required to ensure information is accurate;
 - All three towns would benefit from having a reduced and standardised tariff structure which would ensure visitors remain in the towns to help encourage economic growth;
 - The needs of workers and residents should be taken into consideration for all three towns. Workers and visitor permits could potentially improve the current situation;
 - Public transport infrastructure across the Borough could see improvement, particularly in the rural areas where there are limited daily services resulting in people preferring to drive into the town centres; and
 - Effective enforcement can help to improve the efficiency and management of parking and minimises incidences of inappropriate parking.

2.3 Objectives

- 2.3.1 Based on the key issues and opportunities identified and set out above, the following high-level aims have been identified to help form the basis of the final objectives of the parking strategy for Mid and East Antrim:
- Ensure adequate quality, safety and security of all Council-operated car parks;

- Ensure parking provision facilitates appropriate parking in key locations, including minimising the impact of on-street parking on traffic circulation, without affecting retail spend;
- Manage and maximise existing car parking provision to best meet the needs of the local community, considering both short-stay and long-stay parking, local employers and employees, as well as commuters;
- Provide sufficient car parking provision and appropriate management solutions to help meet any additional parking demand generated by projected future employment and housing growth;
- Provide sufficient and appropriately located disabled parking provision;
- Promote travel by sustainable means through improved and increased cycle parking provision, and promoting public transport facilities across the Borough;
- Ensure effective enforcement of parking measures so as to maximise available supply and minimise traffic disruption and congestion on the local highway network;
- Improve signage and wayfinding infrastructure in the three locations to facilitate efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians to and from car parking provision; and
- Improve technology to make it as easy as possible for businesses, visitors and residents to pay for their parking and for the Council to manage the car parks.

2.4 Options

2.4.1 A range of scheme options and policy tools have been considered to address the identified issues and opportunities. These have been broadly classified into the following categories:

- Pricing;
- Technology;
- Signage & Wayfinding;
- Supply;
- User Prioritisation;
- Enforcement & Management; and
- Marketing & Promotion.

2.4.2 The potential benefits offered by each individual type of measures has been assessed, with an overarching appraisal of benefits undertaken.

3. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Developing a Strategy for Mid and East Antrim

- 3.1.1 It is clear from the collated evidence base that the Mid and East Antrim requires a progressive parking strategy that manages and enhances the existing provision and provides opportunities to utilise Smart technologies to engender operational efficiencies and benefits to users.
- 3.1.2 Whilst there are some car parks that experience high levels of utilisation, these are generally free to use and, hence, relatively unconstrained. Overall, there can, generally, be considered to be sufficient car parking capacity at the present time. Furthermore, this is likely to continue into the future, based upon current expectations of growth within each of the three main towns, with the possible exception of Ballymena where a significant proportion of the supply is in private ownership and wider redevelopment is a more immediate proposition. In general terms, the absence of significant pressures on capacity provides the opportunity to implement progressive, holistic plans to utilise current car park assets in a sustainable manner that best supports the local communities and underlying economy.
- 3.1.3 There are a range of pricing structures amongst the paid car parks across the Borough; however, overarching all of these tariffs is the '£1 for 5 hours' rate that is available in all Council car parks. This additional tariff is not cohesively embedded into an overall pricing structure and it has a strong influence over the way individuals park. The stakeholder engagement process identified a tendency amongst car park users to utilise this tariff rate, even if they could potentially purchase a cheaper ticket, as it provides certainty that the individual can park for as long as required. Whilst this might have some positive impacts for the town, in terms of dwell times, it also discourages the turnover of parking spaces within high demand car parks located in premium locations. The '£1 for 5 hours' tariff also creates challenges in understanding underlying demand for parking, as it dominates tickets sales and yet provides no real information about parking durations of stay. This restricts the information available with which to predict future behaviour.
- 3.1.4 An important consideration is the relationship between off-street car parking (within the control of the Council) and on-street parking (managed by the DfI). The presence of free short-stay on-street car parking in the heart of Ballymena and Larne, in particular, currently creates behavioural responses from car drivers that may not benefit these towns as a whole, and certainly reduce the attractiveness of much of the off-street parking provision. Whilst the Council can only lobby the DfI for changes to on-street controls, it will be important to consider this relationship between the on-street and off-street car parking "offer" to drivers. This strategy for off-street car parking can either be proactive in establishing a philosophy for all parking across the town or, alternatively, can seek to simply manage the negative impacts of some of the current on-street controls. Ultimately, a proactive approach should deliver longer term benefits to the town.
- 3.1.5 The influence of parking on town centre traffic circulation is also an important consideration, with vehicular movements currently causing constraints within certain areas. Greater understanding of the 'gateways' into each town and influencing drivers choices at these points of the network is an important way to reduce unnecessary vehicle trips within the core of each town centre. Similarly, the role of car parks as pedestrian 'gateways' into the heart of the retail areas is also important, requiring good wayfinding measures and urban realm.

