

Shropshire Council Car Parking Strategy 2017

Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID)

Consultation Response

October 2017

Prepared by

Seb Slater BA FRSA Executive Director, Shrewsbury BID

Chris Carter BA MCIHT Associate Director for Transport, AECOM



AECOM



Introduction

Shrewsbury BID is a business led partnership dedicated to making Shrewsbury a better place to live, work, visit & invest.

Shrewsbury BID was elected by the business community in April 2014 and represents the interests of 500 businesses in the town centre. Access and Car Parking is a key area of the Shrewsbury BID business plan on which we were elected and which is supported by Shropshire Council.

Shrewsbury BID has had its largest response from members to this car parking strategy and has carried out extensive consultation with its members - there is deep concern about the negative impacts on businesses and the town.

Shrewsbury BID have worked in partnership with Car Parking specialists AECOM to provide a qualitative review of the Shropshire Draft Parking Strategy to consider the potential effects of the proposals on Shrewsbury Town Centre.

This report focuses on the potential effects on the local economy through possible changes to shopping/leisure visitor levels, although potential effects on commuting and tourism are also considered.

Shrewsbury BID seeks to work in partnership with Shropshire Council on a way forward.

Shrewsbury BID is solely accountable to its members and is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors (below) from a representative range of sectors in the BID area.

Mike Matthews
(Chair)
Prince Rupert Hotel

John Hall
(Vice-chair)
Write Here!

Kevin Lockwood
(Chair Car Parking Group)
Shrewsbury Shopping

Helen Ball
Town Clerk
Shrewsbury Town Council

Gemma Davies
Head of Economic Growth
Shropshire Council

Trish Donovan
Vinterior

James Handley
AHR Architects

James Hitchin
The Alb

Paul Kirkbright
University Centre Shrewsbury

Dilwyn Jones
Sabrina Boat

John Major
Majors

Ann Tudor
Claremont Accounting

Rachel Williams
Marks and Spencer

About the Shropshire Council car parking strategy

The Draft Parking Strategy seeks to supersede the current Parking Strategy for Shropshire which was introduced in 2012. Shropshire Council wishes to consider parking in light of current and future levels of supply and demand, with a more efficient use and management of car parks essentially allowing these assets to be used as a traffic management tool to achieve the following strategic goals:

1. Contribute to economic growth;
2. Reduce traffic in the historic town;
3. Improve journey time reliability;
4. Encourage sustainable transport; and
5. Enhance the built environment.

The proposed strategy would establish a county-wide approach to parking, and is built around four key sections upon which consultation has been sought:

The proposed strategy will establish a county-wide approach to parking, and is built around four key sections upon which consultation has been sought:

Section 1

Proposals regarding: linear parking pricing bands; unrestricted parking; evening parking; loading bays; 'pop and shop' parking; and Raven Meadows Car Park opening hours.

Section 2

Proposals regarding: a new policy and tariff framework for weekly tickets; season tickets; residents' off-street permits; and coach and HGV parking.

Section 3

Proposals regarding: changes to the on-street resident's parking permit scheme.

Section 4

Proposals regarding: changes to the car parking waiver system.

It is considered that Section 1 has the greatest potential to affect the interests of the Shrewsbury BID and its members, with proposals that could impact on the wellbeing of the Town Centre through affecting parking that is most likely to be used by visitors and commuters to Shrewsbury. This consultation response therefore focuses on this section.

Context: Shrewsbury as a Destination

Shrewsbury is home to over 600 listed buildings, including Shrewsbury Castle and the Abbey, reinforcing its status as one of England's finest heritage towns. It has a unique mix of national and independent operators in the Town Centre. Neither can survive without the other. Independent retailers occupy many of the classic Tudor buildings in the Town Centre, with Butchers Row and Wyle Cop as prime examples. It has become a rarity in towns across the UK to be able to walk along a street without seeing a "high street" brand, as is the case on The Parade, or to see long-established, family owned firms such as Tanners Wines still operating. This, together with the big name offerings in Darwin, Pride Hill and Riverside Shopping Centres is what gives Shrewsbury such a broad appeal for visitors from across the County and beyond.

