

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19 March 2019



Title	Review of car parking in Ashford		
Purpose of the report	To note		
Report Author	Lee O'Neil, Deputy Chief Executive Bruno Barbosa, Interim Parking Manager		
Cabinet Member	Councillor Daxa Patel	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Clean and Safe Environment		
Recommendations	The Committee is asked to note the update on analysis of parking issues in Ashford town centre and the proposed additional enforcement exercise for the area.		
Reason for Recommendation	To note		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 In September 2016 Cabinet agreed the disposal of Ashford Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) for redevelopment.
- 1.2 Previous surveys had indicated a sensitivity around the level of car parking within Ashford town centre. The Cabinet therefore agreed that a proportion of the funding from any disposal of the multi-storey car park would be set aside to improve the car parking situation in Ashford, in recognition of the significant level of local concern from residents.
- 1.3 Since that date, the Council has been considering other options for redevelopment of the multi-storey car park site.
- 1.4 In view of ongoing concerns over parking provision in this area, a study was commissioned by Spelthorne to study the current supply and demand for parking within Ashford Town Centre at different times of the day and week, whilst also identifying recommendations on how the town centre could be improved. This study (by Markides Associates) was undertaken in June 2018.
- 1.5 The main conclusions from their study relating to parking were:
 - (a) The town centre is popular and busy with few vacancies, and the catchment quite local;
 - (b) Surveys have shown that only around 44% of shoppers access Ashford by car, so access by other modes is important;

- (c) Parking supports the town centre and is quite convenient. People like the easy access to and within the centre;
- (d) Most of the existing parking use was found to be for short durations of stay, with the majority of visitors to the centre staying for less than two hours. This was similar for the multi-storey car park and the parking on Church Road, where stays are limited to a maximum of two hours;
- (e) There was considerable spare parking (estimated at 196 spaces on weekdays and 224 on Saturday). Excluding the railway station and Tesco car parks (which serve particular functions), the spare capacity in the area remained at 150 spaces on a weekday/Saturday;
- (f) On-street parking was well-used, although there were still spare spaces;
- (g) The Tesco and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) car parks experienced higher occupancy levels, reaching capacity at certain times of the day or week;
- (h) The multi-storey car park was very poorly used, with a maximum of 48 of 139 spaces used on a weekday, and less on a Saturday. Most users stayed for less than 2 hours;
- (i) There was evidence of a lack of enforcement associated with the parking on Church Road, with 7% of weekday users and 4% of Saturday users staying longer than 4 hours; taking up short-stay bays in prime locations;
- (j) The urban realm is dominated by the road and there are improvements that can be made to create a greater sense of 'place' and areas for more social interaction. This should include more landscaping, better pedestrian crossings, slower vehicle speeds and more space for people. There is an opportunity to introduce more on-street parking.

1.6 In order to assess the possible effects of improved enforcement, and establish the underlying causes for the parking patterns in the area (plus possible solutions to them), the Council made additional targeted funding available to dedicate a specific enforcement resource to the area for a period of three months (from 14 August – 13 November 2018).

1.7 Ashford had been identified as an area in need of increased enforcement by the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers, particularly due to the main road being mostly restricted and having limited-stay bays aimed at customers of the businesses within the town centre. The reported issues related to overstay in the limited-stay bays, and long-term use of unrestricted/restricted kerbside space by commuters.

1.8 A targeted deployment approach was taken, with an officer visiting a range of specified locations to log relevant vehicles in limited-stay bays, enforcing contraventions observed, and keeping a record of the kerbside space availability in each location (wherever vehicles could legally be parked was considered an available space).

Waiting restrictions were automatically enforced since a vehicle needs to meet specific conditions to be able to park in those restricted areas for any period of time.

Different officers were used at different times, to further ensure data would not be skewed by perception or personal error. This also ensured a varied data

source and prevented patterns from being used by drivers seeking to use them to their benefit.

Only public highway kerbside space and public car parks owned by the Council were considered for this dedicated enforcement.