Focus for Ballymena

- 3.1.6 At present, the key issues facing Ballymena, in terms of parking, relate to making the most of the existing parking stock through improvement in the quality of the supply in specific locations, in tandem with appropriate pricing mechanisms and signage. Whilst development proposals remain uncertain, there is the potential for regeneration and redevelopment, including some privately-owned car parking, which could change the overarching balance of demand and supply for parking. The strategy needs to respond to this potential shift, albeit potentially through demand management, rather than supply side, measures.
- 3.1.7 The current one-way system around the town creates some challenges for circulation to and from individual car parks and, undoubtedly, influences user choices over car parks. This in combination with the presence of free on-street car parking in the heart of the retail core, has created a relatively car intensive centre. Whilst recent enhancements to the urban realm have, and will, help off-set some of these impacts, the off-street parking strategy needs to play its part in minimising the impacts of vehicular trips at the centre of the town.

Focus for Carrickfergus

- 3.1.8 Parking demand is high at the rail station in Carrickfergus, as well as some of the free to use car parks; however, general provision for the town centres is considered to be adequate to meet demand. Based on current growth projections this is not anticipated to change significantly in the coming years.
- 3.1.9 Whilst both the core town centre and waterfront offers attractive historic assets and leisure opportunities, the degree of cohesion between these areas suffers from accessibility barriers, including the A2 Coastal Road that dissects parts for the centre. This creates challenges for managing the overall car parking assets and so the strategy needs to focus on supporting connectivity and way-finding between car parks and key town centre assets, so as to maximise the available parking spaces across the town.

Focus for Larne

- 3.1.10 There is a relatively high number of off-street car parking locations across Larne, some of which were not specifically designed as public car parking but have become available with changes in surrounding land uses. Furthermore, the availability of free to use and charged parking is often geographically very close, leading to significant underutilisation of charged car parks.
- 3.1.11 The one-way system around the town results in some challenges in terms of wayfinding, which, added to the availability of free on-street parking along the High Street, creates unnecessary town centre circulation. The off-street car parking strategy needs to consider how best to reduce the impact of vehicles within the core retail areas, without unnecessarily restricting access to the town as a whole.

Focus for coastal and rural car parking

- 3.1.12 There are a range of other coastal and rural off-street car parks located across the Borough. Some of these are within clusters around smaller settlements and leisure attractions, whilst others are standalone provision often associated with a specific land use. All of these car parks are free to use, with a variety of standard of provision. Demand for these car parks is clearly highly correlated with leisure activities, resulting in both seasonal variation and higher weekend demand.
- 3.1.13 The strategy needs to ensure all provision is safe and secure for use, in particular during quieter times of operation when natural surveillance is lower. Whilst these car parks would offer the potential for some revenue generation from the introduction of tariffs, the impact upon the local tourism economy needs to be considered. In addition, the dispersed nature of the car parks would make management and enforcement of charged parking relatively expensive.

3.2 Overarching Strategy Principles

- 3.2.1 Responding to the assessment of issues and opportunities for off-street parking across the Borough, the overarching principles for the strategy are set out as follows:
- Maximise the benefits derived from the Councils parking assets, avoiding un-utilised car parking provision;
 - Manage traffic circulation around the town as it accesses car parks, utilising appropriate technology, so as to minimise network congestion;
 - Ensure cohesion between the management and operation of off and on-street parking and work with other car park operators to ensure an integrated approach to car park management and operation across each town centre; and
 - Inform and inspire the local community and visitors, through a variety of mediums, about parking provision and the range of options available to them to access a growing town centre economy.

