

Report to:

**TOURISM, ECONOMY, AND COMMUNITIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer:

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Date of Meeting

23 November 2022

PARKING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To provide information on the performance data of Council-owned and managed car parks, and on-street parking, both with regards to patronage and income in the full year ending 2021-22, and in the current year, April to October, with comparisons to previous years. The report also provides an update on the growth of the new PayByPhone system introduced in May 2020. Detailed performance figures are shown in the appendix to this report.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider the performance of parking services and to identify any further areas for scrutiny as appropriate.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure constructive and robust scrutiny of the report, which had been requested by the Committee.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"

6.0 Background information

6.1 Parking Infrastructure

There are two types of car parking: On Street, which relates to the parking bays along a street and Off Street, which relates to parking within a car park. There are approximately 900 pay and display On Street bays, mainly within the town centre and along the Promenade.

There are 21 Council-owned car parks, plus two car parks which are managed by the Council although privately owned, with a combined total of almost 5,000 parking spaces.

Note that due to two major regeneration projects – the Blackpool Central development and the planned Civil Service Hub – we have lost spaces on both Central and East Topping Street car parks.

As a result, we are now down to 371 bays plus six disabled bays on Central and down to 173 bays plus six disabled on East Topping Street. The lost spaces on Central will eventually be replaced by the new multi-storey car park which is now under construction though we will lose all of East Topping Street when work commences on the civil service building.

There is likely to be some disruption at South King Street over the coming months when demolition work is carried out on the adjacent buildings.

Some of the losses in the town centre are being offset by the acquisition of Alfred Street (close to the new Conference and Exhibition Centre) which provides 116 bays and by the reopening of Talbot multi-storey roof following the recent completion of anti-suicide fencing.

In light of the various losses and gains, particularly in and around the town centre, the Council's car parking strategy is being reviewed.

As part of the Council's EV charging strategy, additional electric charging bays have been installed in West Street and Talbot multi-storey.

6.2 Performance (see also Appendix 6(a))

Patronage can be affected by a number of different factors. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact between March 2020 and May 2021 with repeated lockdowns and restrictions clearly having a negative impact on car park usage at certain times.

As we moved into a new financial year at the start of April 2021, large parts of the tourism and hospitality sector remained in lockdown, which meant a significant downturn in visitor numbers at Easter and the early May Bank Holiday.

However, as the Government roadmap out of lockdown unfolded, there was a dramatic recovery in visitor numbers from late May onwards, illustrated by high levels of footfall and parking usage during the summer, autumn and winter seasons.

In November and December 2021, when we had an extended Illuminations season and the new Christmas By The Sea village in place on the Tower Festival Headland, we attracted record numbers of visitors over the winter months which, in turn, delivered significant increases in patronage on our car parks.

The second part of the Performance Report looks at patronage between April and October this year. Over the first few weeks, patronage on our car parks continued to show growth over previous year, though that was largely due to the tourism industry not opening up until mid-May in 2021 which skewed the comparison.

Patronage figures since then (both on-street and off-street) have mainly under-performed against comparative weeks in 2021, though that was partly to be expected given the “staycation” effect that Blackpool clearly enjoyed during that year when international travel was extremely limited.

It is also important to bear in mind the loss of spaces on Central to help facilitate the new multi-storey car park and associated leisure development at Blackpool Central and at East Topping Street to facilitate the planned Civil Service Hub. These are major capital projects that are key to Blackpool’s regeneration.

As we moved into the summer, performance was also affected by the fuel and cost of living crises which have undoubtedly had a dampening effect on the tourism and hospitality industry not just here in Blackpool but across the whole of the UK.

Whilst that has resulted in an overall downturn in car park usage, the actual income achieved to date has held up relatively well due to the tariff increases introduced in May.

It is worth noting that the VisitBlackpool major events programme continues to drive high volumes of car park usage. There were exceptional patronage figures during the Air Show Weekend in August and over the four firework nights in October when our main car parks were at full capacity.

6.3 PayByPhone

At the end of May 2020, we launched our new PayByPhone parking app that allows customers to pay for their parking via their mobile phone either by using the downloadable app or by calling a designated number.

This allows the payment to be made without queuing, handling cash or touching payment

machines. It also enables users to top up their parking session from a remote location.

Extensive signage has been installed around the car parks and along the Promenade to encourage people to download the app. The attached report illustrates the continuing growth since its launch with almost 170,000 transactions April to October this year compared to 151,000 in the previous year.

Given the extremely high usage of our car parks at certain times the app has been particularly useful in giving people an alternative method of payment rather than queuing at pay machines, it is our intention to put more focus on promotion of the service at the point of payment.

We continue to explore ways in which we can utilise the technology to offer discounted offers for specific times as well as conferences and events. For example, the Christmas offer of £1 to park for a three-hour period, which we introduced as part of the Christmas By The Sea event in 2021, is only accessible via the app. It will be repeated again this year.

In addition to the PayByPhone facility, we are actively exploring investment in new payment infrastructure that will facilitate faster payment and enhance the overall customer experience.

The year-to-date performance and comparison against last year is shown in the attached report.

6.4 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 Appendix 6(a): Parking Performance Data

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 The car parking service has made a surplus of income over expenditure every year as far back as records goes. The introduction of new tariffs in May this year – the first to be introduced in several years – has helped sustain income levels.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 None

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 None

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 See Appendix 6(a)