

Car Parking in Town Centres

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to create further discussion on the car parking strategies in Greater Manchester (GM) with an overview of the current debate and examples of best practice linking the paper to the national context. The wider framework for this work has been set by the Greater Manchester Town Centre Action Report published in March 2013, which recognises car parking as a key measure of town centre management. Further co-operation between the 8 principal town centres in GM is needed in order to respond to the major challenges town centres are facing and ensuring car parking policy is seen as a measure to generate footfall.

Car parking policy has been inconsistent during the past decade at the national, regional and local level. The scope of the national parking policy has shifted from urging the maximum use of parking provision to emphasise the role of local conditions and reasonable tariffs combined with practical parking locations. It is the local authorities who are responsible for both setting their own parking policy and collecting car parking revenue.

The link between town centre prosperity and car parking is weak. There are several reasons why people turn away from the high street and there is a lack of clear evidence and evaluation of town centre car parking. Out-of-town retail complexes and e-commerce pose major challenges to town centres, as specialist shops, more varied retail offers and free parking lure customers away from town centres. Footfall levels reflect town centre performance while a practical and efficient car parking policy can help generate more footfall. A coherent and correctly applied car parking strategy can be used as a tool to enhance town centre activity taking into consideration the current trading conditions in the principal GM town centres.

Town centre car parking strategy can be influenced in four broad areas by the local authorities: setting the correct tariff, offering limited free parking, having fair parking enforcement and improving the overall car parking experience. The right tariff depends heavily on local factors and there is a delicate balance between collecting revenue and offering a practical parking service, which also supports local businesses. Delivering thorough evaluation and continuous car parking reviews can help maintain this balance and to determine the level of efficient car parking offers, including an element of free parking, which according to evidence gathered boost town centre activity. Fair parking enforcement and a well maintained parking stock with several payment methods and technological applications provided for motorists' convenience help enhance the overall parking experience having an improving effect on the town centre image.

Car parking policy in the principal GM town centres is broadly similar with the differences in pricing reflecting the needs and demands of individual town centres. The majority of the eight town centres have parking offers and limited

free parking but the use of new technology is not wide spread. A lack of evaluation of existing parking policy and possible free parking trials means that it is difficult to show what works best. Few examples exist but in Swindon, a reduced tariff was assessed to have increased the length of time people stayed in the town centre and in Middlesborough a free car parking element led to a doubling of use of the parking spaces. More locally, Bolton and Oldham's free parking offers have produced positive feedback from retailers in their evaluation of the schemes that have taken place.

Overall, a clear and evidence based car parking strategy designed around the needs of local business and with an understanding of the existing car parking occupancy can attract visitors back to town centres and boost the overall town centre vitality.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The principal town centres in Greater Manchester (GM) are working together in a unique plan to ensure they co-ordinate to earn new investment and achieve the greatest possible success. The eight principal centres all recognise they are facing major challenges primarily from e-commerce and out-of-town developments placing unprecedented pressure on their retail offers.
- 1.2 AGMAs Planning and Housing Commission have recently carried out some research to review each of these principal town centres with an ultimate aim of combining forces so that the centres complement each other and develop in their own style to exploit the key features of their “offer”¹. Experts in the public and private sectors have worked together to analyse the unique character and potential for development in the 8 principal town centres (Altrincham, Ashton, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport and Wigan).
- 1.3 A GM town centre action report was considered by the GM Combined Authority in March and the recommendations are now being implemented. The report included recommendations for further research on town centre marketing, best practice, car parking, business rates and working with landlords and retailers to support town centre transition.
- 1.4 This brief gathers together information around the town centre car parking issue and its link to the vitality of the town centres.

¹ GM Town Centres Project: Concluding Report *Greater Manchester Combined Authority March 2013*

2 CAR PARKING AND THE SUCCESS OF TOWN CENTRES

Policy Background

- 2.1 Over the past decade parking policy has been inconsistent at the national, regional, and subsequently, local level. National parking policy was contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 13 on Transport (2001) which initiated the change from minimum to maximum levels of parking provision. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 introduced a more holistic approach to parking planning, emphasizing the importance of local conditions. This national policy made it clear that car parking charges should not inhibit town centre vitality while encouraging proportionate parking enforcement. On setting local parking standards, local planning authorities are to take into account public transport, car ownership levels, need to reduce use of high-emission vehicles, accessibility, and the type and use of new developments. In essence, parking policy is now set at the local level giving local authorities the possibility to take into consideration local conditions. This also means local authorities have the power to manage car parking revenue.²
- 2.2 At the regional level two sets of standards were introduced in the North West to reflect areas of differing accessibility. However this led to some confusion which resulted in the Parking Standards for Greater Manchester (GM) which was included in the second GM Local Transport Plan in 2006. The partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy contained a revised set of standards which all authorities were to comply with thereby creating consistency across GM. The Coalition Government abolished the statutory basis for Regional Strategies in July 2010 and as a consequence a non-statutory framework is now in place for the North West. The North West of England Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 mentions reducing private car use as a goal while encouraging the use of 'smarter choices' alongside effective parking charges, enforcement and provision when managing travel demand. North West Parking Standards define the upper limit of parking linked to developments and are in line with PPG13 (Planning Policy Guidance on Transport) for North West Regional Parking Standards.³
- 2.3 Parking provision is recognised as an essential part of a functioning local economy. Commuters have identified cost and ease of car parking as a key priority for road travel in GM. GM's third Local Transport Plan 2011/2012-2015/16 emphasises the challenge of balancing high levels of parking with restricted parking availability which supports the need for greater use of

² National Planning Policy Framework 2012

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

³ North West of England Plan. Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021

more sustainable transport modes. GM Councils have parking policies designed to support the economy of the Regional Centre and the town centres. The suggested policy framework encourages reasonably priced short stay parking for shoppers and visitors close to the centre while long stay parking should be available towards the fringe of a town. As a strategy to encourage more sustainable modes of transport the amount of long-term parking is to be reduced and cost increased over time.⁴