3.3 Short Term Measures

- 3.3.1 Within the short term, the primary focus of the parking strategy is to manage existing provision and introduce 'quick wins' to ensure the effective integration of the DfI car parks with the Councils existing parking stock and to enhance the overall parking offer. These short term measures are summarised as follows:
- Ensure a consistent high standard of parking provision across the Borough;
 - Manage and make maximum use of available parking assets to support town centre vitality and provide for the needs of all users;
 - Work with other car parking providers, including the DfI, to ensure adequate, appropriate and consistent car parking provision, encompassing both on and off-street provision;
 - Provide clear vehicular and pedestrian routings to/from car parking locations that minimise vehicle circulation and ensure ease of access to the town centres;
 - Introduce clear and consistent parking tariffs that support the wider management of parking, with a range of easy payment mechanisms; and
 - Ensure optimum approach to enforcement, balancing the need to encourage good parking behaviour, without unnecessary strictness, whilst delivering value for money from the resources employed.

Consistent High Parking Standard

- 3.3.2 The baseline site audit work indicated some variation in the perceived condition, safety and security of individual car parks across both specific towns and the Borough as a whole. There is also a range of quality provided by non-council operators of car parks. As 'gateway' points either into the retail core of each town centre, or to tourism and leisure attractions along the coast, there are significant benefits that can be derived through continuing to improve the overall quality of car parks, including access and egress points for vehicles and pedestrians, and creating an enhanced pedestrian environment.
- 3.3.3 The ParkMark system provides a set of benchmark criteria to ascertain for each individual car park, although in terms of quality of wayfinding and connectivity higher aspirations should also be sought to ensure parking provision has a positive influence on town centre urban realm.
- 3.3.4 The Council should also seek to work in partnership with other car park operators in the town to ensure consistently high standards of parking provision.

3.3.5 Within the short term there is a specific requirement to consider the quality of provision within the Tower Centre Multi-Story Car Park in Ballymena. Whilst located within a prime location within the centre of the town, there are a number of inherent issues with the design that result in safety and security concerns. It will be important to address these issues in order to ensure this car park remains attractive for users.

Manage and maximise provision

3.3.6 Within the short term, there will remain considerable pockets of spare parking capacity across all of the town centres. How best to utilise this capacity in a sustainable manner, that does not impact upon future parking needs, is a key issue.

3.3.7 The stakeholder engagement process identified the potential benefits of providing all-day parking at affordable rates in order to permit low paid workers to park within the town centre closer to their place of employment. Whilst this concept may have equality merits, and could discourage employees from parking on-street in residential areas, it needs to be evaluated within the wider context of projected growth within the town. Allocating parking in the short term to all day parking, with very low levels of turnover, is likely to foreshorten the time horizon in which future pressure on parking supply could materialise. Establishing a precedent for long-stay employee parking may also encourage travel behaviours that become unsustainable in the future.

3.3.8 The strategy does not, therefore, specifically incorporate this particularly type of measure but rather it seeks to improve the utilisation of car parks through a more balanced overall management of spaces that will facilitate future growth in demand in a more controlled manner across each town.

3.3.9 The evidence base indicates that there are certain preferential car parks within each town that are well utilised. Whilst many of these are free to use, and so attractive for long-stay parking, other popular charged parks are, unsurprisingly, in close proximity to the main retail offer of each town. It is important to ensure that these popular car parks have suitable levels of provision for blue badge holders but also other user groups, such as 'mother and child' parking or electric vehicle charging locations. In addition, long-stay parking in the remaining spaces could be discouraged to provide greater opportunity for parking in these popular locations. If car parking becomes more available then this could be particularly useful in discouraging vehicles from circulating around the town to find on-street parking. This is linked with a proposed change in pricing structure, detailed further in Section 3.3.24 below. An example of the type of car park where this approach could be adopted would be Springwell Street in Ballymena, or High Street in Carrickfergus.

3.3.10 Utilisation of spare capacity for other uses, such as coaches or motorhomes, could also be considered, particularly within some of the coastal car parks but also some of the more peripheral town centre car parks. Whilst it is acknowledged that providing dedicated provision for these vehicle classes can be challenging and needs to be sensitively delivered, it is preferable to accommodate them in dedicated provision rather than resulting ad hoc parking. A lack of coach parking was identified within Ballymena, with the suggestion this acts as a deterrence to coach trips to and from the town.

Partnership Working

3.3.11 Whilst the Council is now the predominate operator of off-street car parks across the Borough, there are a number of different car park operators, relating to retail centres and station. Furthermore, the DfI remains responsible for all on-street parking controls across the Borough. The Council therefore needs to continue to work in partnership with the other operators/organisations to ensure a coherent strategy relating to parking provision.

