

Briefing and Recommendations on Car Parking for March to April 2020 during the Corona Virus outbreak

Background

In normal circumstances, the City Council own and manage fee - based multi-storey and surface car parks within the city providing around 3300 spaces on a daily basis. The County manage, enforce and maintain on-street parking, surface car parks, MSCPs and CPZs.

The current situation has driven a change in city centre use but increased demands for parking for critical workers and for newly restricted home workers. City Councillors have previously considered the public health and other implications of a “free parking offer” and have agreed a restricted support package requiring use of a “whitelist” approach to provide free parking for critical workers. In the light of increasing demands, and changes in Government requests for a higher number of essential work and volunteer community hubs to enable the most vulnerable and the general public to restrict movement outside their homes to a minimum, there is a need to review the current arrangements.

Demand for Car Parking

The current demand for City Centre car parking has altered considerably over the last week or two in response to Government guidance in relation to the virus. Normal demand for parking in the city centre has dropped massively, (150 cars parked yesterday and 129 today in MSCPs which provide 5000 spaces) whilst conversely, the unintended consequence of the vast majority of people working from home is the increase in residential parking requirements during weekdays as those who may use their car for work normally are remaining at home. This has become particularly apparent in areas around, for example, Mill Road.

This has led to pressure within key residential areas in the city and requests for the County and the City to provide free alternatives and to step down enforcement measures.

An increasing level of requests are also being received from organisations providing critical services in addressing the pandemic, such as food retailers, pharmacies, volunteer workers and the Police force. In order to enable and support their workers to continue to access their workplace safely, and in an efficient manner, they have asked if a number of key workers may have access to free car parking which they wouldn't normally need nor expect. For the City Council, whose own staff are also considered critical in the fight against covid-19, requests for around 300 spaces has already been received and this level is increasing.

The Government is expected to announce today a request to Local Authorities to suspend parking charges for health workers, social care workers and NHS volunteers for on-street parking and open car parks.

Key Points and Issues

A few key points to consider are as follows:

- The demand for general parking in the city has reduced massively, and is likely to reduce further, but the demand for a critical number of key workers to access their workplace in flexible ways is increasing. Whilst Cambridge City Centre might be normally seen as a destination for many, the current situation is very different. Those who might usually drive in to spend visitor time in the city now seem focussed more on places for their limited daily exercise with more open space, and less perceived/real competition from city centre residents. Yesterday 150 cars only (and today 129) entered city centre multi-storey car parks which have space for circa 3000.
- Whilst public transport partners are working to ensure provision of transport which allows sufficient social isolation, there are issues with provision of sufficient space to allow general essential travel as well as critical worker travel, and to meet the timetable demands for protracted hours, flexible shifts and space for workers to transport their own essential purchases around their working hours.
- As can be seen from the London tube experience, the combination of restricted staffing through illness and reduced overall demand can lead to the residual public transport service struggling to allow the relevant social distancing without complementary support from other travel modes. In these circumstances, car travel, which would normally be discouraged, can help complement public transport demands in the current circumstances for a restricted period.
- The County have suggested a proposal which ends their enforcement of street parking, retaining only a small team to manage dangerous parking. However, they wish to jointly announce this with City simultaneously stopping car park enforcement
- Options need to consider the risks in regard to public health and their mitigation. A risk assessment in this regard is shown in the appendix of this report.
- Resources for both parking teams may be impacted on considerably over the next few weeks by virus issues, although at the moment management resource is being maintained. A clear policy with simple management requirements which could be managed by redeployed staff if necessary would be an advantage

- Options need to consider equality in dealing with demand. For example, it would be challenging to differentiate between priority groups or to treat groups using different car parks differently.
- The LGA announcement today about the expected request to suspend parking charges for the healthcare sector may well be extended to further critical groups in the coming days, especially with the community work rapidly increasing to support the most vulnerable in their homes, and to ensure that critical workers can more easily transition between workplace home and/or into the communities they are asked to support.

Options

With those points in mind, the following options have been considered

Option	Pros	Cons
1. Maintain Normal Status Quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as normal • Maintains • Retains whatever income is available from parking • Fees may possibly deter general public from car use but usage suggests this is inherent in the current situation anyway • No inherent encouragement for car use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing about the current situation is normal • Demands for key worker support • Public transport may not be able to maintain social distancing on its own • Residential parking issues not addressed • Management may become difficult with reduced resources • Reputational risk • Car park income dropped by half and dropping further in any case
2. Maintain current plan with key worker white lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages key priority workers by exception and charges others, • no wider encouragement for car use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't address street parking issues • Increasingly complex to manage for Council and recipient organisations • Requires higher levels of resource management • Not joined up with County proposal

<p>3. County announce their planned changes but City maintain their current plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps address some home worker issues but not all • Retains focus for free city parking for key workers only • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing for customers • Likely to increase overcrowding on streets • Provides benefits for some, but possibly not all the critical groups • Doesn't support public transport levels to help supply social distancing
<p>4. City and County joint announcement but on surface car parks only</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to restrict city centre parking to reduce risk of non-essential use • Smaller volume of space included in announcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand by key workers more than surface can provide • Prioritisation of home workers considered as equality issue • Limited support to addressing critical issues for addressing corona virus
<p>5. City and County joint announcement to cover street, surface car parks and MSCPs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider range of spaces to take necessary cars, easier for social distancing for reduced overall number cars • Easier to understand as all aligned – less confusion for customers • Meets current social media and other requests for support for key workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to manage and review regularly • Possible risk of use by general public for non-essential needs, but currently experience would suggest this risk is very low as city centre is not destination of choice