2.4 It is mandatory for local authorities to provide details of their finances – including the collection and use of parking revenue – to the Department of Communities and Local Government. Local authorities in England are estimated to collect around £1.4 billion from parking tickets, permits and penalties. Around £0.8 billion of the raised revenue is reinvested leaving a £0.6 billion surplus (based on data from 2007 – 2012).⁵ The Transport Committee urges local authorities to publish their annual parking revenue accounts in full in order to add more transparency into the process and ensuring parking charges are used in a practical way, not in order to increase revenue.⁶ In 2011-2012 Greater Manchester boroughs had parking operations revenue outturns ranging from £224,000 in Oldham to £1,361,000 in Stockport (excluding Salford and Manchester).⁷

Table 1: Parking operations revenue outturn in the local authorities with the 8 preliminary town centres in Greater Manchester (current account surplus/deficit excluding capital costs)

Local Authority	2011 – 2012 in thousands
Bolton	£1,324
Bury	£1,232
Oldham	£224
Rochdale	£623
Stockport	£1,361
Tameside	£893
Trafford	£ 412
Wigan	£ 720

Source: RAC Foundation: *Local Authority Parking Finances report (2013)*

⁴ Greater Manchester's third Local Transport Plan 2011/12 – 2015/16
http://www.tfgm.com/journey_planning/LTP3/Documents/Greater_Manchester_Local_Transport_Plan_Core_Strategy.pdf

⁵ http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/local_authority_parking_finances_report_david_leibling_010813.pdf

⁶ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/news/parking-substantive/>

⁷ http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/local_authority_parking_finances_report_david_leibling_010813.pdf

Scope of current debate

- 2.5** As discussed in the GM Town Centre Review, there are many reasons why people are turning away from the High Street which is why trying to find a conclusive link between town centre prosperity and car parking provision is extremely difficult. The proven relationship between car parking and economic performance is weak, but generally positive. Many people fear that making changes to the way that parking is managed will adversely affect the town's economy but there is little clear evidence of such a relationship one way or the other and a significant amount of anecdotal evidence, opinion and speculation has risen over the relationship between car parking provision and town centre prosperity.
- 2.6** The majority of the town centres pre-date the existence of cars and common car ownership – historic town centres especially posing a challenge⁸. They are not purpose-built to accommodate the car and their density and high concentration of land use along with multiple land ownership make them difficult and expensive to adapt. This is why tariffs became a necessity in many locations, to ease congestion as well as to cover costs.⁹ However, there are concerns that fees are being introduced in areas where congestion is not an issue, or being raised to levels which stifle local trade. Concerns also surround the diversion of funds away from car parks, not allowing for the necessary reinvestment to take place.¹⁰
- 2.7** Of the variables that influence the success of a town centre footfall does appear to reflect directly on town centre performance. Towns with higher footfall levels generate a higher spend and have a better quality retail offer. For example, in towns with an average footfall of over 300,000 per week, annual spend is over £500 million. This compares to towns with footfall of between 150,000 and 200,000 per week in which annual spend is around £150 million.¹¹ Thus, it is the level of footfall that is the key in the success and survival of town centres - and therefore the influence that car parking can have on these levels.
- 2.8** Footfall is falling in many town centres whilst out-of-town retail and e-commerce continue to grow. In 2012 there were 287,100 retail outlets in the UK with a third of consumer spending going through shops. Internet retail sales in 2012 amounted to £29 billion forming around 9% of total retail sales following strong growth.¹² Internet based sales have been rising much more rapidly than retail sales as a whole in recent years, as e-commerce sales

⁸ http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/changing-face-high-street-decline-revival/773_130604_final_retail_and_town_centre.pdf

⁹ RAC Foundation. English Local Authority Parking Finances
http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/local_authority_parking_finances_report_david_leibling_010813.pdf

¹⁰ Re-Think! Parking on the High Street Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres
http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf

¹¹ Re-Think! Parking on the High Street Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres
http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf

¹² http://www.brc.org.uk/brc_stats_and_facts.asp?iCat=668&sCat=Sector+Stats+%26+

have increased year-on-year in every month since 2007.¹³ The challenge of large retail complexes is also significant as local town centres cannot compete on the same terms as out-of-town retail centres, which offer a wide range of services under one roof – including large scale, modern parking which is usually free of charge. Increased car ownership levels give consumers the ability to travel further to larger retail centres and bringing back more purchases per trip. The key factors determining the level of threat to town centres are especially the size of out-of-town developments, the type of retailing and how well the complexes are linked to town centres.¹⁴ The key issue for town centres in relation to car parking is whether adjustments in car parking policy (such as tariffs and pricing structures) are enough to counteract the competition from out of town shopping/visitor offers, to encouraging more town centre visits.

2.9 It has been argued that shopkeepers overestimate the share of their customers arriving by car and evidence shows that, while car drivers spend more on a single trip, walkers and public transport users spend more over a week or a month. For example, in 2011 walkers in London town centres spent £147 more per month than those travelling by car – and the amount has risen compared to data from 2004.¹⁵ It should be noted that these results are linked to a major urban centre and walking distance is a crucial variable when applying these figures outside of London. Contradictions remain as the government has stated ‘anti-car dogma’ councils are hurting local economies, while another London based study has reported pedestrians spend between two to six times more in their local shops than shoppers arriving by car.¹⁶ This research concluded that more parking does not necessarily mean more trade but a well managed parking scheme where spaces turn over frequently can help to increase the number of visitors to a town centre. Similarly, a retail study by GVA Grimley looked at Richmond as a case study revealing it is the limited range of shops, and in particular its lack of specialist shops, that are the most important reasons for people shopping elsewhere. Poor parking facilities were identified as the third most important reason.¹⁷

2.10 The role of retail indicators in assessing the success of town centres has been criticised by several recent studies.¹⁸ The Scottish National Review of Town Centres (2013) for example recognises town centres as a vital part of economic recovery and sustainable economic growth, but argues that town centre data ignores aspects of high street vitality that have cultural, heritage and leisure uses. These should be included in town centre performance

¹³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rsi/retail-sales/october-2013/stb-rsi-october-2013.html#tab-Focus-on-Internet-Sales>

¹⁴ http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Library/GVA_-_MeasuringandImprovingTownCentreViabilitySpring2011.pdf

¹⁵ The relevance of parking in the success of urban centres. A review for London Councils. http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/The_relevance_of_parking_in_the_success_of_urban_centres_-_A_review_for_London_Councils.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news/current/pressdetail.htm?pk=1549>

