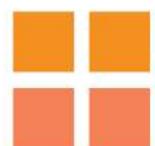


Car Parking Strategy 2016



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1 Background

The following document sets out the policy and practice of Lichfield District Council regarding the provision of public, off street parking.

Whilst we recognise the importance of parking provision to residents and businesses throughout the District due to the pattern of customer demand most of the specific references below will apply in the main to the City of Lichfield.

Lichfield District Council provides off street parking facilities to serve retail, business and visitor needs in Lichfield city centre. In addition the Council operates three car parks designed to accommodate visitors to Beacon Park.

The District Council also owns car parks in Chasetown and Armitage and in the Netherstowe area of Lichfield.

Parking is provided in the interest of the local economy and to help achieve the aims laid out in the emerging Strategic Plan for Lichfield District, 2016-2020.

These aims include:

A vibrant and prosperous economy

Healthy and safe communities

Clean, Green and Welcoming place to live

The provision of off street car parks is not a statutory requirement and in many towns and cities the majority of the parking provision is provided by the private sector. Lichfield does have some private operators but the number of parking spaces they provide is minor compared to those in public ownership. Lichfield District Council operates slightly in excess of 2100 spaces.

Until March 2015 Lichfield District Council, in common with the other District level authorities in Staffordshire, worked in partnership with the County Council to deliver both on and off street parking enforcement across the County.

This arrangement came to an end when the County Council decided to take the on-street function in house.

The District Council remains a statutory consultee in the implementation of new on-street parking orders but no longer has any involvement in on-street enforcement.

Considerable sums of money have been invested in recent years to improve the Council's parking estate. Major areas of expenditure include the construction of an extra deck at Lombard Street car park; structural repairs and general refurbishment of the Multi Storey on Birmingham Road; and, the construction of the new Friary car park. Additional spaces will also be provided as part of the planned Friarsgate development.

Parking charges are bench marked against those of other authorities in the region. Whilst it may be possible to find specific, local charging rates for certain periods and locations which may be lower than those in Lichfield the District Council aim's for an overall offer that can compete with those towns who may offer a rival attraction to retail and leisure visitors.

Our intention is to fulfil the needs of residents and businesses by continuing to offer an attractive mix of parking locations and facilities but within a framework which is beneficial to the Council Tax payers of the District.

A detailed Parking Policy report was submitted to Councillors for approval in the spring of 2016. The main conclusions of this report are detailed below-

- The District Council should continue in its role as the major provider of parking for visitors, residents and workers in Lichfield City Centre for the time being.
- Various delivery options including private sector involvement have been considered but it is felt most appropriate that the District Council continues to manage these facilities, albeit with the assistance of external partners and contractors to deliver the enforcement, cash collection and maintenance functions. This situation will remain under ongoing review.
- New operating and payment methods should be explored to give customers an improved level of service and convenience
- In the interests of the long term economic viability of the City the parking team should continue to work closely with the Lichfield City BID group, Three Spires Shopping Centre and other partners to promote the availability of parking in Lichfield.

2 National legislative and policy context

There are no specific legal requirements which require Lichfield District Council to provide any public parking.

Until recently planning policy guidance suggested councils should positively seek to control car-borne access to town/city centres and other locations offering services and facilities as a means of reducing the need to travel by private car. Whilst the overall desire is to be more efficient in the way people move around and to make it so that access to services and facilities can be achieved in more sustainable ways, it is increasingly recognised that overly restricting car borne travel can be detrimental to having strong and healthy economies and prosperous communities.

3 Local policy and approach

A car parking offer which meets the needs of residents and visitors is an important factor in meeting the challenge of keeping a busy city, like that of Lichfield, open for business and plays an important part in ensuring the continuation of a vibrant and prosperous local economy.

Whilst public transport, both bus and train, has an important part to play in serving the needs of visitors to Lichfield it is clear that for most shoppers private motor cars provide by far the most convenient method of access.

The plans and related business model for the new Friarsgate development place a heavy emphasis on attracting cinema and hospitality visitors. Given that these visits are likely to be at times other than during the normal working day and of unpredictable duration it is likely that cars will be the preferred method of transport for these users too.

As with most other city/town centres the local economic focus in the City of Lichfield is mainly on the retail and hospitality sectors but tourism, particularly in the form of day visitors also plays an important part in the economic well-being of the urban centre.

Links with local businesses involved in retail and tourism indicate that they feel that parking provision is an important factor in the continuing viability of these business areas.

A less-well recognised factor in the town centre economy is the existence of professional services.

Whilst many of the companies involved in this sector are small concerns employing only a handful of people with little impact on parking need we do have some larger operations based in Lichfield and one local legal services provider is our largest permit customer by a considerable margin.

