



Place and Resources Overview Committee

9 July 2025

Parking Review and Strategy For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr J Andrews, Place Services

Local Councillor(s): All councillors

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority: Dorset Council

Report status: Part Exempt (Appendix 2)

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the strategic direction arising from the Dorset Council Parking Review. The 2023 introduction of new parking machines enabled this review to have extensive data to analyse. This review represents the first comprehensive, data-led assessment of council-operated parking across Dorset and identifies a clear need for modernisation to address traffic flow, congestion, air quality, unsafe parking behaviours, road safety, kerb space uses, local environment, seasonal pressures, fairness, accessibility, and alignment with wider transport, climate and urban enhancement objectives.

The review concludes that while overall utilisation of Dorset Council car parks is moderate, demand is highly concentrated in a small number of central and coastal locations, particularly during peak seasons. This creates congestion, poor air quality and reduced accessibility, while large peripheral and seasonal parking sites remain underused for much of the year. Current pricing structures, enforcement capacity and resident parking arrangements limit the Council's ability to manage this demand effectively.

The proposed direction is not revenue-led but focuses on improving availability, supporting economic activity, improving public confidence and ensuring compliance with statutory duties. Key themes include demand redistribution through town-level pricing and lengths of stay, modernised enforcement, improved resident parking offers, review of underused assets, stronger integration with public transport and climate objectives, and using parking surplus income to support improved bus and community transport services.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Place and Resources Overview Committee:

- Notes the strategic direction of the Dorset Council Parking Review.



- Reviews the detailed data in Appendix 2.
- Supports the emerging strategic direction for parking management.
- Comments on further policy development and phased implementation.
- Inspects the display of new parking machines and technology presentation that could enable the changes suggested in the review.

3. Reason for the recommendations

3.1 The recommendations enable Place and Resources Overview Committee to consider the evidence base, ensure alignment with Council priorities and provide constructive ideas before detailed proposals are progressed to Cabinet.

4. The report

4.1 The Parking Review examined 82 council-operated car parks (including those covered by Harbour Revision Orders), alongside on-street provision, and covered demand, utilisation, pricing, enforcement, resident permits and asset performance. The evidence highlights recurring issues of seasonal volatility, spatial imbalance and under-resourced enforcement.

The proposed strategic approach adopts a town-by-town methodology, recognising that parking performs different functions in market towns, coastal resorts and employment centres. The review advises against a flat, county-wide tariff as this would exacerbate congestion in the most pressured locations. Instead, differentiated pricing, better planned parking periods and clearer signage are proposed to encourage more balanced use of the parking estate.

4.2 Some very positive initiatives are already underway that will help us to support the recommendations of the review, as follows.

(a) At the Park and Ride in Weymouth the service operates frequently from 5am to half past midnight every day. A group of five passengers can stay in town all day long for a set price of only £6.50; whereas the very popular Pavilion car park costs £15.80 to park for the whole day. Further, site improvements are underway, including new site signage, installation of more CCTV cameras, installation of an information wall explaining how the service works, improved lighting, fresh redecoration, a new Real Time Information display, a refreshed active travel map and information panel, plus enhanced site security to stop unauthorised access when the site is closed. Later in 2026/27 a bus shelter will be installed and extra CCTV cameras will cover that zone of the site. During all these improvements, the Park and Ride service will continue to operate.

(b) At Cabinet (9 June 2026) it was resolved that procurement will now begin to replace the software systems used for civil enforcement and parking permits. That will significantly improve efficiency (by replacing separate legacy IT systems with a single integrated system) and will help the staff to keep the streets clear of congestion, keep traffic flowing, reduce air pollution, and reduce dangerous parking (eg on double yellow lines).

(c) The Council's complement of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) is significantly below strength compared to similar local authorities. Recruitment will now increase, to gradually increase staff numbers.