¹⁷ <http://towns.org.uk/files/Market-Towns-Car-Parking-Research-2007.pdf>

¹⁸ http://pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/Successful%20town%20centres%20-%20main%20report_0.pdf

frameworks which form a basis for more robust town centre planning. Access and car parking are linked to the wider people and footfall theme with other indicators including footfall, geographical catchment and community spirit.¹⁹ A dynamic picture of activity levels in the town centre can be achieved by combining the measuring and monitoring of car park usage with footfall and retail sales. Such data can provide a basis for comparison between variances of activity and the impacts of events, special offers or changes in high profile business presence.²⁰

- 2.11** Given the present trading conditions in the town centres, the GM town centre reviews highlighted that car parking was one of the major tools available to town centre managers rather than car parking itself being a major influence on a town centres decline.
- 2.12** A successful town centre parking strategy means understanding car park occupancy, moderating demand, collaborating between public and private parking providers while ensuring parking enforcement is fair and practical.²¹ Impacts of competing town centres can be alleviated by furthering collaboration between neighbouring areas and producing annual parking reports increasing transparency of parking expenditure.²² Town centres with a wider range of services and facilities should charge more in order to manage their greater level of demand, while smaller centres should charge less. Further collaboration and increased transparency can also help reduce administration costs as information from what works is more widely available making it possible to create more standardised parking policy.
- 2.13** The Government has recognised the need for further reform in parking policy and a parking consultation was launched in December 2013 closing 14 February 2014. The consultation aims to discuss especially the use of CCTV in parking enforcement, enhancing communities and businesses rights to require parking reviews, the use of grace periods and the need for updates in parking enforcement guidance.²³

¹⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00426972.pdf>

²⁰ http://pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/Successful%20town%20centres%20-%20main%20report_0.pdf

²¹ Re-Think! Parking on the High Street Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres

http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf

²² <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/news/parking-substantive/>

²³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263815/parking-consultation.pdf

Car Parking Strategies

2.14 There are four broad areas that can be influenced with regards to car parking strategy in town centres by a local authority, that of setting the correct tariff, free parking offers, parking enforcement and improving the overall car parking visitor experience. These are explained in more detail as critical elements of local car parking strategies.

Setting the correct tariff

2.15 Ultimately, there is no simple formula that can be given on determining the right kind of tariff to be introduced nationally because every location is exposed to an individual set of dynamics and factors. The only universal answer is that local authorities and other operators must develop a plan for parking provision that faces up to the question, “What and who is our parking for?” and compliments a wider strategy for accessibility that again, fits with a strategy for the town centre or local authority area. One suggestion in tackling this is the introduction of ‘Town Teams’ and voluntary ‘Town Rangers’ not only to plan transport infrastructure but also to oversee the delivery of policies and patrol the town centres making them a safer and more pleasant place to shop and socialise. The Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners Programme is a good example of localism in practice to monitor and keep on top of who and what the parking provision needs to be.²⁴

2.16 The answer to the issue of parking charges is clear for private operators. Their assets need to make a profit. For local authorities it is less clear. Is parking about raising revenue for local services? Is it a service to the public, residents and visitors alike? Or, is it to support businesses as part of an economic regeneration strategy? One thing clear from the evidence available is that successful parking tariffs should identify the correct balance of these factors. Having a clear strategy for parking, and in particular parking charges, as part of a wider transport strategy is vital and must be customised to the local circumstances. Strong arguments have been made on how the increasing cost of parking is curtailing the appeal of town centre locations, while the transparency of how parking revenue is used and whether the revenue is invested in transport and improving parking services is often unclear.²⁵ Effective information exchange between local authorities should include good practice examples and case studies of successful delivery of high street support.

²⁴ The Portas Review
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6292/2081646.pdf

²⁵ Portas Review
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6292/2081646.pdf

- 2.17** When changes to parking restrictions, charges or enforcement are made, the evidence suggests that the primary behavioural responses to the change tend to be either:
- an acceptance of the new arrangements, in which case people's behaviour broadly remains unchanged;
 - a change in parking location, people park further away from their destination in an attempt to avoid paying a charge or
 - a reduction in the length of stay in order to reduce parking costs.
- 2.18** Despite fears to the contrary, there is little evidence to suggest that the primary response to parking management is any more extreme than this. There is no evidence that visitors use alternative destinations more. However, these arguments only hold true as long as you are sensitive to local needs and influences which should be taken into account before changes to parking management are implemented ²⁶
- 2.19** The key issue with car parking charges is not only how much the tariff should be, but which payment systems are in use and what the pricing structure is. Parking management has been used to suppress demand during peak-time and encourage demand during off-peak. Interventions have also been used to entice shoppers into the town centre but encourage commuters to park edge-of-town to ensure town centres are able to capture spend. Parking management has also been used to influence a modal shift in the transport choices of people from private transport to public transport.
- 2.20** The balance is a very hard one to achieve and car parking policies in town centres can soon be criticised as being too rigid, with unwelcoming enforcement staff with arbitrary pricing policies with little evidence of re-investment.
- 2.21** There are various examples of town centre car parking policy and practice which are clearly evidence based. For example, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council introduced a borough-wide parking strategy in March 2012. Independent market research was commissioned seeking views of residents, businesses and visitors. As a result a need to increase availability of short stay spaces was recognized as well as making charging clear and uniform. Long term parking charges of £2.40 all day have been introduced for Monday-Saturday 9am-5pm²⁷ and free parking for 30 minutes, after 5pm and on Sundays in short-stay pay and display parking spaces across the borough.
- 2.22** There is little evidence, however of evaluation of car parking policy after they have been implemented, at least in the public domain. One example, however, was action taken by Swindon town centre in relation to concerns raised by local retailers on the impact that car parking charges might be having on footfall and turnover particularly in the context of the recession. In

²⁶ <http://towns.org.uk/files/Market-Towns-Car-Parking-Research-2007.pdf>

²⁷ <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/documents/ert/carparks/yarmoffstreetparking.pdf>

June 2010 the Council responded by reducing short stay car parking charges in the three premium rate 'pay on foot' multi-storey car parks and all car parks in Old Town for the period to 31st July 2011, with the aim of encouraging more people into Swindon town centre and Old Town and increasing the length of stay of shoppers. Importantly, the Council undertook detailed monitoring and evaluation of the scheme, using quantitative data relating to car parking usage and footfall (up by 8.17% against a national fall of 2.2%), and qualitative data from retailers on retail performance. General feedback on retail performance gathered through surveys was overwhelmingly positive from both retailers and customers, with many anecdotal comments on increased dwell time and spend, brought about by the revised charging structure which encouraged a 4 hour stay.