The prominence of the River Severn in Shrewsbury's townscape, combined with the prestigious gardens located at The Quarry, contributes to the Town's relaxed atmosphere and promotes Shrewsbury as a "day out". A number of events are held throughout the year in Shrewsbury, including the Shrewsbury Flower Show, which is one of the UK's premier flower show events attracting exhibitors and visitors from all over the country, the Carnival, and the Regatta. Shrewsbury has a growing evening economy which is bolstered by a wide range of quality restaurants and bars in the Town Centre. Venues such as Theatre Severn and The Old Market Hall Cinema play host to a variety of music, theatre and cinema events and represent the juxtaposition between new and old which make Shrewsbury so distinctive.

The closest comparable town to Shrewsbury is Telford, easily accessible and located less than 30 minutes' drive from Shrewsbury via the M54. Although it does not offer the same level of historic character and mix of independent operators, Telford undoubtedly has a more significant retail offering in terms of 'big name' brands, most notably with Debenhams. Telford has also recently upgraded its evening economy with the development of the Southwater complex at the heart of the Town Centre, which includes a range of dining and leisure options. The accessibility of the town and large parking resource make it a competitive alternative to Shrewsbury for the car-borne consumer. This will increasingly be the case if the current proposed parking strategy is implemented in Shrewsbury, with Telford offering significantly lower cost parking. Currently, the maximum price for parking in Telford Town Centre is £6 in short-stay and £4 in long-stay car parks. There is a nominal 50p charge in all car parks after 6pm, and free car parking after 5pm on Thursdays when the Town Centre is open late. Sunday car parking is £1 all day, which aligns with the existing Sunday tariff in Shrewsbury which is to be scrapped as part of the proposals.

In short, Shrewsbury Town Centre is an attractive place to visit in part due to its character and range of independent shops and national brands. As a town centre, its main competitor is Telford. Whilst Telford does not have the same level of character, it does have a greater range of shopping options an improving evening economy and relatively inexpensive parking charges. Telford is located within the administrative boundary of Telford and Wrekin Borough Council, and is therefore not affected by the

Parking Strategy. Measures which affect the competitiveness of Shrewsbury in relation to Telford need to be considered carefully.

There is a perception that Shrewsbury Town Centre is underperforming in economic terms, in part due to difficulties with transport access, the negative impacts of motor traffic crossing the Town Centre and due to poor directional information, particularly for visitors¹. There are clearly a high proportion of car drivers accessing the Town Centre, validated by the fact that around 60% of people in Shrewsbury drive to work². This is higher than the national average (54%). By comparison, only 5% of people travel to work by public transport. This is considerably lower than the West Midlands as a whole (10%) and the national average (16%). In the absence of quantitative data on the travel behaviour of visitors to Shrewsbury, commuter travel is considered to be a reasonable proxy for how the town compares to other areas for car dependency.

The Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package (SITP) aims to combat the issues associated with car travel in the Town Centre and is being implemented in parallel to the proposed parking strategy. It is a package of transport measures including key junction improvements, improving the efficiency of vehicle movement in and around the Town Centre, and enhancements to pedestrian and cycle links. Funding has been secured for the SITP and will provide a total £12.1m investment in the town. It is unclear whether there are any proposals to address the low level of public transport use; and consequently it cannot be assumed that a reduction in car use in the Town Centre will result from the proposals of the SITP or the parking strategy without viable alternatives. Anecdotal evidence suggests that public transport is currently not a viable alternative to private car usage for many users of the town centre: the Park and Ride service was downgraded in 2016, and there are no Sunday or evening bus services.

¹ Shropshire Council (2016), *Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package Consultation – Supporting Information and Images*

²2011 Census Method of Travel to Work

Overall response from Shrewsbury BID

There is deep concern from Shrewsbury BID members and the wider public about the impact that some of the proposals contained within the proposed strategy.