3.3.12 Critical to this partnership working is an understanding of the relative commercial motives of different operators. Whilst some operator's interests are limited solely to commercial

management of the car parks themselves, others have wider business concerns that are the primary influence on how they operate their car parks (e.g. supermarkets).

- 3.3.13 Establishing coherent pricing structures across all town centre car park will always be a challenge as by the nature of a competitive market it will be in the interests of the commercial operator to establish its tariffs in response to the Councils payment structures so as to maximise the benefits, either in terms of car parking revenue or the wider attractiveness of their associated offers (e.g. retail centres). Whilst this is clearly a perfectly acceptable commercial practice, it can create challenges if the Council is seeking to utilise tariffs as part of a wider town centre management strategy.
- 3.3.14 There are, however, always opportunities presented by potential growth in the demand for parking to work with other car park operators to the mutual benefit of all. In particular this can be important in terms of shaping the role of individual car parks around the town, e.g. to serve specific land-uses, high/low turnover, discourage town centre vehicle circulation. Whilst much of this will develop over time to respond to future development, it is recommended that the principles are established in advance in order to facilitate effective change over time.
- 3.3.15 Perhaps of greater importance, is ensuring coherence between the Councils off-street parking offer and the on-street parking provision in the heart of the town centres, in particular Ballymena and Larne. As has already been highlighted, the presence of free on-street parking in the centres creates a strong incentive to drive and circulate around the towns, rather than park directly in an off-street car park at a charge. Whilst some retailers may consider this to be an important functionality, permitted short shopping trips, it also facilitates a poor public realm environment, including poor air quality issues, that may have a negative impact upon the wider retail offer of the towns. Working in partnership with the DfI to examine ways of reducing town centre circulation will have wider benefits to the quality of the retail environment within each town.
- 3.3.16 Working in partnership with private operators is also important in ensuring high quality provision of car parks across the town, as discussed in the previous section on car park standards.

Infrastructure & Signage

- 3.3.17 There is currently a predominance to utilise certain key car parking within each of the towns that impacts on the way in which people search for parking spaces. In addition, there are wider traffic circulation issues around the towns, in particular Ballymena and Larne, caused by the one-way systems. The provision of signage and appropriate traffic management infrastructure is therefore considered to be an important tool in influence travel choices.
- 3.3.18 The extent of the one-way systems can create additional circulation issues in themselves. Opportunities to minimise the total lengths of trips to and from car parks should, therefore, be considered.
- 3.3.19 Creating vehicular 'gateways' into the town can be an important visual signal that a motorist is entering the core town centre. Alongside this the provision of detailed information about the closest available parking provision and its proximity to core town centre locations can encourage drivers to alter behaviour. This needs to be reinforced through appropriate public realm and way-finding provision from each car park into the town centre.
- 3.3.20 Identification of 'Gateways' into each town – vehicular and pedestrian
- Ballymena:
 - A26 Larne Road Link;
 - Bridge Street;
 - A42 Galgorm Road;
 - Cullybackey Road;

- A26 Ballymoney Road;
 - Thomas Street;
 - A43 Cushendall Road; and
 - A42 Broughshane Road.
- Carrickfergus
 - A2 (west);
 - Ellis Street;
 - North Road; and
 - A2 Marine Highway.
 - Larne:
 - A2 (Circular Road Roundabout);
 - A8/Pound Street;
 - The Rodens;
 - Old Glenarm Road;
 - Glenarm Road; and
 - Curran Road.

3.3.21 Ideally, parking provision would be available as close to each of these interception points, encouraging people with a destination in the core town centre to leave their vehicles close to these points, thus reducing town centre traffic circulation. A good example of this would be vehicles approaching Larne along the A2 parking in the Circular Road Car parks, without having to enter the core town centre highway network. Whilst there are some other examples of this, in practice the existing locations of car park and wider physical constraints means that this is not always the case, nor would it be feasible to provide in the future. For these corridors it is therefore important to encourage use of car parks that require minimal circulation of the town.

3.3.22 Through the introduction of Variable Message Signs on the peripheral of the town, advice on car park provision can be disseminated to drivers prior to arrival within the town centre. Information on parking availability can be displayed, which can subsequently encourage use of underutilised car park. Used alongside static signage, a coherent set of information can be provided to drivers to ensure they minimise their travel time and distance when accessing a car park.

3.3.23 Footfall is a good indicator of town centre viability, any vehicle counter information collected could be considered in tandem with footfall information to improve picture of town centre use.