- 2.23** The Council also reported that interest in letting units was on the increase. It was anticipated that two more units were on the verge of being let to national operators previously not interested in Swindon. Data revealed that, whilst the reduction in tariff had not increased the overall volume of cars in town centre car parks, car borne visitors were probably staying longer – resulting in the positive changes to footfall and performance. Sensibly, the evaluation also took into account other factors that might have had an impact on the scheme, including new development/store openings, and public realm improvements. The Council also considered the costs of the scheme, which were anticipated to result in a reduction of car parking income by £0.5m in the financial year. Despite this, the Council made the changes permanent, subject to a normal annual review process. This highlights the importance of a well thought out and evaluated policy as well as the effects a change in car parking tariffs can have on footfall.

Free Parking

- 2.24** It is important to note that, in reality, there is no such thing as a free parking space; someone, somewhere is paying for it to be provided, serviced and maintained. The important question is who pays and how are the costs covered? Is it the Local Authority, local businesses or the users? Over time, car parking has proved to be a good tool for generating revenue for local authorities. DCLG estimates that, for England alone, parking income from fees and penalties for 2009/10 comes to £1.35 billion and legislation does prescribe how income from on-street car parking can be used by local authorities (but not that generated from off street parking).
- 2.25** Free parking schemes with limitations offer more flexibility without causing major issues in terms of parking revenue, as compared to unrestricted free for all parking. Free short stay provision promotes customer satisfaction and can increase footfall to favour, for example, visits of up to 3 hours.²⁸ Local tariffs should take into consideration the parking offers nearby urban centres have in use to minimize the effects of displacement. Seasonal free parking is

²⁸ Parking and Town Centres. Parking Forum position paper 12
<https://www.atcm.org/atcm-uploads/DOCS/187-491-ParkingInTownCentrespositionpaper12>

probably the most long standing form of free parking scheme to attract footfall in November and December, which are the most important retail trading months.²⁹ There are numerous examples of free car parking, or schemes with elements of free car parking throughout the country, but again there is little evidence of any evaluation of the schemes as to whether they have had a positive impact on the town or have changed behaviour. The following examples do show some evidence of evaluation.

2.26 In Middlesbrough, the Council introduced new parking measures in February 2013 on a trial basis in order to boost town centre shopping. Public car parks offer free parking for two hours and a rate of £1 per hour or £1 all day depending on the car park. The initiative followed a consultation with local business leaders, employers and traders with the aim to ensure the town centre kept attracting visitors.³⁰ Assessment of the scheme showed that the number of car parking spaces being used in the town centre doubled. The trial was estimated to cost the council £300,000 in revenue but is seen as a success in boosting footfall in the town centre.³¹ Reducing car park usage had been a continuing trend in Middlesbrough since 2008 so this represented a real turnaround and the review of parking charges complimented the Council's sustainable regeneration objectives for the town.³²

2.27 Rotherham Borough Council introduced a "free after 3pm" parking initiative in May 2009, offering free of charge parking in Council owned off-street car parks and on-street parking bays between 3pm-6pm Monday-Friday. After a limited evaluation of the scheme the Council ended the free parking initiative in October 2010, returning to normal parking fees - mainly as a result of funding to the scheme being cut and deciding that the costs outweighed the benefits. As a compromise, a suggested 10% increase for on-street and off-street parking was deferred in an effort to continue supporting town centre traders despite discontinuance of the 'free after three' scheme³³

2.28 More locally, and most recently, the free car parking scheme in Bolton has been extended for a longer period from weekend to weekdays after 3 p.m. with the offer running until after Christmas. This is in recognition of feedback from retailers that the free parking scheme has had a positive impact on their sales. Similar feedback was received from the free pilot parking scheme in Oldham. The pilot came to an end in April this year and saw town centre car park use increasing by 31% along with positive feedback from businesses and shoppers leading to an extension in the project.

²⁹ Re-Think! Parking on the High Street Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres
http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf

³⁰ Middlesbrough car parking discounts
<http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6510>

³¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-23223367>

³² Middlesbrough Annual Parking Report 2012-2013
<http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=8568&p=0>

³³ http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/news/article/309/free_after_3_scheme_ends

- 2.29** There are some examples of how a combination of elements of free car parking and reduced but consistent tariffs have shown a real difference in terms of footfall in some town centres. With benefits encouraging some councils to continue the schemes and take on the cost burden of maintaining a free parking element to fulfil their leadership role in economic regeneration of the town centres.
- 2.30** As discussed previously, where there is a lack of clarity between the car parking charge and the quality of the offer of a location, then customers will be deterred from visiting and be attracted to other areas such as out of town locations. The worse case scenario is that a town is considered to be over charging relatively to the benefit of visiting the town centre, or that it is being over zealous and rigid in terms of enforcement. It is clear that charges for car parking in town centres, as elsewhere, must be consistent, clear and justified. Once shoppers are deterred, be it through car parking or for any other reason, it is often very difficult to reverse or change shopping habits back to a town centre location

Enforcement

- 2.31** A further issue relating to car parking tariffs in town centres is that of enforcement. Rigid enforcement can result in a very negative image of the town centre and could in effect deter visitors. Whether the enforcement is carried out by the local authorities or by private contractors, enforcement has to be seen to be clear, fair and reasonably flexible. For example, as in most local authorities, parking enforcement in Torquay town centre (along with Torbay Council) is carried out by Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) who are directly employed and managed by the Council and use hand held computers and printers. Enforcement by CEOs benefits from on street monitoring by a supervisor, constant analysis of data from hand held computers, daily staff briefings, customer contact and an appeals procedure.³⁴
- 2.32** Grace periods make sure enforcement is fair so that the time on the pay and display machine is noted by the CEO and compared to their handheld computer to avoid any discrepancies. CEOs also use observation periods where vehicles parked in contravention of the regulations can be observed for a time before a penalty charge notice is issued to make sure vehicles are not involved in activity that might make them exempt from immediate regulations.³⁵