Despite being borne out of 'a detailed evidence-based review'³ it is considered that the adoption of a countywide strategy neglects the 'individual set of dynamics and factors' that each location is exposed to⁴. A study into parking provision in town centres by the Association of Town and City Management et al (2013) explained that there is no simple formula to generate a suitable parking tariff to be used for numerous locations because the effects of parking charges are highly dependent on individual context. We recognise that there is a level of differentiation in the proposed system through banding car parks, but it is important to recognise that this system still fails to recognise the differences between Shrewsbury and the rest of the county.

Furthermore the strategy does not seek to identify or respond to the needs of different users of car parks in Shrewsbury, or seem to have considered the potential unintended economic consequences.

The proposals are at odds with the objectives of the strategy and in particular to 'contribute to economic growth'. The strategy appears to have been designed with the objective of generating additional revenue with no care for the wider economic impact. Whilst the strategy will increase the price of parking, it is questionable whether this will result in the intended net increase in revenue as there will be an inevitable decrease in usage. This has the potential to offset the additional revenue per ticket by reducing the number of tickets purchased, or the duration of stay and hence cost of the ticket. We are not aware of any revenue forecasts underpinning the Strategy which take this effect into account.

We welcome the ambitious and recently announced plans that Shropshire Council has for investing in Shrewsbury town centre. However we are concerned that implementing the proposed car parking strategy would seriously harm development and the value of key Shropshire Council assets, including Theatre Severn, the Old Market Hall and Market Hall.

Whilst using a parking strategy as a 'traffic management tool' can be effective, without viable alternatives to travel it can cause damage to the vitality of the Town Centre.

There is also no mention of improvement and investment in the Park and Ride services, or other transport infrastructure to provide viable alternatives to accessing the town centre by car. This is a key strand coming out of the Big Town Plan work which Shrewsbury BID has been working in partnership with Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council.

³Shropshire Council (2017), *Consultation begins into proposed parking changes* (<http://shropshire.gov.uk/news/2017/07/proposed-parking-changes/>)

⁴Association of Town and City Management, British Parking Association, Parking Data and Research International, Springboard Research Ltd (2013), *Re-think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres*

Parking charges must not be viewed in isolation. Shrewsbury BID is generally supportive of the measures contained within the SITP, produced alongside the strategy, which will contribute to the efficiency of movement through Shrewsbury Town Centre, particularly for visitors. This includes use of Variable Message Signage (VMS) to direct drivers towards car parking and the wayfinding system developed in partnership with Shrewsbury BID. Measures which enhance pedestrian experience are also encouraged, as this will promote Shrewsbury as a 'day out' and lead to longer dwell times. Currently businesses in the town are seeing a negative effect on business as a result of the SITP roadworks, and this car parking strategy would only further pressure on business in the town.

Response to specific proposals

Proposal 1 - The introduction of a set price per hour (known as 'linear' pricing)

1. The combination of a linear pricing structure with no cap on tariffs will lead to users being penalised for staying at the car park for longer periods.
2. It is a key objective of the parking strategy to contribute to economic growth through encouraging longer dwell times for visitors in Shrewsbury, which is supported by the BID. This proposal contradicts this objective.
3. We are concerned that the implementation of a blanket approach such as linear parking bands reduces the ability to alter parking tariffs to encourage, reward and (in some cases) disincentivise a range of travel behaviours.
4. In comparison to Telford, which is a primary competitor to Shrewsbury and not affected by the Parking Strategy, the linear policy does not perform well.
5. Telford offers £3/£4 daily parking in the Town Centre, compared to a minimum £5 or a maximum £25 in Shrewsbury.
6. Despite not being directly stated in the consultation documentation, these proposals will supersede the existing £1 Sunday daily parking charge which was successfully negotiated and promoted by the BID.
7. Having been introduced in June 2015, the £1 Sunday offer is starting to have a positive effect on Sunday trade and footfall. However we are still way behind other destinations and removing the £1 Sunday offer will negate any progress made – particularly given the lack of a Sunday park and ride service.
8. This initiative creates a significant draw to Shrewsbury on Sundays, and is competitive with other towns that offer a similar reduced tariff.
9. Adopting the standard linear pricing structure on Sundays is likely to lead to a large proportion of Sunday visitors going elsewhere or not travelling at all.
10. Some existing Sunday shoppers may shift to shopping on another day, rather than preferencing Sunday travel. This would slightly offset the economic impact on Sunday trade, but could also have the effect of increasing travel at busier times rather than travelling on Sunday which tends to be quieter.