(d) Our existing parking meter terminals work well. However, consideration is being given to upgrading the machine fronts to provide a better service for motorists, who will be enabled to enter their vehicle registration and pay for a virtual ticket. That will mean there will no longer be any need for paper printed tickets (which can become jammed or damp inside the machine). It will also allow advertisements on the interactive display, through which the council may inform drivers of local



events coming up. Finally, the interactive screen will display the tariffs, and as a result each time any charges change in future there will not be any need to replace the physical signs displaying the tariffs (thereby saving the council the cost of replacing the tariff signs). Examples of the new parking terminals are available for inspection by Members at today's meeting.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 The review considered (a) maintaining the current parking approach and (b) introducing uniform pricing across Dorset. Both options were discounted due to their inability to address congestion, unfairness and inefficiencies identified in the data.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 Parking operations must comply with the Traffic Management Act 2004, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA 1984) and associated secondary legislation. While the power to set parking charges derives from the RTRA 1984, the Traffic Management Act 2004 provides the overarching framework for civil parking enforcement and imposes a duty on local authorities to secure the expeditious movement of traffic across their networks.

6.2 The authority's power to set charges for on-street and off-street parking under the RTRA 1984 is broad but must be exercised in a manner consistent with Section 122 RTRA 1984.

6.3 Section 122 RTRA 1984 imposes a general duty on local authorities to secure the "expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic" when exercising their functions under the Act. This duty requires that parking charges are aligned with traffic management objectives rather than revenue generation.

6.4 In carrying out this duty, the authority must have regard (so far as is practicable) to the matters set out in section 122(2), including:

- The desirability of securing and maintaining reasonable access to premises.
- The effect on the amenities of any locality affected.
- The importance of facilitating the passage of public service vehicles.
- National air quality strategies.
- Any other matters appearing relevant to the authority.

Case law has established that while surplus income may arise, the generation of revenue must not be the primary purpose of parking charges. A failure to demonstrate that these considerations have been properly taken into account could expose the authority to challenge on public law grounds.

6.5 Section 55 RTRA 1984 imposes specific obligations in respect of financial management. The authority is required to keep an account of income and expenditure relating to designated parking spaces. This includes income from parking charges and penalties together with expenditure on enforcement and administration.

6.6 When parking schemes generate a surplus, this must be applied in accordance with s55. In the first instance, the surplus should be applied to meeting the costs of the provision and maintenance of parking spaces. Where further off-street parking accommodation is considered unnecessary or undesirable, the surplus may also be used for:

- Meeting the costs of public passenger transport services.
- Funding highway or road improvement projects.



- Supporting environmental improvements.

Surplus funds must be applied only in accordance with these statutory purposes and cannot be diverted into general council expenditure.

6.7 Section 55 does not require car parking charges to be set at a cost recovery level. The Council should be mindful that a persistent or significant surplus may increase the risk of legal challenge.

6.8 The proposed review will provide a clear audit trail demonstrating how charges have been set in compliance with these statutory duties.

6.9 Councils can introduce differential charging, such as discounts for low/ zero emission vehicles, and higher charges for more polluting vehicles. Such measures must:

- Be reasonable, proportionate and not set at levels that appear punitive or arbitrary
- Be clearly linked to environmental objectives such as improving air quality
- Be supported by clear evidence and structured in a fair and transparent way
- Consider potential impacts on different groups, including equality implications

Charges may also vary by location or time where this supports traffic flow or congestion reduction.

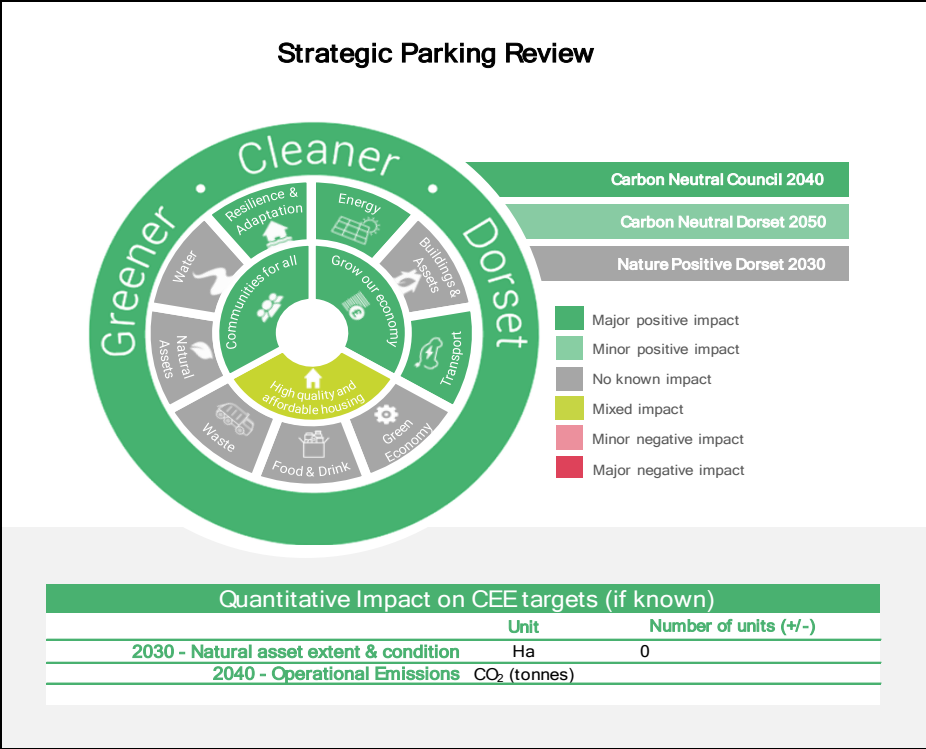
6.10 Overall, the proposed approach in this report is legally achievable if it is carefully designed, evidence-based, and clearly framed as a traffic and environmental management measure rather than a means of raising general revenue.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The proposals are intended to be financially sustainable, maintaining overall income while improving utilisation and compliance. Future decisions will be subject to detailed financial modelling and affordability assessments.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The strategic direction supports Dorset Council's climate and ecological commitments by reducing congestion, discouraging unnecessary circulation for parking and encouraging use of sustainable transport and cleaner vehicles.