³⁴ Torbay Council Parking Annual Report 2011/2012
<http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/parkingannreport1112.pdf>

³⁵ Torbay Parking Enforcement Policy 2012
<http://www.torbay.gov.uk/index/your-services/parking/enforcementpolicyjan2012.doc>

Enhancing the customer experience

- 2.33** There are a number of factors within the realm of car parking, other than pricing, that can make a town centre more attractive. Practice linked to enhanced customer experiences includes integration between parking facilities in terms of design and style, encouraging high standards through reinvestment and introducing new payment methods, taking advantage of new technological advances. Most of the best examples increase the convenience of using car parks as well as making the visit a much more pleasurable experience in a safe and clean environment. Town centre car parks can be seen as the gateway to the town centre for many and is often the first impression visitors get of the town centre. Informative signage is an example of how to improve the ease of use of car parks and in the Northampton town centre strategy, for example, the need for better signage to improve access to the town was emphasised along with the need for positive parking experiences.³⁶ On this basis, Northampton invested £200k into new electronic parking signs to provide live information about available parking spaces and free parking as a tool to promote and optimize town centre car parking and management.³⁷
- 2.34** Technology plays an increasingly important role in the promotion and use of car parking in town centres. A number of Local Authorities are exploring new ways of using technology to manage the use of their car parks. In Bedford, for example, the proposed parking strategy suggests managing parking stock so that maximum capacity is available during peak times, developing existing surface car park sites increasing the number of spaces and encouraging short term parking as their main priorities in terms of car parking in their town centres. The Council has introduced a mobile app 'RingGo!' to enable motorists to pay for their parking using their mobile phones. Horsham Council's website offers live information on the status of the council-run car parks. The data is fed from Horsham's main car parks via the West Sussex Urban Traffic Management and Control System (UTMC) with updates every two minutes. As well as a similar mobile app to the Bedford case, the Horsham service also enables the use of reminder text messages for when the parking session is about to end as well as extending the stay by using a mobile phone instead of having to return to the car.
- 2.35** A reward system linked to parking payment based on smart technology can also encourage visitors to return to town centres. A simple example being a free visit for every 5 visits made to the town centre managed electronically. Similarly, ticket machines, such as in Chesterfield, may have notices and vouchers of business offers in the area and if used this can be redeemed for free parking.

³⁶ Parking in Northampton Town Centre

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/Fen/Fcouncilservices/FTransport/FTP/FPDF/2520Documents/FNorthamptonshire/2520Parking/2520Strategy.pdf>

³⁷ <http://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/politics/northampton-to-get-200-000-parking-signs-1-4835147>

- 2.36** Additional services within the car parks could also be offered to enhance the user experience. In Lewisham shopping centre, for example, customer satisfaction is enhanced by offering free AA roadside assistance to all customers experiencing a car break down in the multi-storey car park as well as Car Valet UK providing car cleaning services while customers shop in the shopping centre.³⁸
- 2.37** This balance of service and the correct charging policy is one element in maximizing the potential footfall for a town centre. Parking management is a very powerful tool when used correctly and a direct way of supporting broader local authority objectives. In transport terms, councils have more control over parking than virtually anything else in terms of the number of car parking spaces, availability, as well as the setting of tariffs and price bands. A successful parking management strategy is most importantly flexible and can bring many benefits when used in conjunction with local authorities priorities as well as being tailored to the known customer profile.

Summary

- 2.38** There are some examples of how a combination of elements of free car parking and reduced, yet consistent, tariffs have shown a real difference in terms of footfall in some town centres - enough for some councils to continue the schemes and take on the cost burden of maintaining the schemes to fulfil their leadership role in economic regeneration of the town centres. Where there is a lack of clarity between the car parking charge and the quality of the offer of a location, then customers will be deterred from visiting and be attracted to other areas such as out of town locations. Each local authority needs to reach the correct balance in terms of the car parking tariff as well as in the use of enforcement, technology and the general car parking customer service experience.

³⁸ <http://www.lewishamshopping.co.uk/getting-here/car-parking>

3 CAR PARKING MEASURES IN THE PRINCIPAL TOWN CENTRES OF GM

- 3.1 As discussed in Chapter 2, car parking is a key tool for town centre managers to use in order to maximise footfall. As such, it is useful to look in a little more detail at what policy, quantity and tariffs levels currently exist in the principal town centres of GM, as outlined below. Publicly available information has been updated based on a town centre questionnaire with responses received from Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport and Wigan (the deadline for returns was Friday 25th October 2013).

Altrincham

Altrincham has a number of private and council owned car parks. One of the key car parks being the modern multi-level car park facility at the Stamford Quarter with 24 hour security, eco lighting, strategically positioned ticket machines, higher than average spaces for disabled drivers and lift and stair access directly into the town centre. There are reduced car parking charges during the most popular periods on Regent Road car park and free Sunday parking on all Council car parks and on-street pay and display areas.

Further car parking measures have been introduced, particularly in response to the town centres decline. Visitors can park for 10p for 1 hour in all Council car parks and on-street parking bays, 30p for 2 hours and 70p for 3 hours parking. As a balance, however, all day parking prices in off-street car parks increased slightly in the review to £3. The only exception to this all day charge is Regent Road car park, recognised as attracting commuters to park there all day, which is £6. Future plans include improvements for enhanced visitor experience including an "iapp" for drivers to download information showing the current availability in car parks in Altrincham as well as clearer town centre access signs. The option to pay for parking by debit or credit cards will also be introduced.

Ashton-under-Lyne

Most of the car parking facilities in Ashton town centre are surface facilities which despite being functional can restrict efficient use of land. Non-surface parking facilities are linked to retail centres such as the Arcades and Ladysmith Shopping Centre, with multi-storey car parks providing up to 700 spaces. There are two privately owned car parks, one close to the train station charging £40 monthly and one within 500 yards of the town hall and main market with £10 a week charge. Parking across council owned car parks is free after 3pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The biggest parking facilities in Ashton are Union Street with 212 spaces, Camp Street

with 165 spaces and Old Cross Street with 149 spaces. There are two zones for parking in the town centre with costs from £1/hour to £2.50 for 4 hours, reduced evening rates and zone 1 offering all day Sunday parking for £2.