11. The £1 Sunday tariff performs an important function in encouraging new trips on a Sunday to enhance the week-long viability of the town centre, but also in encouraging trips to the town centre to be undertaken on a quieter day, potentially reducing congestion during the week or on Saturday.

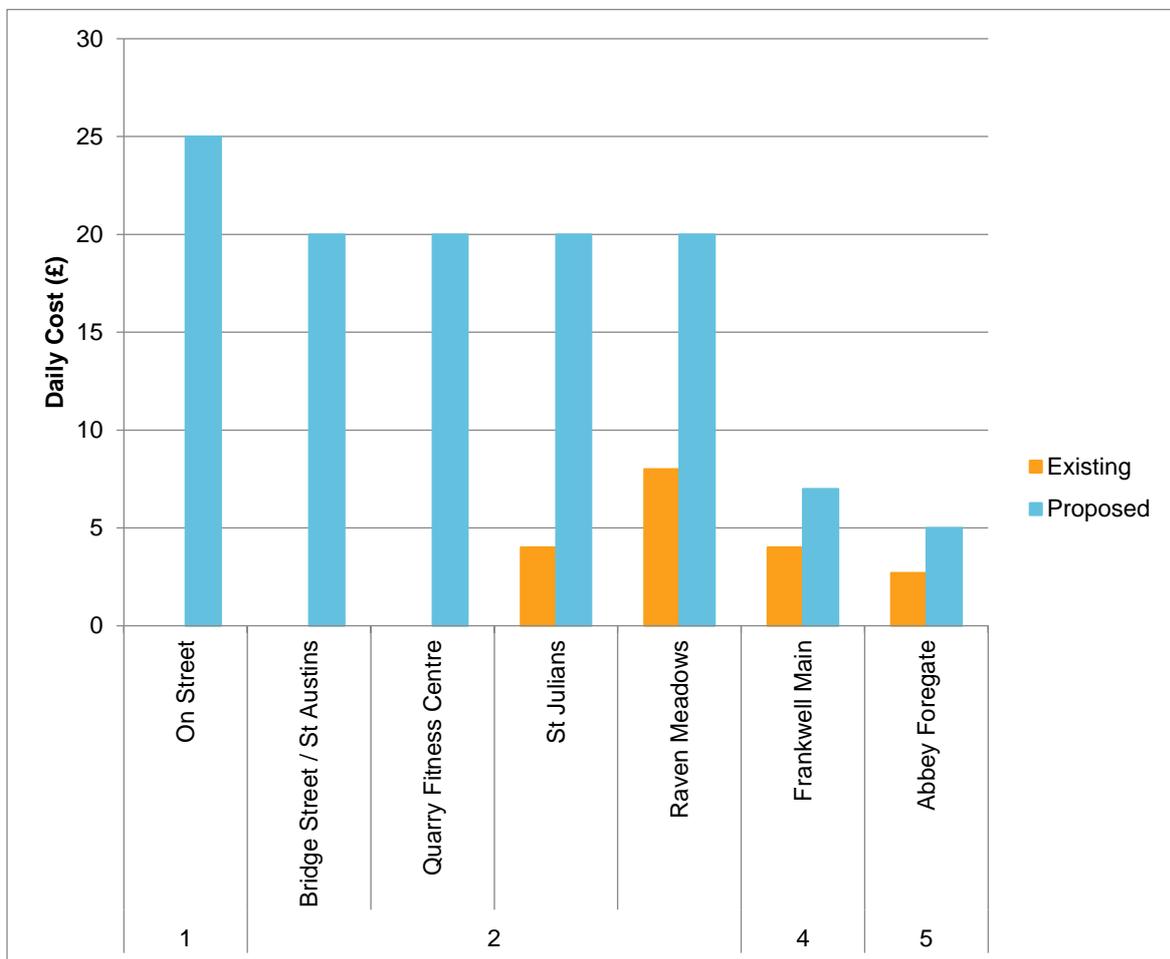
Proposal 2 - A standard countywide car parking banding/ranking system

12. The majority of car parks in Shrewsbury will be allocated as Band 2 under the proposals, with an hourly charge of £2. This includes two of Shrewsbury's largest car parks, which account for 47% of parking spaces in the Town Centre.