Officers from the District Council engage with various local groups such as the Lichfield City BID, the Lichfield City Centre Development Partnership and Burntwood Business Community to ensure that the LDC car parks provide a service that delivers what local residents and businesses need.

Traditionally assumptions regarding car parking provision have been based on projecting a continual increase in demand but in recent years this has proven not to be the correct. Whilst demand has recovered slightly in recent years it remains below the peak reached in 2008.

This change in usage can be attributed to a combination of factors but the main influence appears to be a change in customer habits with a shift away from high street retail to online and other methods of acquiring goods.

Greater stakeholder engagement needs to take place although this has improved in recent times. In addition to Councillors the main stakeholders are residents, the town centre businesses, retail and tourist visitors and the various church and other voluntary groups active in the town.

4 Current car parking arrangements

Lichfield City is well provided for with both long and short stay parking facilities.

Additional small, free of charge parking facilities serve Chasetown, Chase Terrace, Wall village and Armitage with Handsacre.

There are currently 16 car parks serving Lichfield city centre and another three primarily directed at users of Beacon Park. At the moment on site payment is all based on a Pay and Display system.

Pay on Exit systems are often seen as being more customer friendly and the District Council recognises their popularity with customers but the costs of maintaining and servicing systems of this type has always been considered prohibitive. Fortunately, new technology is becoming available which may make it possible to provide systems with the convenience of Pay on Exit but at an affordable price and the Authority is committed to investigating these options which would also offer the choice to pay using cash or cards.

The city centre car parks all offer the facility to Pay by Phone. This system has proven popular with a limited group of regular users but it does not appear that the wider customer base wish to pay in this way and usage levels remain low compared to payment through the machines.

The facility to pay in advance by permit purchase is available on all long stay car parks. Whilst this form of purchase does require that the customer makes an initial financial commitment it also offers substantial discounts over paying at the machine.

5 Future impacts on parking demand/provision

By far the highest level of foreseeable impact on parking in Lichfield is expected to be connected with the Friarsgate development.

With a mixture of large and small retailers alongside new leisure facilities it is anticipated that this development will bring an increase in visitor numbers to the City.

The finished development will have a large car park designed to cater not just for the loss of the existing Multi Storey and Bus Station facilities but also to give a capacity boost to cater for the extra visitors. It is currently anticipated that the District Council will operate the car park which will be of a high specification.

During construction the increased capacity built into our system via the additional deck at Lombard Street, extra capacity at the Friary and the temporary car parking area at the University will compensate for the loss of the two existing facilities.

In the case of any developments in the City not promoted by the District Council possible knock on effects on parking need to be given due consideration as part of the planning process

6 Coach parking

Lichfield District and in particular Lichfield city is a popular destination with day trip coach operators.

The mix of retail and cultural facilities together with a wide range of refreshment outlets explains the popularity and the relatively flat topography of Lichfield City also provides an advantage to those with mobility issues.

Existing coach parking facilities are located within the Bus and Coach facility that will be absorbed by the Friarsgate redevelopment but Council officers are working closely with the potential developer to ensure that a new and improved facility can be delivered prior to the closure of the existing one.

7 Blue badge parking

Blue Badges for parking are available to any persons with mobility issues meeting the criteria laid down by central government.

In off street car parks the disability access requirements mean that operators such as Lichfield District Council have to provide a number of reserved spaces for Blue Badge holders but the operator is not required to extend any payment privileges to these badge holders. It has however always been the policy of the Authority to allow an unlimited period of free parking for these customers and whilst this has been reviewed the policy will continue for the time being.

8 Summary

The provision, availability and pricing of parking is a key issue for local residents, visitors, traders, investors and the District Council.

In seeking to satisfy the various expectations relating to parking the following principles will be paramount:

- The District Council will where possible and practicable continue to ensure that the amount of parking available in Lichfield meets the demands of the local retail and visitor industries. The likely level of demand will be assessed on an ongoing basis giving due consideration to the changing usage patterns affecting city/town centres and also to the impact of local developments.
- Parking rates will continue to be pitched at a level which guarantees a suitable return on the substantial investment made in parking without reaching a level which may have a negative impact on local retail and visitor businesses.
- When and where possible and financially viable, new technology will be employed to improve the customer experience.
- The Friarsgate scheme will deliver additional parking capacity which will meet the additional parking needs generated by that development.
- Enforcement Operations are a necessary part of delivering the desired impact for the car parks but must be properly managed.
- It is important that the views of customers and potential customers informs the District Council's approach towards providing car parking and charging for the same. The Council will seek to engage with car park users and those who may want to use car parks in the future to ascertain views on all aspects of the Council's parking service and use this feedback to review policy on a continuing basis.