The need for more car parking has been recognised; however, especially challenging in terms of parking provision are the Old Town and Portland Basin areas due to their conservation status.³⁹ A new multi-storey car park is being proposed on Dale Street East in St Petersfield providing 244 spaces with 44 designated for the use of Ashton Magistrates Court. However, this car park is to be operated as a private car park for the tenants of the St Petersfield Development.⁴⁰ The package for the recently opened Metrolink from Droylsden to Ashton includes funding for two Park and Ride sites at Ashton Moss and Ashton West with spaces for up to 600 cars.⁴¹

Bolton

NCP are the operators of 16 surface site car parks and 3 multi storey car parks within Bolton town centre. The multi-stories in the centre are Topp Way with 800 spaces; the Deane Road with 815 spaces; and the Octagon with 508 spaces, all offering season tickets for business and the public including validation deals for businesses. Costs range from 70p for an hour to £3 for all day. Motorists parking in Bolton town centre can now pay without cash via RingGo, acting as an alternative to pay and display parking with coins. There is also no ticket needed as Enforcement Officers can check which vehicles have paid using internet connected handhelds.

From May 2013 shoppers have been parking in Bolton town centre for free at weekends in a new attempt to boost business.⁴² The scheme will run for a year in three of the town centre multi-storey car parks operated by NCP, and will be reviewed thereafter. It has also been agreed that there will be free parking on weekdays after 3pm in the same car parks over the Christmas period between early November and January 2014. The council ran a similar free scheme last Christmas at four multi-storeys⁴³. This will cost the council an estimated £280,000 from a budget that has been set aside to boost the borough's economy. As part of the plan, however, there will be charges at surface car parks on Sundays, which are currently free. In 2006 Bolton carried out a study into car parking in the town centre⁴⁴ which these parking tariffs reflect.

Bury

Bury Council manages and maintains 36% of the car parking in the town centres, which comprises of on-street and off-street public parking. Currently the council manages 1,545 car parking spaces in 12 surface car parks, 364 on-street spaces. In addition there are 2 privately run multi-storey car parks with 1,250 and 600 spaces, totalling to 4,940 car parking spaces in Bury's

³⁹ <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/planning/ashtonstrategy/strategy.pdf>

⁴⁰ www.tameside.gov.uk/28aug13/agenda/item11.pdf August 2013

⁴¹ <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/pressrelease/metrolink>

¹⁷ http://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/10417865.Free_parking_boost_for_shops/?ref=rc

⁴³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-19946797>

⁴⁴ <http://www.bolton.gov.uk/sites/DocumentCentre/Documents/Bolton%20In%20Focus%20-%20Car%20Park%20Study.pdf>

town centre. Whilst the actual number of off-street spaces operated by the Council has not altered in recent years, it has dropped proportionally with the opening of the privately owned Rock and Q Car Parks.

Within Bury town centre itself, there are just over 20 car parks, 12 of which are council managed. The public car parks are operated based on pay and display, whereas the private multi-storey car parks use pay-on-exit. On average parking up to 30 minutes costs £1 and up to 1 hour £1.70 using on-street parking. Council owned car parks charge £2 for up to 2 hours of parking, Moorgate being the only car park with a £1 up to an hour charge. Sunday parking is available in public car parks for a standard rate of £1. The Rock car park is the newest addition to the car parking offer and rates start at £1.20 rising to over £5 for over 5 hours and £10 for up to 24 hours. Parking is free in the evening.

Other key car parks in Bury include the Mill Gate multi-storey car park, which has 572 long stay spaces and the largest surface car park is at Woodfields Retail Park which provides 1,032 short stay spaces. Most of the off-street short stay spaces are located around the outside of the eastern and southern part of the ring road – the larger being the Market car park (445 spaces). The market car park is crucial to the success of the market and it is noted that there may be scope for an additional deck of parking. Car parking and transport more generally was reviewed by URBED in 2009 in the Bury but Better report.⁴⁵

Oldham

There are 12 council provided car parks in Oldham Town Centre. Hobson Street has 750 spaces, Cannon Street 250 spaces and Bradshaw Street 138 spaces. The rest of the parking services range between 20 to 126 in size. Overall there are 3,500 off-street car parking spaces and 293 on street spaces. Payment in all the car parks is based on pay and display with ticket machines operating with cash only. The council-owned car parks offer free parking up to 3 hours on Saturdays and Sundays. A ticket from the pay and display machine must be displayed in order to claim the offer. Thirty minute on-street parking is possible holding a pay and display ticket. Hobson Street has free all day parking on Saturdays and Sundays. This scheme was introduced in January 2013 with the hope of boosting footfall and trade. Changing from two hours of free parking to three hours of free parking on Saturdays and Sundays, the offer was extended for the rest of 2013 in April and has recently been extended for a longer period after positive feedback. Covering almost 2,000 parking spaces in the town centre area, the new scheme is expected to cost the council an extra £244,000 over a 12 month period.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ <http://media.urbed.coop.ccc.cdn.faelix.net/sites/default/files/8%20-accessibility%20update%20-%20Bury%20But%20Better%202009.pdf>

⁴⁶ <http://www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/8/news-headlines/79245/new-parking-rules-begin>

Rochdale

Rochdale council provides free parking in Rochdale and Middleton town centres after 3pm on Saturdays and Sundays on council run car parking. Christmas time parking offers are currently being considered. There are 17 car parks, including the Bus Station multi-storey car park offering 413 spaces. Other major car parks include Whitworth Road with 250 spaces and Town Hall square with 152 spaces, altogether providing 2,571 car parking spaces in the town centre. Rates for parking are between 50-90p an hour and £2.80-£6.60 for over 6 hours with the exception of the Holme which offers unlimited contract parking with 251 spaces. There are also several on-street parking options with the largest being the Esplanade with 84 spaces and rates from 90p an hour to £1.50 for 3 hours.