13. Figure 1 demonstrates that across all car parks in Shrewsbury, users will experience an increase in daily car parking charges. This is particularly evident in car parks classified as Band 2.

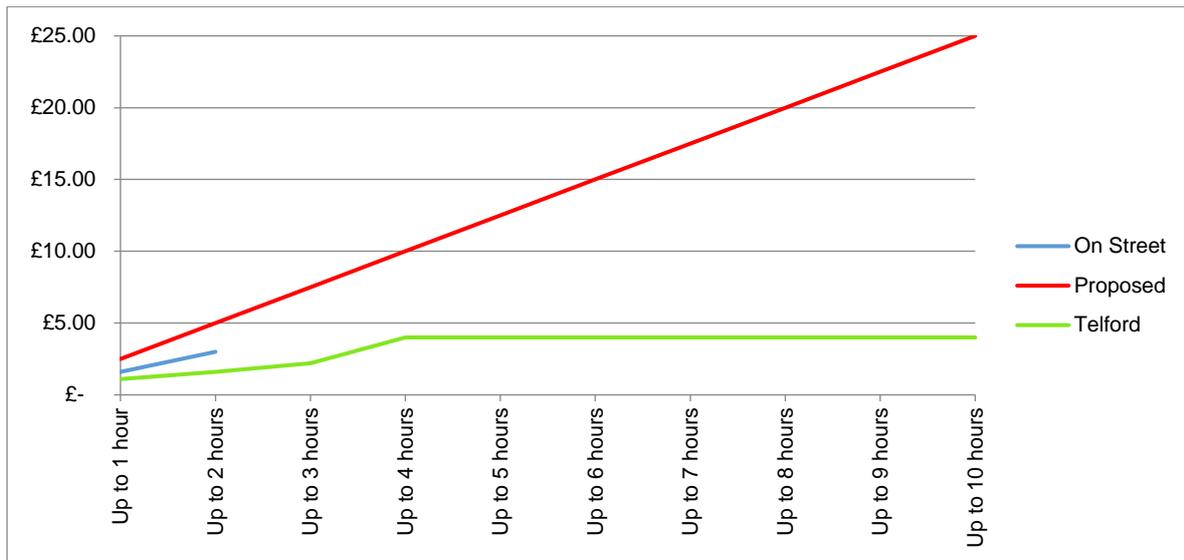
14. For example, the cost of parking for 10 hours in St Julian's car park will increase fivefold from £4 to £20.

Figure 1: Existing and Proposed Daily Charges for Shrewsbury Car Parks



Figures 2 – 5 provide visualisations of the existing and proposed parking charges across a 10 hour period for each parking band. This serves to demonstrate how the proposed parking charges will have a significant effect on what people pay to park for longer periods. The existing cost of parking in Telford is shown to provide a comparison with the closest competing town to Shrewsbury. The equivalent daily cost of a weekly ticket (included within the proposed changes) is also shown.

Figure 2: Band 1 Existing and Proposed Charging Profile



Users are currently only allowed to park on-street for up to 2 hours, which costs £3. Under the proposals, this will cost £5. Without a maximum length of stay, users could pay up to £25 for a 10 hour stay. This emphasises the fact that the proposals contradict a key objective of the parking strategy which is to encourage longer dwell times.