Recommendation

Based on consideration of the current situation, the public health issues, focussing resources on critical work, aligning provision with critical demand and meeting residents and worker needs, the recommendation would be for option 5. To confirm, this would see:

- Removal of County car park enforcement in residential areas in the city
- Retention of enforcement via a small County team for any poor or dangerous parking in the streets and/or in other areas where appropriate
- Provision of free parking city council surface car parks to support the self-isolation in heavily congested zones
- Provision of free parking at city centre MSCPs for priority critical workers
- Retention of City car parking team in critical oversight and management role in car parks for Health and Safety and sanitisation

This option:

- Aligns City and County in a clear supportive message to residents and workers around enabling more effective home working and critical key worker access to workplace
- Provides key workers with an alternative option to public transport to maintain social distancing to and from their workplace, and helps them to meet work place needs during the critical period
- Supplements public transport provision with spaces to support critical worker social distancing whilst travelling
- Manages and mitigates risks around cross contamination and supports safety of car park and traffic staff
- Does not promote or encourage general public use of car travel but does not discriminate unnecessarily
- Maintains traffic flow for emergency vehicles and essential deliveries to food shops and pharmacies at key sensitive locations, hot spots
- Provides light touch management whilst ensuring that streets are not cluttered with badly parked cars and that customers can park for essential visit e.g. near food shops, hospital, pharmacies
- Dissuades people from parking anti-socially which may waste police time and disrupt key workers
- Addresses key hotspots including around Addenbrooke's which is a very sensitive location especially Red Cross Lane and Greenland's and likely to become a hotspot for parking violations, also Mill Road attracts a lot of improper parking and needs to be kept clear for deliveries and emergency vehicles and to maintain adequate space on the footway for people accessing food shops
- Minimises abuse of loading bays and disabled bays near food shops and pharmacies at sensitive locations
- Will assist vulnerable residents who have a need for carers but for whom there are limited visitors permits

For practice purposes the recommendation would be to:

- simultaneously announce this option with County proposals ref street parking
- to review on a weekly basis with the intention of running it for an initial 3/4 weeks to align with Government advice

- In practice this means lifting barriers at MSCPs in order to prevent critical workers having to queue at barriers to press call buttons.
- to ensure that clear signs ref parking with care, keeping social distance between cars (where possible) and people, reminders to wash hands, have care using lifts/stairs etc. The team will also re-sanitise key areas for possible cross-contamination on a regular basis for the MSCPs

There could be a phased approach with a start in key areas although this may cause more confusion and also result in a deluge of challenges for support in other key areas.

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Risk Assessment

The risks outlined are primarily those raised by Liz Robin, Director of Public Health, during discussions, alongside others considered by the Cambridge City and County Teams

<u>Risk</u>	<u>Mitigation</u>
<p>The risk of providing free parking may increase the risk of people choosing car travel to access the city for non-urgent reasons</p> <p>Impact; reduction in social distancing and increased risk of virus spread</p>	<p>Joint agreement with county provides higher number of spaces freely available without enforcement</p> <p>High number of spaces across the City Council portfolio available combined with reduced number of cars allows social distancing.</p> <p>City centre retailers largely closed down reducing draw to centre. Key food and essential retailers remain</p> <p>Police random checks on car use helps maintain essential use only</p> <p>Small risk of general public using for restricted essential travel to get food but if they can access by car may reduce number of visits overall</p> <p>Relevant notices across the portfolio and team regular sanitising of equipment helps prevent cross - contamination</p>
<p>Risk of car sharing increasing mixing between families</p> <p>Impact: reduction in social distancing and possible increase in virus spread</p>	<p>Need to reinforce key messages of social distancing</p> <p>No higher risk than travel by public transport</p> <p>Would be impossible to enforce but Police random check may help here</p>
<p>There is a risk of unintended consequence if this policy is publicised</p>	<p>County require announcement to ensure that messages are clear and understood</p> <p>Messaging is really important. The priority needs to be for critical/key workers and/or in ensuring safe levels of car parking for workers now restricted to home working.</p> <p>We should be clear that it is not free for general public use</p>

<p>Overarching “encouragement” of car use in current climate change emergency environment</p>	<p>Current major reduction in car travel in city centre in any case. On 24th March 150 cars only across 5000 spaces.</p> <p>The recommendation is not about encouragement of car use, it is about enabling critical worker support to address the pandemic, enabling other workers to park cars safely whilst remaining at home as required.</p> <p>Including key worker free parking and “home” worker car storage will still retain numbers far below normal</p>
<p>Risk of staffing levels for management purposes reduced via virus infection levels</p> <p>Impact: Changes in parking practice enforced rather than planned leading to management issues and confusion to public</p>	<p>Staffing remains a risk as when city car parks are used at all they require staffing for H and S reasons. However, if parking fees are not charged and parking enforcement is reduced then resources can be managed more effectively even with illness.</p> <p>Same applies to County as reduced resource needed if only enforcing dangerous parking etc</p> <p>Management of option 5 more simple so could possibly be managed via redeployed staff if necessary (TBC)</p> <p>Other options still require complex management</p>
<p>Risk of options to income</p> <p>Impact: ability of councils to support emergency and normal activity where required outside of possible government funding provided to support business</p>	<p>The corona virus is expected to, in general, cut in half the expected the City Council’s car parking fee income over the next six months. It will also impact on County income.</p> <p>All options provide for an aspect of free parking with the recommended option providing the highest volume of free parking.</p> <p>The proposal is not based around income earning potential however, but to support the critical aspects of addressing the pandemic outbreak.</p> <p>Those who live in CPZ areas have already paid zone permit fees, but daily numbers are higher following working at home restrictions. This action would help ease dangerous and crowded parking in streets.</p>