- 1.9 During the three month enforcement exercise, approximately 5,168 visits were performed in Ashford by the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers. During this time:
- (a) There were only 32 occasions when there was no observed available space to park in a given road visited;
 - (b) A total of 228 PCNs were issued, at an average of just over 3 PCNs per day;
 - (c) The average of observed available spaces to park was 539.
- 1.10 The main conclusions were:
- (a) The enforcement exercise denoted a clear issue with abuse of parking restrictions, with a significant share of these having a direct association with specific businesses operating in the vicinity;
 - (b) Commuter parking was an issue, but as additional enforcement was carried out there was no significant shift in parking routines aside from increased rotation of vehicles in specific areas;
 - (c) The survey data did not show a meaningful unavailability of space in Ashford, i.e. whenever space was not available in a specific location there was normally an adjacent location with available space. The average space availability was around four times the total capacity of Ashford MSCP;
 - (d) Despite the increase in enforcement activity and visual presence, Ashford MSCP remained mostly vacant, never having reached its capacity and preserving over 50% of available space on average every day;
 - (e) The intelligent deployment approach designed could potentially enable focus on one specific town area for a limited time without significant negative impact on normal duties. Additional resources would however be required to apply this approach for a prolonged period or to more than one town centre at a time, since a targeted approach always implies a temporary reduction of available resources for other areas of the borough;
 - (f) Enforcement of the two-hour waiting bays is made difficult due to this requiring the officer being able to evidence the arrival time of the vehicle. As there are no pay and display machines or physical tokens to establish arrival times, a vehicle overstaying can only be enforced by the officer observing the entire length of stay, without moving from the area between the initial and follow-up observations.
- 1.11 The additional visual presence provided some positive reassurance and throughout the period of targeted enforcement Council officers received a great deal of positive verbal feedback, particularly from businesses that would previously regularly call the car parks office to report vehicles overstaying the

permitted time. Much of this positive feedback is presumed to have focused around a potential higher rotation of vehicles in the free limited-stay bays.

2. Proposed further work

- 2.1 In order to evaluate any ongoing effects that the initial enforcement exercise had on parking in Ashford town centre and to provide further data on how enhanced enforcement affects parking patterns, a further three-month enforcement exercise will be undertaken in the area starting in March 2019.
- 2.2 The results from this additional enforcement, together with the data gathered from the initial enforcement exercise and parking study will be used to assess any improvements needed to parking provision and ongoing enforcement in Ashford town centre.
- 2.3 This additional enforcement exercise will provide enhanced data maturity and reliability, enabling patterns to be modelled more accurately and potential reassessment of deployment approaches, e.g. whether a risk management approach should be considered, establishing priority areas and taking into account the resource/benefit ratio achieved from deployed resources.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 As the proposed deployment approach is designed around intelligent resource management, it is currently anticipated that the costs of the additional three month enforcement exercise will be covered by existing budgets. Close monitoring will, however, be required to ensure there is no negative impact on revenue streams or associated costs, and that service delivery standards are maintained.
- 3.2 The results from this exercise may suggest the need for changes to the enforcement approach going forward which could result in the need for additional future funding.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1 In undertaking a targeted deployment approach the Council must manage the potential risks of not being able to meet service expectations for enforcement requests in other areas of the borough. Resources will need to be managed effectively and if necessary additional resources may need to be provided, to ensure that other areas of the borough are not adversely affected.
- 4.2 The Council will ensure that an appropriate Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken to consider the needs of all members of the community in relation to any significant changes to parking provision and enforcement in the borough; and that appropriate mitigation measures are taken where necessary.

5. Timetable for implementation

- 5.1 The additional three-month enforcement exercise will commence in March 2019.
- 5.2 The results of this exercise will be evaluated with a view to reporting any recommendations for improvements to Cabinet in July 2019.

Background papers: There are none

Appendices:

['Ashford Car Parking Study – Current and Future Parking Requirements' \(August 2018 – Markides Associates\).](#)