Figure 3: Band 2 Existing and Proposed Charging Profile

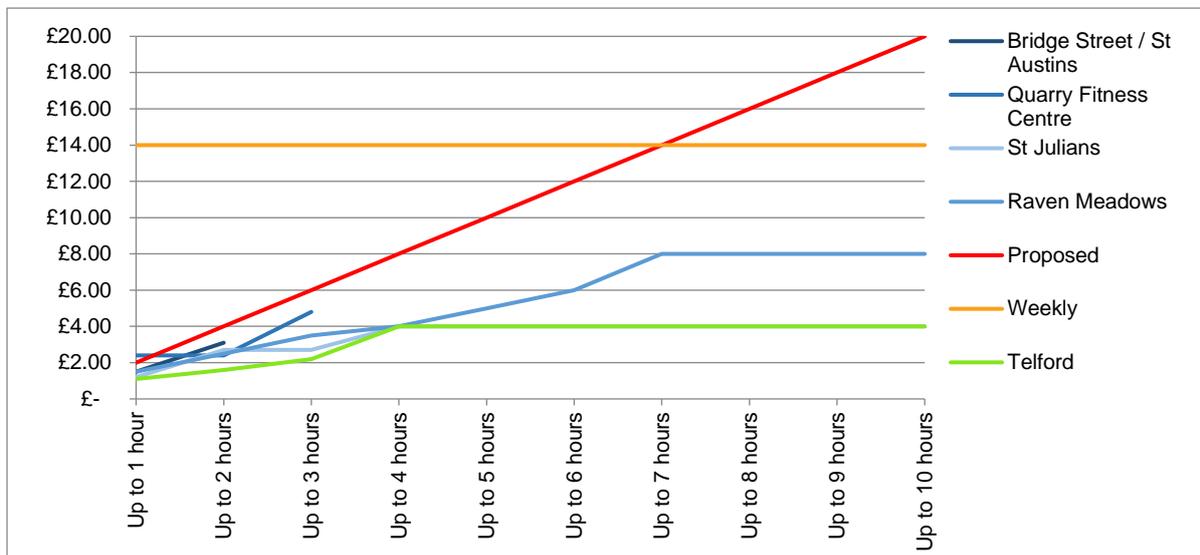
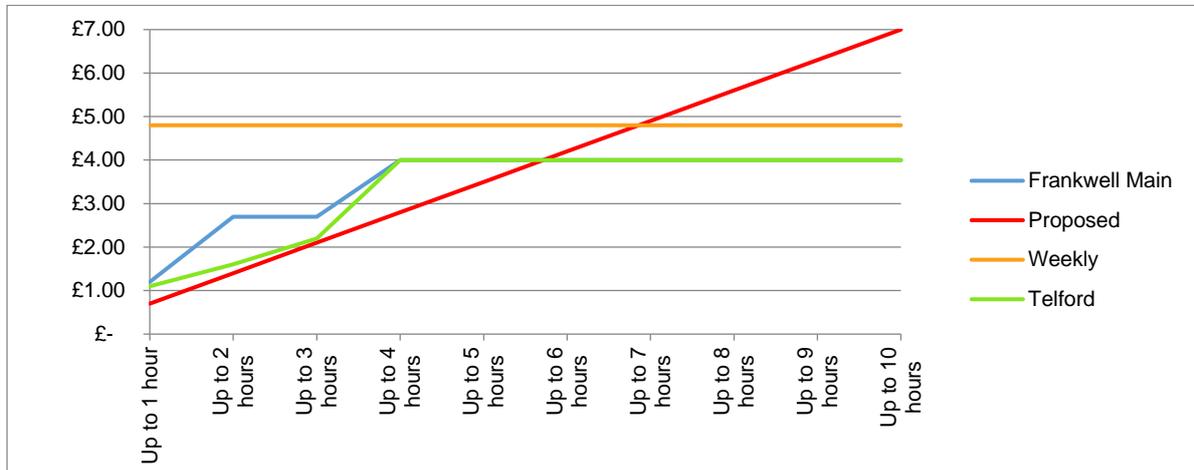


Figure 3 shows that users of Band 2 car parks in Shrewsbury will have to pay more with the proposed charges than they do currently. The existing charges for long stay parking encourage longer dwell times, with parking after six hours in Raven Meadows costing £8. Under the proposals, users in Band 2 parking would be required to pay £12 for six hours. A weekly ticket costing £70 (£14/day equivalent, assuming a five day week) would only be worthwhile for users parking for over seven hours. At 10 hours, users will only be saving £6 which could be lost if they do not park on every day of the week. The

comparison with Telford is stark, with the maximum cost of £4 for over 4 hours far lower than the proposed charges. At 10 hours, the difference in charges between Shrewsbury and Telford would be £16.