3.3.24 Equally important is the provision of coherent and consistent way-finding from car parks to key town centre locations. This is particularly important for the car parks on the periphery of the town. The planning and placemaking powers the Council now have can be used to support and drive this.

Pricing and Payment

3.3.25 As previously discussed, there are a range of pricing structures amongst the paid car parks across the Borough; however, overarching all of these tariffs is the '£1 for 5 hours' rate. There are also a range of options for paying for parking, including pay on foot machines, phone payment, or utilisation of the ParkMobile App.

3.3.26 The payment mechanisms are considered to be appropriate to meet short term requirements for the car parks. The range of mechanisms is considered to meet different user group needs, albeit it is accepted that there are opportunities for improvement. Of greater importance in the short term is considered to be the need to focus upon the pricing structures themselves.

- 3.3.27 The '£1 for 5 hours' is not helpful in understanding, or influencing, demand for parking across the town. Whilst this is not to say that the tariff itself is inappropriate, the fact that it dominates the rest of the parking tariff structure distorts the relationship between price and demand. Alongside this, the presence of free on-street car parking in some of the town centres further distorts the overall relationship.
- 3.3.28 As a short term measure, it is proposed that a revised tariff structure is introduced that includes ½ hour free, 60p for 1½ hours, £1 for 3 hours across the Council car parks. In addition, a £1.50 for 6 hour tariff would apply in most car parks, with the exception of the most popular core town centre car parks. Alongside this, it is proposed that this tariff is applied within some of the free to use car parks to remove inconsistencies across towns and to off-set some of the potential revenue loss from the proposed new tariff structure.
- 3.3.29 The aim would be to utilise some of the spare off-street parking capacity to encourage short-stay 30 minute parking in off-street car parks, rather than on-street (as discussed in Section 3.3.9 above). Whilst this would not generate any revenue for the Council, it would seek to reduce town centre vehicle circulation and create an enhance town centre environment.
- 3.3.30 The aim of the revised tariff structure would be to encourage reasonable turnover of vehicles in prime parking locations, whilst still permitting long-stay parking in more peripheral parking locations.
- 3.3.31 The recommendation would be to apply this tariff structure for a 2 year period and to the conduct a detailed assessment of ticket sales data to gain a greater understanding of parking demand across each car park, town centre, and the Borough as a whole. This would then inform a more robust pricing policy going forward.

Technology

- 3.3.32 The short term priority in relation to technology should be a market testing exercise, engaging with the market to establish what Smart Parking technology providers could offer to Mid and East Antrim. This exercise will provide options and costs for the medium and long term, this should include the option of a mixed approach e.g. including both ANPR and sensors. Inviting the market to engage at an early stage should also help to define a future procurement process.
- 3.3.33 Introducing Variable Message Signs on the number of available spaces within each car park should be another short term focus. Information provided through these signs can encourage use of underutilised car parking provision and help reduce congestion on the road network. The VMS should be focussed on the agreed Gateways into each town.
- 3.3.34 It is noted that a number of car parks within Mid & East Antrim have Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) installed, existing provision is considered to be adequate; however, it is recommended that an assessment of their usage is undertaken to ensure charging points are located in the most optimum car parks.

Management and Enforcement

- 3.3.35 The current management and enforcement regime offers the Council the advantage being part of a wider contracting arrangement across multiple public sector organisations, and means the day-to-day management is delivered outside the Council. The inevitable disadvantage of this approach is that the Council has less influence over the approaches adopted, in particular in relation to enforcement.
- 3.3.36 Given the proposed short terms measures set out in relation to pricing structures, including the subsequent two-year review, is recommended that the current enforcement regime is maintained over the same period. At this point, as full operational review can be undertaken with full revenue generation implications available.

- 3.3.37 In the short-term, therefore, the focus should be upon negotiating some of the details of the contractual arrangements, including levels of enforcement. It is recommended that these focus upon prime car park locations, where higher turnover of vehicles would be advantageous and, hence, a benefit to ensuring appropriate enforcement.