There have been major transformation works taking place in Rochdale town centre over a period of about 5 years. Metrolink started operating at Rochdale train station in February 2013 and is due to be extended to the town centre in 2014. The overall transformation of Rochdale town centre includes plans to make the town centre more pedestrian and cycle friendly. There are no current plans for improvement in parking in the town centre area.⁴⁷

Stockport

The council provides a combination of surface and multi-storey car parks in Stockport town centre offering 2,750 parking spaces in total. Spaces range from 798 in the Heaton Lane multi-storey car park to 200 spaces in Newbridge Lane to 138 in Stopford House. The Merseyway shopping centre offers 835 spaces with 31 disabled bays. Two of the town centre car parks have been awarded with a Park Mark which indicates measures for safer parking have been met and assessed by the Police. Managed by the British Parking Association, the scheme helps to prevent criminal activity and anti-social behaviour by the parking operators. Most of the car parks operate with pay and display with fares ranging from £0.60 an hour to £1.20-£2.20 for two hours. The town centre is divided to two classes of fares with both operating a reduced cost for Sundays with £0.50 for 2 hours and £1.00 for over 2 hours. Contract parking is available for a number of town centre car parks and on-street parking. Parking payment is based on pay and display as well as pay by mobile phone.

A major transformation has been put into place to improve the parking facilities in Merseyway multi-storey car park. Stockport Council, UK Asset Resolution and the landlord of Merseyway shopping centre have jointly invested £1.84m to refurbish the car park. New pay on exit machines means visitors can drive straight into the car park without a ticket allowing more flexibility in the length of stays. Work in the car park is planned to be completed in early 2014.⁴⁸ Stockport council also offered free parking in

⁴⁷ http://www.rochdaletowncentre.com/home/access_to_parking

⁴⁸ <http://www.stockport.gov.uk/newsroom/merseywaycarparkfacilitboosthighstreet>

council-owned pay and display car parks and bays on Sundays in December and free afternoon parking in the run up to Christmas .⁴⁹

Wigan

There are two multi-storey car parks in Wigan town centre offering over 1,000 parking spaces and both operating a pay on exit system instead of pay and display. Galleries car park is situated within the Galleries Shopping Centre and Water Street within a short walk to the town centre. Both multi-storey car parks have limited opening hours from 6.30am or 7am to 7pm Monday to Saturday and 10.30am to 5.30pm on Sundays. The Galleries car park offers an additional hour on Thursday evenings. Out of the two large car parks, Water Street offers a quarterly, biannual and annual permit charges. The rest of the car parks in Wigan town centre offer surface parking based on pay and display and permit parking. Overall there are approximately 3,500 car parking spaces in Wigan town centre.

Except for the two multi-storey car parks, parking in town centre is free of charge on Sundays and at a reduced rate of £2 all day on Saturdays for the majority of car parks. Standard fares are £1.10 for the first hour, £1.90 for two hours and £2.70 for three hours applying to most car parks in the town centre. Pay and display is in operation between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday and is operated by phone and card as well as cash in five of the largest car parks. There is an ongoing debate about parking fees in Wigan and it has been highlighted in local media that the council collected over £475,000 in parking fines and some £2m in parking fees last year.⁵⁰ The car parking policy in Wigan is aiming to provide cost effective parking to drive the economy of the town with promotional free parking initiatives taking place throughout the year. The cost of car parking in the town centre as compared to out-of-town developments has been identified as one major barrier hindering the use of Wigan town centre.

Case study – use of technology

Manchester City Council launched a 6 month parking application trial in September 2013 running until March 2014. The innovative smart parking technology provided by US-based company Streetline offers real-time parking availability information via the Parker app, which directs motorists to free parking spaces via Sat Nav. The trial is funded by the City Council's contractor NSL and is based on electronic sensors which have been placed in 200 parking bays in the Northern Quarter, Chinatown and King Street areas. Parking charges can also be paid via the PayByPhone payment option the app provides which means no cash payment is needed. Using PayByPhone, motorists can also extend their parking time without returning to the car as well as receive reminders via text message when their parking time is about to expire. The Parker app also provides information of the costs of parking, time limits and metered hours of operation in a specific location.⁵¹

⁴⁹ <http://www.marketingstockport.co.uk/business/news/172-STAY-IN-STOCKPORT-FOR-EXTRA-SPARKLE-THIS-CHRISTMAS>

⁵⁰ <http://www.wigantoday.net/news/local/businesses-warn-of-high-parking-costs-1-6011426>

⁵¹ http://www.manchester.gov.uk/news/article/6672/parking_app_for_manchester_motorists_goes_live

The free Parker app is available for smart phones and tablet devices and can be downloaded from the Council website. American cities such as Los Angeles, Washington DC and New York use the technology, while Manchester is leading the first major trial in the UK. If the trial is successful the system could be extended to other parts of Manchester city centre. The trial aims to increase Parker app awareness and downloads, enhance parking guidance and payment efficiency, and to provide insight into user behaviour. Manchester City Council is hoping the system will help motorists find parking, optimize the utilization of parking inventory, reduce congestion and increase commerce for merchants.⁵²

Summary

- 3.2 It is clear from the evidence above that policy in GM town centres is broadly similar, with similar pricing and an offer of both surface and multi-storey car parking with a mixture of both public and private ownership. The differences in pricing reflect the needs and demands of the town centres. The majority of the principal town centres in GM have some element of free parking within their pricing structures.
- 3.3 There is limited evidence, however, of the broad take up and use of new technology within the car parking offer. As showed by the technology case study, there are services available to make parking as convenient as possible for the motorist.