Figure 4: Band 4 Existing and Proposed Charging Profile



Whilst proposed Band 4 charges will offer better value than existing charges at both Frankwell Main and in Telford up to six hours, in both of these car parks longer stay parking is encouraged with a flat rate after this time. The effects of the proposed linear charging model are evident, with a difference in charge of £3 between existing and proposed for a 10 hour stay. The result of implementing weekly parking tickets on Band 4 parking is the same as for Band 2.

Figure 5: Band 5 Existing and Proposed Charging Profile

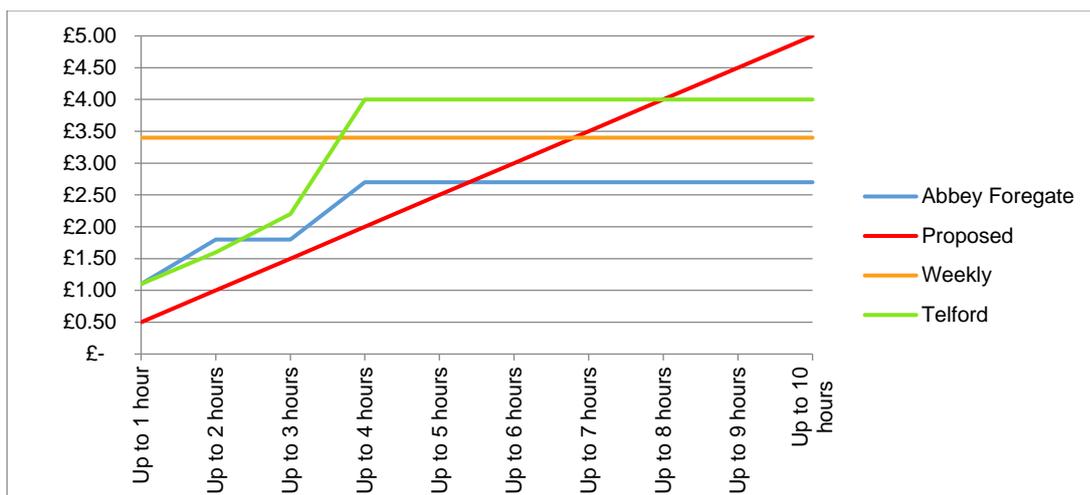


Figure 5 shows that the proposed charging model will provide better value for those parking in Abbey Foregate up to six hours. After this time, while existing charges remain at £2.70, proposed charges continue to increase up to £5 for a 10 hour stay. This disincentivises longer dwell times.

Proposal 3 – Parking tickets for unrestricted periods

15. Although we welcome the removal of short and long stay restrictions, we firmly believe that caps should be in place in some or all of the car parks to incentivise dwell time and reduce traffic in the town centre.

Proposal 4 - Introduce linear (set price per hour) charges between 9am and 8pm

16. Evening car parking is currently free after 6pm, and this provides great support for Shrewsbury's growing evening economy. Extending parking charging hours from 6pm to 8pm could potentially cost an individual £4/5, which would be a material consideration on whether someone decides to stay in town and socialise after work and/or make an evening visit to the town centre. Extending charging hours to 8pm is therefore likely to have a detrimental effect on the growth of the evening economy, particularly during a time when Telford is vastly improving its offering through the opening of the Southwater development, combined with reduced price or free parking in the evening.

Proposal 5 - The extension of on-street loading and taxi bay provision in the evenings and early mornings Proposal

17. We welcome this proposal.

Proposal 6 - Removal of the 15-minute 'pop and shop' period Proposal

18. Pop and shop performs an important function in the viability of a town centre. Many people are time limited and only need to perform a short task in the town centre, and therefore this parking strategy is unlikely to encourage them to stay for longer.