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	Positive impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	Major positive impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	Major positive impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	Strongly supports it
High-quality and affordable housing	Neutral
Communities for all	Strongly supports it

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 Improved traffic flow, reduced congestion and better access to town centres can support public health, air quality, accessibility and community well-being, particularly for those with mobility needs.



10. Other implications

10.1 The parking strategy supports wider regeneration, economic vibrancy and public realm objectives by improving access to town centres and reducing the negative impacts of congestion.

10.2 In future some existing assets (i.e. car parks) may be identified for improvement, redevelopment or sale.

10.3 Some town centre public car parks have CCTV, and car parks are priority locations for preventing crime and anti-social behaviour. Key stakeholders include Dorset Council, Dorset Police, Dorset Community Safety Partnership. Car parks feature particularly regarding safety planning for the night-time economy, anti-social behaviour responses, and safer town centre initiatives during seasonal peaks. These factors will be taken into account in future developments.

11. Risk implications

11.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium – reflecting public and Members' sensitivity to parking changes and operational complexity.

Residual Risk: Low to Medium – subject to phased delivery, community engagement and ongoing monitoring.

12. Equalities

12.1 In undertaking a review of parking charges, the authority must comply with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Section 149) and the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled persons (section 20). These duties are continuing, non-delegable and apply not only to the final decisions on parking charges but also to the process by which those decisions are developed and implemented.

12.2 Under the PSED, the authority must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between such persons

Having due regard requires the authority to be properly informed about the potential impacts of parking charge changes and consider how the proposals may disproportionately affect certain groups. The authority must identify opportunities to mitigate adverse impacts and promote accessibility. The equality considerations must be integrated at a formative stage of decision making and not a retrospective justification.

12.3 These duties are engaged not only in the substantive outcome of the parking charges review but also in how the review is undertaken. This includes ensuring that:

- all relevant demographic and usage data is collected and analysed.



- consultation processes are accessible and inclusive including engagement with disability groups and other affected stakeholders.
- equality impacts inform the design of charging options at an early stage.

12.4 Future parking proposals will be supported by Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that impacts on protected groups, including disabled people and lower-income households, are properly considered and mitigated.

12.5 Emissions-based discounting will be advantageous to electric vehicle drivers. If surcharges for high emission vehicles are also introduced, that could unfairly impact on low-income residents who lack the means to switch to a low or zero emission vehicle. Options will be considered to see if there is a way to soften the impact, subject to complying with legal advice.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1: Dorset Parking Review Report (WSP 17/3/2026) Executive Summary and Recommendations.

13.2 Appendix 2 (exempt): Screenshots from the Power BI interactive tool.

14. Background papers

14.1 The following background papers are relevant to this report:

Dorset Parking Review Report (WSP 17/3/2026) Executive Summary and Recommendations

Dorset Parking Review Report (WSP 17/3/2026, a 297-page technical report)

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the Cabinet Member for Place Services.