⁵² Streetline Inc marketing material

4 CAR PARKING EVALUATION

- 4.1 The lack of evidence of a direct correlation between car parking policy and town centre vitality is persistent primarily because there have been a very limited number of full evaluations of existing parking policy. While the need for an evaluation framework is evident, a lack of reliable parking information can make evaluation difficult. The examples below show how evaluation can be used to both review separate parking schemes as well as to form an overall review of the whole parking policy. Parking evaluation usually focuses on short term effects while longer term effects of parking policy have not yet received detailed attention.
- 4.2 Oldham Council introduced a free parking pilot scheme in January 2013 offering free parking seven days a week for two hours in off street car parks. An evaluation followed the pilot showing that off-street parking in Oldham town centre increased by 31%. However, the impact was seen to be less productive during weekdays, mostly due to town centre-based office workers and business users benefiting from the free parking. The evaluation led to a more limited parking scheme being introduced offering three hours free weekend parking which is more clearly targeted to boost the town centre economy. The new scheme running from April 2013 is estimated to cost Oldham Council an additional £224,000 over its existing budget in the next 12 months.⁵³
- 4.3 Bolton Council's Car Parking Study delivered by Peter Brett Associates (PBA) in 2006 used three key performance indicators to assess the car parking process in Bolton town centre which could be deemed as important in any town centre evaluation. The indicators, with weightings based on their level of importance, are accessibility (55% weighting), internal environment (30% weighting) and cost of parking (15% weighting). Each indicator considers a series of influential factors in order to show why motorists choose to park in certain locations, while the weighting is based on results of individual car park user surveys carried out in Bolton town centre in November 2005 by the Greater Manchester Transportation Unit. Each car park was then scored based on the three indicators thus forming an overall town centre quality score. This 'InFocus' approach gave Bolton town centre a score of 68% which PBA saw typical for a town centre with several relatively small car parks close to key anchor points with some accessibility issues. The overall analysis included car park utilization data for the financial year 2005/2006 provided by Bolton Council and APCOA as well as additional spot check site visits. The car parking assessment concluded that there will be a shortage of car parking spaces by 2012, which will require further action (assessment delivered 2005/2006).⁵⁴

⁵³ http://www.oldham.gov.uk/press/article/369/oldhams_new_free_car_parking_offer_starts_this_weekend

⁵⁴ <http://www.bolton.gov.uk/sites/DocumentCentre/Documents/Bolton%20In%20Focus%20-%20Car%20Park%20Study.pdf>

- 4.4 TRL Limited carried out a Parking Measures and Policies Research Review for the Department for Transport identifying pricing, changes in supply, location, Park & Ride, Workplace Parking Levy, parking provision in new developments and parking standards in new residential developments as the main policies and measures forming a car parking review. While this review focused on a wider area than town centre parking, the review discussed parking review methodology such as time series analysis and survey work. The use of surveys especially in mapping stated preference and scenarios is seen common in parking evaluation.⁵⁵
- 4.5 The Traffic Restraint Model developed for Bristol focused on mapping responses to transport changes. The change indicators included change of use and location or intensity of activities. Forecasts were then made to model four scenarios: a fall in the supply of Park & Ride spaces, increase in parking tariffs, increased charges for short stay parking and changes to parking enforcement. The main objectives of the study were to build a comprehensive parking inventory, develop a parking demand model and identifying areas with shortfalls in parking facilities, as well as to recommend solutions to arising problems.⁵⁶
- 4.6 In order for an area specific robust evaluation framework to be established, the purpose and criteria of what will be evaluated along with the key evaluation questions, data collection methodology and analysis tools need to be agreed. Data for evaluation must be gathered at regular intervals in order to form a basis for further comparison. Parking evaluation is also linked to determining the correct parking supply: efficiency-based standards for example take into account geographic, demographic and economic factors that affect parking demand simultaneously reflecting the relative costs and benefits of different options.⁵⁷ Setting benchmark is also essential, for example the AMT suggests that car parking is well managed when car parks are 85% full on a busy day.⁵⁸
- 4.7 An evaluation framework should be made part of a wider “integrated parking plan” which defines the geographic scope of analysis, identifies existing parking problems, is in line with the existing strategic planning context, includes a parking supply survey, identifies and evaluates current options, as well as including an implementation plan. The evaluation framework should be comprehensive and take into consideration at least the scope of the analysis, geographic range, time-scale of impacts, goals and objectives, a list of performance indicators and a base case forming a comparison standard. Specific evaluation methods depend on the goals and impacts of the evaluation process. Any time-limited parking schemes should be

⁵⁵ TRL Limited: Parking Measures and Policies Research Review, May 2010

⁵⁶ Study of Parking and Traffic Demand: A Traffic Restraint Analysis Model. Bates, J.; Skinner, A.; Scholefield, G. And Bradley, R. 1997

⁵⁷ Parking Management: Strategies, Evaluation and Planning. Todd Litman for Victoria Transport Policy Institute. 2013.

⁵⁸ <http://towns.org.uk/2013/12/12/parallel-parking-solutions/>

evaluated prior to their termination so that a need for any new programs can be established.⁵⁹

Summary

- 4.8 While full reports of how parking evaluations have been carried out are sparsely available, the examples above show that evaluation should be in line with the parking policy or plan in a certain area. Forming a distinct parking policy that suits local needs will help establish how and when data should be gathered for thorough evaluations taking place at regular intervals.

⁵⁹ Parking Management: Strategies, Evaluation and Planning. Todd Litman for Victoria Transport Policy Institute. 2013.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 There is no clear evidence of a direct correlation between car parking policy and town centre vitality primarily because there have been no full evaluations.
- 5.2 Towns with a good general offer will be able to attract customers despite having poor parking facilities and tariffs. However, there are some good accounts of experience that suggest that there are some clear positive relationships to ultimately fulfil the goal of maximizing possible footfall. For example.
- A clear and evidenced car parking strategy designed around the needs of local business can change the trends in footfall as in Middlesborough where success was documented through anecdotal evidence from retailers.
 - Free car parking costs can outweigh the benefits for a Council as highlighted in Rotherham, but can bring increased benefits if tied into wider initiatives such as sharing of costs with retailers as in Bolton.
 - It is not just about free parking, but reducing costs to encourage short stay parking as in Swindon. Positive feedback from surveys showed increased dwell time and spend encouraged directly through a four hour free pricing strategy. The scheme also highlighted that car parking practice can also attract new businesses to a town centre location.
- 5.3 Evidence points towards an element of free parking within a clear pricing structure being the most effective.
- 5.4 Most of the principal town centres in GM have adopted a free parking element with differences being in the length of time the free offer is available based on the town's needs.
- 5.5 The use of technology in a number of the GM principal town centres remains limited in enhancing the car parking experience.
- 5.6 The pace of change of town centres means that car parking policy needs to be regularly and consistently reviewed.
- 5.7 Evidence through evaluation of car parking practice is crucial to move the issue of car parking policy away from instinct and opinion towards an informed view looking at the individual needs of the town centre, set within a strategic context.