Proposal 7 - The extension of opening hours in Raven Meadows multi storey car park in Shrewsbury

19. We welcome this proposal but would stress that further investment is needed to make this car park safe and secure.

Additional comments

Weekly tickets will provide users with a minor saving which would be negated if they are unable / not required to travel to Shrewsbury on a particular day (the saving is equivalent to less than the cost of one day of parking).

Season tickets may offer better value than weekly tickets, but paying a large up-front cost is often not feasible for low paid workers. In addition, season tickets may cause people to drive to Shrewsbury on days when they don't need to drive, purely because

they are entitled to a parking space. This could conflict with one of the key aims of the strategy which is to reduce congestion in the Town Centre.

Recommendations

In the previous section we have set out some of the potential effects of the proposed Parking Strategy. We have significant concerns about applying a County-wide approach to Shrewsbury town centre. Whilst we recognise that the Strategy needs to be joined up across the County, the context of Shrewsbury town centre is unique to the rest of the County and its main competitor, Telford, is located outside of the scope of the Strategy and is therefore unaffected. As well as Shrewsbury being different to the rest of the County, there are significant differences between users of the town centre themselves.

'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?"'⁵.

The focus on coherence and consistency in the proposed parking strategy does have some obvious benefits, but it fails to address the main issues which, if considered, could yield the greatest results and address the key aim of the strategy, namely: to have a more efficiently managed and utilised parking resource in Shrewsbury which does not impede the operation of the Town Centre and instead contributes to its vitality.

As stated, we have identified a number of concerns of potential elements of the County-wide Parking Strategy on the users and businesses of Shrewsbury Town Centre. We appreciate the ability to make a representation on the consultation at this stage. We consider that the Parking Strategy needs to be developed and refined to mitigate these potential negative effects.

A key recommendation is to establish the identity of the different groups who use the Town Centre parking resource and what they use it for. This moves away from the traditional notion of 'the more you pay, the longer you get', which places time restrictions on motorists, cuts dwell time and enjoyment, and instead creates a strategy that is based on the needs of town centre users and also has the potential to contribute to reduced congestion⁶. We are concerned that the implementation of a blanket approach such as linear parking bands reduces the ability to alter parking tariffs to encourage, reward and (in some cases) disincentivise a range of travel behaviours.

This principle was enacted by Colchester in the production of their parking strategy. Colchester is in many ways comparable to Shrewsbury, as the county town of Essex, with a historic core and a mix of specialist independent shops and 'big name' brands.

They established four groups which best represented those who use the town's parking resource and tailored parking tariffs to each:

- 'Work' Special offer for all day parking for those arriving before 8am, i.e. commuters.

⁵Association of Town and City Management et al (2013)

⁶Association of Town and City Management (2014)

- 'Shop' Special offer for 4 hours parking for those arriving after 10am, i.e. shoppers.
- 'Play' Special offer for 4 hours parking for those arriving after 3pm, i.e. lifestyle/leisure users.
- 'Relax' Weekend ticket valid at multiple car parks, i.e. weekend visitors/tourists.

This strategy sat above an hourly/daily charging regime at each car park, and provided additional incentives which supported the needs of users and the town centre as a whole. It offered the same simplicity for drivers as the proposed linear, countywide strategy, but went a step further by making it clearer which tariff was appropriate for each user. It also incentivised commuters to avoid driving during the morning peak period, reducing congestion on the roads. Businesses in Colchester were supportive of the scheme, with restaurants, theatres and cinemas increasing publicity through participating in coordinated marketing campaigns.

The Shropshire Parking Strategy could work towards these principles by maintaining and building upon both the existing evening and Sunday parking charges which are tailored towards the groups who are most likely to use the parking resource at this time. For example the evening charges aligns with the 'play' category in the Colchester case study, and the £1 Sunday daily charge aligns with the 'relax' category. We recommend that further mechanisms such as those implemented by Colchester are considered to mitigate the concerns raised in this report.