

Colchester Draft Parking Strategy

A Positive Parking Review

Pre-consultation draft

Easy-read Summary

Pre-Consultation Draft

September 2019

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Pre-Consultation Draft

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Foreword

The supply and provision of adequate accessible and good quality car parking is important to visitors and residents alike.

The quality and availability of off-street car parking, including realistic charges compared with other modes, easy access, providing a safe and secure environment has an impact on the number of people visiting our towns and using the facilities they have to offer.

Summary

This document makes recommendations for the future of Colchester's car parks.

Following its Climate Emergency declaration, Colchester Borough Council is looking at ways to influence motorist behaviour. A change on just one day a week could take a fifth of the traffic out of the peak, with consequent improvements in air quality, reductions in congestion and CO2 emissions.

The Council is also installing its first Electric Vehicle charging point in a shoppers and residential car park to encourage alternatives to internal combustion engine car travel, reducing air pollution at the point of use.

The Strategy recommends some adjustments to Tariffs, especially at peak times, and combines this with positive innovations that could offset increases for motorists who can adjust travel patterns when using the proposed MiPermit special offers.

Reviewing parking in Colchester

Colchester Council's Off-Street Car Parking provision was last reviewed in 2009/10 with changes being implemented from April 2010. The charging strategy was based on a mixture of short and long stay with protection of the historic core as far as possible.

Several years have passed since the last review, it is necessary to carry out a further review to determine the strategy for the next five years. In addition, the implementation of Park & Ride and changes to several off-street parking areas has been completed.

In addition, the quality of off-street car parking including realistic charges compared with other modes, easy access, providing a safe and secure environment has an impact on the number of people visiting our towns and using the facilities they have to offer.

Having adequate car parking facilities is particularly important in helping to deliver the Council's programme that supports regeneration of the town centre, helps manage air quality, whilst seeking to improve the commercial vitality of the town, encouraging greater footfall and to improve the public realm and streetscape enhancements.

What is Positive Parking?

Colchester Council is both a founder member of, and has signed up to, the Positive Parking Agenda, an initiative started by a group of local authorities supported and assisted by the British Parking Association.

The aim of the Positive Parking Agenda is to change perceptions and challenge misconceptions about the parking sector as well as local government's role and make the parking experience a better one for all concerned. The Agenda looks to provide effective and positive communications, promoting innovation and the use of technology, for the benefit of all.

The Agenda addresses a range of key priorities including: congestion, safety, air quality, accessibility, technology, working together and fairness.

Colchester Council is looking to align its parking strategy, including its policies and operations, to this agenda through a Positive Parking Framework. The Positive Parking Agenda is looking to its founder members to set a benchmark standard for other local authorities to follow.

Find out more at www.positiveparkingagenda.co.uk



Positive parking themes and principles

This review addresses the Off-Street parking assets and tariffs at car parks owned by Colchester Council; Colchester Council's parking operations supplied by its shared service, the North Essex Parking Partnership (On- and Off-Street, including outside schools); Use of technology; location and provision.

Project Definition, Objectives and Themes

A Project Group was formed, and this group has established a number of themes. The Positive Parking Framework has been structured around these **key themes** in order to help shape the framework. The work included looking at issues such as:

 Publicity: Providing information about the services	 Perceptions: Questionnaires, Consultation
 Promotion: Tariff and Offers	 Place/provision: Locations and Provision
 Prosperity: Town Centre Vitality	 Environment: Congestion, Air Quality and LTP & Bigger Picture
 Parking requirements: Access, Provision, Systems	 Online Payment Parking Account Design and Innovation

1. Place & Provision

Looking at tariffs, custom and usage to suggest which car parks should be used in what ways. Consideration is given to promoting further or wider partnerships.

Comparisons are drawn with other places, including safety and ease of finding a space. Ways of dissuading peak hour travel in support of the climate emergency declaration is considered.

Charts show the success of existing special offers and payment types as the basis for recommendations to support the town centre including off-peak parking for shoppers, visitors and time-bound offers through the use of technology.

Recommendations have been raised to support this through providing the right provision in the right places, times, and charges. Recommendations for future improvements to car parks from income made from peak charging have been made, linking improved facilities to changed tariffs.

Locations of shoppers, shorter stay, all day parking, and facilities for disabled parking are discussed and recommendations made for the use of existing facilities, keeping longer stays outside the town centre core in order to priorities public transport, especially in the peak hours.