3.4 Medium to Long Term Measures

- 3.4.1 Within the medium to longer term, the focus of the parking strategy needs to reflect the potential changing dynamics of the individual towns, providing a positive influence supporting economic growth and managing travel behaviour. Furthermore, the role of technology in transport is anticipated to significantly diversify over the next 5 to 10 years, enabling alternative approaches to delivering parking services.
- 3.4.2 The key areas of the longer term strategy are as follows:
- Develop the available parking stock to support the focus of development across the towns and wider coastal and rural leisure requirements
 - Prioritise available parking for different user groups on the basis of identified need
 - Keep under review on-street parking provision and restrictions, giving due consideration for the varying needs of different parking user groups across town centres
 - Ensure adequate information provision, through a variety of different mediums, to direct visitors and permit locals to make informed travel decisions

Development of Parking Stock

- 3.4.3 The masterplanning exercises conducted within each town centre around 2010 all identified a range of development potential across the towns. Whilst the intervening periods has not resulted in significant growth, this demonstrates the potential for future growth.
- 3.4.4 Ballymena has undergone a range of public realm enhancements within the town and is considered to offer the greatest potential for development, with proposals for the St Patrick's Barracks site redevelopment having an impact upon demand for parking. In addition, it is understood that the privately-operated Alexander Street Car Park is subject to redevelopment proposals that could directly impact upon the supply of town centre parking.
- 3.4.5 Specific development opportunities are less clear within Carrickfergus and Larne and, indeed, central forecasts of growth for these towns are currently low; however, there remain potential requirements and/or opportunities to develop the parking stock within these towns as well, so as to enhance overall provision.
- 3.4.6 As a general principle underlying the strategy when considering developing the parking stock, the key consideration needs to be the impact that any additional provision will have upon vehicle circulation around the town. There may be merit in consolidating parking provision on sites that are more accessible, both in terms of vehicle access and proximity to retail and leisure facilities, particularly if then permits other current car parks to be redeveloped. This is particularly the case within Larne, where parking provision is considered dispersed and, in places, piecemeal.
- 3.4.7 A development plan may designate an area of parking restraint, within which a reduction in the Department's published car parking standards can be applied and this could be used as a policy tool to manage the overall parking supply in certain areas, though alternative modes would need to be strongly represented in these areas.
- 3.4.8 Another key consideration is the potential economic benefits of releasing land in the centre of the three areas that is currently used to provide car parking in order to enable development. However, it is vital to ensure that such action is offset against overall car parking provision to ensure supply is able to accommodate existing and forecast future parking demand. It is noted that it is not possible to establish what different car parks and

parking provision are used for through the existing tariff structure, payment systems and resultant parking demand data. The introduction of a standardised tariff structure will help to provide a firm dataset that can be used to recommend changes to parking provision or closures of particular car parks. However, it is important to recognise that different arrangements may be needed in terms of developing strategies for the operation and management of Council car parking provision for Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne due to differences in the character and nature of the three areas.

Prioritisation of Users

- 3.4.9 The proposed short terms changes to parking tariffs is anticipated to provide much greater insight into individual car park behaviour. This will provide the opportunity to understand the role of each car park and how this can be influenced in order to provide a balanced supply of car parking across each town centre, as well as in coastal locations.
- 3.4.10 Whilst, based on current predictions, parking demand will not increase excessively over the coming years, parking pressures will remain and could increase within specific car parks and, hence, it will become increasingly important to consider the prioritisation of parking needs in these areas. This could be in terms of the duration of stay permitted in different car parks; the tariffs applied, or the specific designation of bays for individual user groups. The data from the review of ticket sales will provide valuable insight into the requirements of parking provision.
- 3.4.11 The designation of short/long term stay car parks should be investigated with a view to harmonisation of tariffs' especially in locations that are affected by seasonally busier periods, when the demand for long stay car parks is increased.
- 3.4.12 Whilst blue badge provision is provided in most car parks, the future demand for this should be monitored through discussions with access groups. Similarly, on-street waiting restrictions, where blue badge holders may park, should be monitored to ensure these do not interfere with traffic circulation around the town.
- 3.4.13 It should be ensured that there is an appropriate provision of parking allocated to blue badge holders within individual off-street car parks across the Borough. Within multi-story car parks it would be appropriate to spread such provision over a number of floors providing they are in close proximity to lifts.

