

Report to:	CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications
Date of meeting:	27 September 2023

ANNUAL PARKING PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report

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 2022-23, and in the current year, April to August, with comparisons to previous years. 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 Reason for recommendation(s)

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

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

3.2 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 and key 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 20 Council-owned car parks, plus two car parks which are managed by the Council although privately owned, with a combined total of more than 4,000 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 61 bays on East Topping Street.

The lost spaces on Central will eventually be replaced by the new 1300-capacity multi-storey car park which is now under construction and due to open early next year ahead of the new tourism season.

We will eventually lose most or all of the East Topping Street as work progresses on the new Civil Service Hub, though the provision of new car parking capacity forms part of the town centre parking strategy.

Over the past year, there has been some disruption at South King Street while demolition work was carried out on the adjacent buildings, but that work is now complete and the car park fully-reopened.

Some of the losses in the town centre have been offset by the acquisition of Alfred Street (opposite the entrance to the new Conference and Exhibition Centre) which provides around 130 bays and by the reopening of Talbot multi-storey roof after the recent completion of anti-suicide fencing.

Further town centre parking will be available on a 129-space car park which will be opened alongside the Holiday Inn between Talbot Road and Dickson Road.

As part of the Council's EV charging strategy, additional electric charging bays have been installed in West Street where we now have three charging bays and four to Talbot multi-storey where we now have six. In addition, six have been installed at Banks Street, one on Bispham Village car park, one on New Larkhill Street and two on South King

Street.

A significant investment of circa £125k is also being made in our parking payment infrastructure. This is in readiness for Vodafone switching off their 3G network.

In order to future-proof our payment machines, an upgrade is now underway to ensure the public can continue to pay for parking using the payment card option.

We are replacing the communicators within all of the on-street and off-street payment machines with a new piece of hardware that will give us a secure network connectivity for both payments and our own reporting systems using either wi-fi, roaming networks or fixed fibre where possible.

This not only prepares us for the 3G switch-off but also provides added confidence in the resilience of the parking payment system for the public, speeds up the payment process and provides fallback options to retain connectivity, particularly at peak visitor times.

6.2 Performance (see also Appendix 5a)

The first part of the Performance Report shows the overall performance (for both On-Street and Off-Street) during the 12 months ending March 31, 2023.

Off-street patronage (use of our car parks) was clearly affected by regeneration works which resulted in the part-closure of Blackpool Central which resulted in the loss of almost 150,000 users over the year.

Some of these losses were offset by visitors using other car parks along the Central Corridor with Lonsdale showing an increase of 12,000 users; Bonny Street, plus 8600 users; Chapel Street, plus 7,500 and Foxhall, plus 6,000.

The biggest gains over the 12 months were seen on the town centre car parks with 40,000 patrons using the newly-acquired Alfred Street car park as well as significantly increased usage of Talbot Road multi-storey (plus 10,000 users) and West Street (plus 15,000 users).

On-street parking showed an overall increase of almost 9,000 users compared to previous year, despite losses of circa 29,000 users along the Promenade and 8,000 users on Princes Way. In contrast, the town centre on-street bays showed an increase of almost 30,000 users and the Bond Street/Watson Road bays an increase of 8,700 over the year.

The increase in town centre patronage is undoubtedly linked to the extended Illuminations season and the Christmas By The Sea village which returned to the Tower

Festival Headland for a second year, attracting record numbers of visitors over the winter months which, in turn, delivered significant increases in patronage on our car parks.

This performance was enhanced by a repeat of the “Park For A Pound” promotion during the Christmas By The Sea event which allows residents and visitors to park for three hours on most of our Council-owned car parks for £1 using the PayByPhone app.

The second part of the Performance Report looks at patronage over 22 weeks between April and August this year.

Over the first two months of the year, patronage on our car parks performed relatively well, with May in particular benefiting from good weather and an additional Bank Holiday to mark the King’s Coronation.

However, as we moved through June, the trend declined and we started to show an under-performance compared to previous year and this was particularly evident in July when a prolonged spell of poor weather coincided with the start of the school summer holidays.

This poor weather, coupled with a continuing pressure on family finances through cost-of-living increases and high fuel prices, clearly had a dampening effect on visitor numbers and, in turn, car park usage.

This is also evident when looking at usage of the on-street Promenade bays which showed a loss of 3,600 users compared to the same period last year.

As we moved into August, the trend started to steadily improve, helped by a much better spell of weather and the start of our summer/autumn events programme.

It is worth noting that these large-scale free events continue to drive high volumes of car park usage. There were exceptional patronage figures during the Air Show Weekend in August when footfall on the Promenade was recorded at more than 350,000 over the two days.

Year-to-date, car park patronage is around 13,000 down compared to last year. Another major factor in this is the loss of a large part of East Topping Street (minus 23,600 users compared to the same period last year). Some of this has been displaced, with Talbot multi-storey showing an increase of 4,800 users; West Street, plus 4,600 and Alfred Street, 4,600.

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 last year not being introduced until two months into the financial year. This has given us a knock-on benefit in April and May this year. As of Week 22, income is marginally ahead of last year.

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.

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.

In the year ending March 2023, the total number of users grew to 377,000 and income to more than £2m. Year-to-date usage and income is continuing to show significant growth over the first half of this new financial year (illustrated in Appendix 5a)

6.4 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 **List of appendices**

7.1 Appendix 5(a): Parking Services 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 2022 – the first to be introduced in several years – has given some benefit in the first two months of this financial year.

9.0 **Legal considerations**

9.1 None

10.0 **Risk management considerations**

10.1 None

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people

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 Appendix 5 (a)