Discussions start in this section around payment after parking, through the use of existing but expanded MiPermit technology in support of the aims of the BID. Types of tariff are discussed in other sections.

Improved signage to inform and support – and more importantly explain simply – these measures is recommended.

2. Perceptions

In order to provide the draft recommendations, we have engaged with the public and the ourColchester BID. The survey work resulted well in excess of 400 records and results are included throughout the document to support or illustrate points.

A recommendation has been made to widen the scope of consultation, once a full pre-Consultation Draft of the Strategy has been circulated and the final draft agreed.

The discussion also includes the letter from the DfT setting out how local authorities can license any publicly available parking areas, including private operators, if required.

3. Parking Requirements

In this section, discussions turn to the tariff and patterns of usage and turnover. The need to avoid over-complexity is mentioned. The MiPermit App payment service including facilities to extend the stay is explored further.

A number of recommendations about tariff are made throughout the section, including developing the discussion about peak hour premiums to encourage modal shift, maintenance of car parks and checking provision of accessible bays for blue badge holders.

By-the-minute charging is introduced as a possible concept, and the thinking about payment after parking is developed. Special offers are explored including some other days and additional provision of sites.

4. Online Payment & Technology

The section explores the rapid development in technological solutions, which helps to reduce the use of cash and machines, and providing other options not possible with traditional technology.

Dynamic pricing is introduced as a concept, and the granularity of the tariff structure, e.g. hour blocks vs. by the minute, is discussed alongside what technology can enable.

The thinking is developed to promote other types of parking tariff not previously possible, with ways to support town centre through interaction inside shops with the App.

5. Prosperity

The thinking around tariffs and their suitability is further discussed and developed, particularly the ways it supports the aims of the transportation policy, the town centre, the BID and other modes.

Linked to the inputs from stakeholders and the survey, the discussion turns to ways to support the town centre whilst also considering transport policy and recommendations have been made around dynamic pricing, banded/structured and pay-by-the-minute tariffs, alongside other offers and incentives to travel/park at only the right times.

6. Environment & the Bigger Picture

Here the wider picture is assessed, with positioning, air quality, congestion and the climate and environment being considered.

Data from car parks and the survey informs the thinking, set against the requirements of transportation policy, footfall in the town centre, whilst maintaining an income so the facilities can be maintained and improved.

Recommendations made encourage the recognition that Air Quality is linked to congestion caused by traffic. Alternative modes can be influenced by Peak/Off Peak pricing – such as a shift to Park & Ride, or at least a shift traffic away from the most congested, peak times which contribute to air quality management issues.

The recommendation is to consider Peak Hours charging between 7am-9am. If people must continue to drive into town, this is the time to avoid.

Further discussions develop the disabled bay provision, linked to other improvements in town including at the Theatre, in St Mary's car park including minor improvements required.

A variety of options includes using MiPermit to resolve the tariff issues, with a recommendation that the Council introduces appropriate measures using the digital system including: –

- dynamic pricing with a peak hours surcharge
- minimum price with by-the-minute charging thereafter
- pay-as-you-go charging
- a resident discount – Borough wide, local or hyper-locally.
- a preferred parking or refund system with retailers via MiPermit
- spread further the 'trusted customer' collection system to save transaction charges
- introduce offers, badges and deals to regular trusted customers.
- maintaining the long stay outer/shorter stay inner car parks but varying the stay type on the outer car parks
- liaising with the town and parish councils about the outlying car park tariffs.

7. Promotions

In this section we discuss Marketing and Communications including where to market, what to market, and which media to use.

A recommendation is made to continue to work with local businesses, to develop a series of discounts, benefits and offers can be established and introduced which ultimately provide a reward to the customer for using the Council's parking service.

Discussions include how messaging and branding should be provided, recommending welcoming, clear signage for customers explaining the payment types and facilities available, and taking the opportunity to explain to customers what the car park charges incomes are used to support.

8. Communications

This section is less complete than others since it will include the plans to communicate the final version of the document. A number of options is discussed here which may make their way into the final version.

Ultimately this will include the methods planned to market the Council's pricing structure for the coming years including the use of dynamic tariffs, pay after parking, any concessions/special offers designed to increase utilisation of car parks and measurement of footfall in town centres through an index.