Appendix 1:

Dorset Council Parking Review

Executive Summary and Recommendations





Executive Summary

The parking review provides the first comprehensive, data-driven assessment of Dorset Council's parking operations covering 82 council-operated car parks and associated on-street parking across the county for the period April 2024 to August 2025. The review establishes a clear evidence base to support future policy, operational improvements, and strategic decisions.

In addition to the data analysis, the review has considered the legal framework that parking must operate under, and the recommendations have been developed with this framework in mind. Raising revenue is not an objective of civil parking enforcement; the objectives and any policies or strategies must be designed around the following points:

- Managing the traffic network to ensure expeditious movement of traffic, (including pedestrians and cyclists), as required under section 16 of the Traffic Management Act (TMA) 2004 (Network Management Duty)
- Improving road safety
- Improving the local environment and air quality
- Improving the quality, accessibility, and use of public transport
- Meeting the needs of people with disabilities, some of whom will be unable to use public transport and depend entirely on the use of a car
- Managing and reconciling the competing demands for kerb space

The review identifies opportunities to improve availability within Dorset Council's busiest car parks, supporting economic growth and helping communities to become better connected. By setting pricing structures and lengths of stay through a strategic approach that understands the interrelationship between each car park, and recognises the individual needs of local communities, Dorset Council can deliver a strategy that meets the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Key Challenges

- Coastal car parks see a significant seasonal variation, generating pressure in the summer and significant spare capacity in the winter.
- There is strong spatial imbalance. Central car parks in towns such as Weymouth, Dorchester, Bridport, and Shaftesbury regularly exceed capacity, whereas peripheral car parks in those towns frequently remain underused.
- Traffic congestion, driver frustration, and poorer air quality are created in areas which have high demand for the most convenient car parks, although there is typically spare capacity in nearby car parks.
- Many people who frequently use the highest tier car parks feel that the pricing structure is unfair, while people in market towns are opposed to level parking charges, often feeling that driving to access their local communities is their only viable option. Levelling parking charges while maintaining income would result in a 10-hour tariff of £11, a significant increase from the current £4.20 in tier 1 and £6.30 in tier 2.

Key Observations

- Dorset Council has significantly fewer Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) than nearby authorities, potentially resulting in lower levels of parking compliance, in turn leading to higher levels of dangerous parking.



- The Dorset Council resident's permit provides exceptional value for money for people who often park in off-street car parks. However, take up is low.
- Better utilisation of car parks will support plans for regeneration and needs to be considered as part of ongoing urban enhancement work. Beyond car parking, improving access to local businesses is likely to support economic growth.
- Public transport and car parking provision are intrinsically linked. A better bus and community transport offer brings the opportunity to rethink parking charges.

Recommendations

Emissions based discounting

Dorset Council's Plan 2024-2029 is clear on the need to respond to the climate and nature crisis. To promote greener vehicles and improve air quality in towns, the Council should consider implementing emissions-based parking discounts for low/ zero emission vehicles and could possibly consider surcharging for high emission vehicles. To introduce emissions-based discounting, £250k of parking machine upgrades would be required but car park tariff display signs would not need to be updated, and could be removed altogether, because the tariffs would be displayed in real time on the screens of the upgraded parking machines, which would save the Council approximately £125k every time tariffs were to change in future years.

Demand redistribution

Pricing structures and maximum lengths of stay should be adjusted to level overall demand on a town-by-town basis. Less-used car parks should be promoted through digital signage, and improved signage.

Optimise use of underutilised sites

Alternative winter uses should be considered for sites with low seasonal demand. Underutilised sites should be considered for repurposing or sale.

Modernising enforcement

Dorset Council should expand its Civil Enforcement Officer capacity. This needs to include an increase to the baseline number of permanent staff alongside exploring options to further increase the team in periods of high demand.

There is also a need to implement updated technology-led enforcement systems that work in conjunction with other parking systems.

Public engagement

Comprehensive public engagement should be planned to explain proposed changes and implementation of a revised parking strategy.

Resident discounts

The most cost-effective way for residents who regularly park in Dorset Council's car parks is to purchase a resident's permit.

There is the opportunity to implement pay-as-you-go resident discounts, although cost certainty on income would be low. Dorset Council does not have sufficient usage data to accurately determine the split between residents and visitors using their car parks. Should Dorset Council wish to provide discounts on pay-as-you-go prices, a number of options are available. One way could be to apply



discounts through an app-based system, with people registering to verify their residency and the app then offering discounted rates.