On-going influence of On-Street Parking Provision

- 3.4.14 The evidence base has identified a range of issues relating to on-street parking provision within and surrounding some of the town centre. These include both the impact of free short-stay parking in core retail streets, as well as parking in residential streets.
- 3.4.15 Measures outlined within the short-term strategy seek to reduce the impact of vehicles circulating around the town centre attempting to find free on-street spaces by permitting free ½ hours off-street car parking. It is recommended that this approach is reviewed after two years to determine both the success of the measure but, more broadly, whether the retention of free on-street parking is beneficial to the town as a whole. Whilst on-street parking restrictions are beyond the direct control of the Council there may be the opportunity to demonstrate a clear case why the partial, or complete, removal of free on-street parking in the heart of the town, is optimal.
- 3.4.16 Some residential areas on the periphery of town centres have parking pressures relating to different groups of users wishing to park in these streets, namely residents and workers. In some cases this can create an over-crowded road space, restricting vehicle movements. Depending upon the growth of demand for parking, as well as the impact of the short-term pricing measures, these pressures could increase and so there may be a requirement to lobby for additional controls to prioritise residential parking in residential streets.

- 3.4.17 The short-term parking measures include proposals for additional provision for coach and motorhomes. The impact of these measures should be monitored to determine if there remain any issues within on-street parking of these vehicles, particularly for overnight parking, with remedying measures proposed, if required.

Information & Technology

- 3.4.18 We would recommend Real-Time Information Technology is prioritised over the medium to long term. This should be driven by the market testing exercise and could include parking sensors in individual bays and also the introduction of ANPR cameras at car park entry/exit. The sensors and ANPR could be used to gather and transmit information, improving the efficiency of management, payment and compliance monitoring processes.
- 3.4.19 Longer term a parking management system could be introduced, a platform which integrates multiple data sources, including on-street data and also has a public facing front end. Tying into the provision of real-time information, smart parking technology allows the Council to monitor the duration of stay of vehicles and alert parking attendants to vehicles which have stayed beyond their maximum allotted time. Data collected through this technology allows for the identification and analysis of parking trends over long periods of time and over the longer term could facilitate a move to a more dynamic pricing model.
- 3.4.20 Any such technology platform should offer future resilience with consideration given to vehicle to infrastructure connectivity, providing accessibility for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CAV).
- 3.4.21 Over the medium to long term, consideration should also be given to increasing the number of electric vehicle charging points as ownership levels of electric vehicles increases. Such provision would encourage drivers to charge their vehicle in an off-street and safe environment.

4. STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This section sets out a series of actions to be implemented as part of the parking strategy process. As with the previous sections, the actions are disaggregated into short and medium/long term to reflect potential changes in dynamic of the town centres, and technological advances, over that period.

4.2 Short Term

- 4.2.1 A total of fourteen short term actions have been identified for implementation over the next two years. These are set out below along with associated outcome monitoring tools that can be applied to gauge success.

Consistent High Parking Standard

- Set aspiration to meet and exceed the ParkMark standard in all Council-operated car parks across the Borough, seeking to establish a consistent standard of car parks as 'gateways' leading into the core town centre.
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Awarding of Park Mark standard; programme of formal audits alongside feedback from Civil Enforcement Officers and public.
 - **Cost implications:** Urban realm, pedestrian and signage infrastructure.
- Deliver enhancements to the Tower Centre Multi-Story Car Park (Ballymena) to ensure it remains safe and secure for full operational use

- **Outcome Monitoring:** reported criminal activity, public perceptions of safety
 - **Cost implications:** CCTV, Lighting, minor structural works
- It has been recognised that since the SYSTRA Audits took place that the Council has undertaken a number of improvement works on the Tower Centre Multi-Storey Car Park, and the Car Park is now close to or is meeting ParkMark standards.

Manage and maximise provision

- Maximise the use of available parking provision by prioritising specific user groups in popular car parks, including blue badge, mother & child bays, electric vehicle charging
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park utilisation data
 - **Cost implications:** signs & lines, car park revenues, information provision
- Designate popular car parks for priority short-stay parking, alongside changes to pricing structures (see below)
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park utilisation data
 - **Cost implications:** signs & lines, car park revenues, information provision
- Consider opportunities for coach and motorhome off-street parking provision to negate impacts of these vehicles types parking on-street in confined locations.
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park utilisation data
 - **Cost implications:** signs & lines, car park revenues, information provision

Partnership Working

- Establish protocols for discussions with the DfI (responsible for on-street parking provision) and private car park operators to assist with appropriate management of parking provision and to facilitate smooth town centre traffic circulation
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Established protocols.
 - **Cost Implications:** Minimal.
- Commence a market testing exercise with Smart Parking technology suppliers
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Establish options and costs.
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited
- Leasing out of the top floor of the Tower Multi-Story Car Park during weekdays to local businesses or other private actors for a fixed term, for the purpose of attaining guaranteed income as well as managing the demand of wider parking provision.
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Establish terms and conditions of lease
 - **Cost Implications:** Will provide guaranteed income, Additional barriers and signs, Management of lease

Infrastructure & Signage

- Development of external 'gateway' locations coming into core town centres that act as entry points into the heart of each town, as well as 'information points' to influence choice of parking locations
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Traffic counts and car park occupancy
 - **Cost implications:** 'Gateway' treatments
- Development of a static sign and way-finding strategy, in addition the introduction of VMS on key arterial routes into town, to influence traffic circulation within the town and the choices drivers make about parking provision.
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Traffic counts and car park occupancy

- **Cost implications:** VMS signage and supporting technological infrastructure, static signage provision
- Enhanced public realm connecting car parks to core retail areas, promoting car parks as internal 'gateways' into the town.
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Pedestrian counts
 - **Cost implications:** Urban realm enhancements

Pricing and Payment

- Maintain current payment mechanisms but conduct analysis of changes patterns of payment mechanisms over time
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** breakdown of ticket sales by payment type
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited
- Introduce revised tariff structure to encourage very short-stay parking in car parks rather than on-street, as well as increase turnover of parking in popular locations. Review outcomes after two years to enable refinement of structure.
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** car park occupancy, breakdown of ticket sales by payment type
 - **Cost Implications:** Information provision, new ticket machines and barrier provision.

Management and Enforcement

- Maintain current contractual arrangements but seek enhanced enforcement of designated short-stay car parking to ensure effective turnover of vehicles within these car parks. Review after two years, alongside analysis of ticket sales data to determine optimum regime
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Level of PCN issued, feedback on level of parking offences.
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited

4.3 Medium to Long Term

- 4.3.1** Nine longer term actions have been identified for implementation from two years hence. The majority of these are flexible in nature, reflecting the uncertainty surrounding potential development with each town, as well as changes to tariff structures, and how these may the impact this has upon the overall dynamic of parking requirements. It is also key to recognise that while the Council should seek to apply a consistent approach across all car parks, there will be car parks which are deemed of a higher priority to have improvements. Therefore a graded approach to taking these actions is seen as acceptable.

Development of Parking Stock

- Development of parking stock to reflect changes in supply of private off-street car parking, as well as potential increases in demand. Potential consolidation of parking provision to release future development land.
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park utilisations
 - **Cost Implications:** potential car park construction costs

Prioritisation of users

- Further prioritisation of car park use based upon additional ticket sales data and any development / consolidation of car parking provision
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park occupancies, ticket sales data
 - **Cost Implications:** signs and lines, car park revenues, information provision

On-going influence of On-Street Parking Provision

- Work with DfI to review the impact of free short-stay parking in off-street car parks on pressures for on-street parking, with the potential promote rationalisation of on-street provision to enhance the town centre environment
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** On-street parking occupancies, town centre traffic congestion
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited
- Review parking pressures within residential streets resulting from changes in off-street parking tariffs and promote prioritisation of residential parking, if required
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Reported parking conflicts in residential streets
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited
- Review impact of off-street parking provision for coaches and motorhomes and develop further provision, as required
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Reported on-street parking conflicts
 - **Cost Implications:** Limited

Information & Technology

- Move to a platform based parking management and enforcement system, with a public facing front end. This should be fed by real time information from car parks and where applicable individual bays (both off-street and on-street).
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Resilient whole system approach, town centre traffic congestion, utilisations,
 - **Cost Implications:** IT Infrastructure and capital costs for equipment.

Car Park Infrastructure

- Move to have alpha numeric machines installed at car parks to prevent ticket re-use through making the tickets registration number specific.
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Car park occupancies, additional ticket sales data, utilisations.
 - **Cost Implications:** Alpha numeric machine costs, installation, car park revenues.

Marketing and Promotion

- Advertisement of car parks through Council media channels and local media releases, including information about routes and walk times to nearby retail and leisure attractions
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Number of advertisements across different media channels and improved pedestrian wayfinding, pedestrian counts to verify.
 - **Cost Implications:** Some media channels already paid for, include reference to parking within already planned comms. Wayfinding improvements.

- Wider information and marketing campaigns highlighting the full range of travel options into each of the three towns
 - **Outcome Monitoring:** Number of advertisements across different media channels
 - **Cost Implications:** Opportunities for sponsorship to cover, link into wider town marketing

SYSTRA provides advice on transport, to central, regional and local government, agencies, developers, operators and financiers.

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