Few councils apply resident parking discounts directly at the parking machine. Councils who have implemented this approach have used a variety of strategies including issuing physical resident's cards/permits. Providing a resident discount option at the machine can make the transaction process more cumbersome for the customer. If Dorset Council chooses to implement emissions-based discounting, the machine upgrades will include a vehicle registration keypad. The most straightforward method to introduce resident car parking discounts (using the parking machine) would be for the resident to select a resident tariff at the machine when they enter their registration number.

Any solution that is implemented needs to be designed in a way to make it as simple as possible for the customer while still ensuring that it is robust enough to deter fraudulent misuse.

Residents' on-street parking zones

Dorset has several residents' parking zones across the larger towns. The schemes have been developed in isolation under the guidance of an outdated policy, and they no longer fulfil the requirements of the residents. The policy requires review, lower limits of permits per property and reductions in non-residents parking in the busier locations should be considered.

Park and Ride sites

Dorset Council currently has two park and ride sites, Weymouth Park and Ride and Corfe Castle Purbeck Park. Both of these operate well below capacity.

Research has shown that for a park and ride location to be successful it requires parking in the destination centre to be limited and suitably priced, sustainable transport links (bus, bike, walk) to be reliable and convenient, and sites should be well signed, advertised and safe. Steps should be taken to ensure all these factors are improved.

Conclusions

The Dorset Parking Review demonstrates that Dorset Council's parking system is characterised by seasonal volatility, spatial imbalance, and demand on a small number of high performing sites.

While overall utilisation is moderate, peak season congestion in coastal and town centre locations places considerable operational strain on the car park estate, in contrast with persistent underuse of peripheral car parks particularly in market towns and during the winter season.

Current enforcement capacity is insufficient to ensure compliance, leading to low PCN issuance compared to neighbouring authorities and potential inconsistent user behaviour.

Climate and decarbonisation commitments require Dorset Council to reshape how parking supports mode shift, EV adoption, and reduced congestion. Parking charges should be linked to improvements in bus services at a town level to help encourage use of public transport. A level tariff across all car parks would take away the opportunity to encourage parking in larger less central car parks and increase congestion and the hunting for spaces in the busiest highest demand locations.

Overall, the evidence underscores the need for a more balanced and modernised parking operation that supports residents, visitors, businesses, and the Council's long term strategic objectives.



Short term Recommendations (6 Months)

Increase the size of the enforcement team to improve highway safety, reduce congestion and to improve compliance in car parks. The size should take into consideration seasonal fluctuations and upcoming new legislation relating to moving traffic offences and pavement parking.

Invest in a modern technological solution to ensure the efficient running of the team for both enforcement and appeals. Give customers a better, smoother experience when using permits, paying for parking or dealing with PCNs. Ensure that solutions are compatible with future plans for single council accounts and residents' parking offers.

Medium term recommendations (1 year)

Explore the possibility of developing an offer to allow residents to have reduced parking costs with a lower resident's tariff. Ensure that the process is simple to operate and available to all users.

Implement a tiered tariff approach at a town level. Use demand, capacity, opportunity to use sustainable transport options, bus improvements, and congestion levels to drive the pricing structure. This could include the introduction of emissions-based discounting.

Improvements to communication of changes and parking opportunities through review of way finder signs, public comms, and car park level advertising particularly of permit offers.

Longer Term recommendations (1 year+)

Development of park and ride sites to help improve congestion and pollution levels in the areas they cover. This will also help with peak parking demand in these key areas allowing more central car parks to be redeveloped or utilised by different users. This is dependent on improvement to sustainable transport links in Weymouth and a suitable bus and walking route from Purbeck Park.

Review the resident on-street parking policy to help manage demand and better control parking by visitors. This will involve amendment to existing traffic regulations and the introduction of new ones in some areas.

Review underutilised sites for potential redevelopment or sale. Explore options for sites with low out of season use and potential winter closure to save on maintenance and wear. This will require further research to help understand how these sites are currently used and how other changes may affect them.

Create an integrated, live 5+ year car parking strategy that aligns parking policy with:

- Town centre regeneration plans.
- Public transport improvements.
- Active travel objectives.
- Net zero and environmental commitments.
- Economic resilience and tourism impacts.
- Local Transport Plan.