

Stevenage Borough Council

Annual Parking Report 2021-22



Contents

Why do we manage parking?	3
How do we manage parking?	3
What have we done this year?.....	5
Personal injury crash site investigations.....	5
Marshgate	6
Alleyns Road Permit Parking survey	6
Harrow Court car park.....	6
Broadwater.....	6
Old Town parking review.....	7
Woodfield parking restrictions	7
Cycle parking/Lockable bike shelters	8
Do we make money from parking?	9
How many people get tickets and what happens next?	9

Why do we manage parking?

Since 2005 Stevenage Borough Council has had the power, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (the local Traffic Authority) to manage on street parking within the town. This means the council can make, and enforce, local parking rules.

Having these powers, the council is expected to use them and before taking them on we developed a Parking Strategy. The 2004 Parking Strategy identified ways that parking affects the community and set out a range of ways that parking should be managed in future to support local and national policy aims.

Managing parking to support these aims benefits everyone who lives in, or visits, Stevenage. That could be by removing hazardous or obstructive parking so that the roads can be used safely and easily, by ensuring that customers are able to visit businesses, or by nudging people to consider using other modes of transport that are better for their health while reducing both traffic congestion and pollution.

Council parking enforcement also means that we can help deal with most illegal parking, freeing up the Police who would otherwise have to do so. The council can enforce against:

- breaking specific rules such as parking on double yellow lines or in an enforceable bus stop, parking for longer than is allowed or not paying when you are supposed to;
- parking that obstructs where the pavement has been lowered (or the road surface has been raised) to give access to a driveway or so that people can cross the road; and
- parking more than 50cm out from the kerb into the road (double parking).

The council doesn't set out to make money from parking but is expected by the government to make its parking service self-funding so that it doesn't form a burden on council taxpayers generally who after all may not even own a car. If the council makes more money from on-street parking fees and parking enforcement than it spends on managing parking, this either goes to offset any loss in past years or is used to fund specific things allowed by law such as transport or environmental improvements and building or maintaining parking facilities.

How do we manage parking?

Parking is largely managed by making rules about what drivers can and can't do and upholding those rules through enforcement if they are broken. The council can only enforce through issuing Penalty Charge Notices ("parking tickets" or PCNs).

It should be remembered that most drivers don't seek to park illegally and may never receive a PCN. If they do, it is because based on what the Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO or "traffic warden") can see they believe that the vehicle has been parked in a way that breaks the rules. CEOs don't receive any sort of reward for issuing PCNs and one of the

service KPIs is avoiding CEO errors, with a target error rate of under 1% so if anything CEOs are incentivised not to issue PCNs unless they are certain that it is correct to do so.

Every year many tickets are correctly issued in this way, and when challenged by the driver correctly cancelled as they provide information or evidence that wasn't available to the CEO. The Parking Office at East Herts District Council considers all PCN challenges on the Stevenage Borough Council's behalf, so drivers are assured a fair and consistent hearing from a third party that has nothing to gain from their decision.

The rules that we make generally fall into two categories: preventing parking and creating opportunities for it.

Preventing parking usually means placing yellow lines. That could be double yellow lines that apply all the time somewhere that parking would create a hazard or obstruction, or a single yellow line to address a problem that only happens at certain times such as parking pressure from commuters. It can also mean banning parking on the verge or pavement to protect the environment and so that pedestrians aren't hindered by parked cars.

Creating opportunities means making it easier for one user to stop, but often at the cost of someone else being able to park. For example, we might have to make a bus stop enforceable so that buses can use it, meaning that cars that had been blocking it would have to be parked somewhere else. It can also mean setting conditions on parking, such as in the High Street where a time limit was introduced so that rather than being occupied all day by workers parking spaces would become available for customers to use, giving them the opportunity to support local businesses.

We also use charges to manage parking, where it is helpful to encourage turnover or steer long stay parking to other facilities while allowing some flexibility in how long drivers can park for. This is used in the town centre, where charges encourage drivers to park only as long as they need while allowing them to park all day if they must – but make it cheaper to use a car park for all day parking so that premium on-street space can be used for shorter visits. It is also used together with a three-hour time limit to encourage turnover of parking near the hospital to maximise parking availability for visitors and outpatients.

When the council sets out to make new rules or to change existing ones, we consult the public to try to make sure that we get it right. This typically includes informal surveys as well as formal public consultation exercises, to understand who will be affected by any changes and how. It is rare for a change to please everyone, but great care is taken to ensure all points of view are considered. A final decision is then made by the Executive Member for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, the senior councillor who oversees our work together with the Ward Councillors who represent the area affected.

Most changes to parking rules are subject to a long and tightly controlled legal process, so that motorists are not penalised through hasty or unconsidered changes. Given the work involved the council can only carry out a few projects to change parking rules each year, and these are prioritised based on the nature and history of each request or concern together with the need to make best use of available resources. This means that we are normally working on a mixture of large and small projects, in order to get them all done as

quickly as possible – though it still typically takes at least nine months to complete even a simple change.

We keep records of all requests for changes to parking and reports of problems, so that when we have capacity to start a new project, we can consider what the next priority should be.

The council also sometimes builds parking. In the past large sums have been spent on this, but it was found that where parking was built car ownership would increase in following years so the benefit of it being easier to find a parking space would often be relatively short lived. In recent years, changes to council funding have meant ever greater financial constraints and significant reductions in the budget available to build parking bays. In June 2019 the council declared a Climate Emergency and set a target for net-zero emissions by 2030, which makes it harder to justify building more parking as it both encourages car ownership and driving and removes valuable if small areas of green space. Although it often seems an “obvious” or “easy” solution to those who want it, parking construction is now something that has to be the exception rather than the rule.

What have we done this year?

The start of 2021-22 financial year coincided with the end of most Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions which meant that parking enforcement was stepped up to manage the problems that came with increasing amounts of traffic and more parking activity taking place.

Several projects to update parking restrictions were successfully progressed after investigations and public consultations were undertaken this financial year.

Personal injury crash site investigations

In 2021-22 financial year we investigated several sites where people have been hurt and parking was considered a contributory factor in causing the crash. The aim was to identify what restrictions if any should be proposed to help prevent reoccurrence and improve road safety.

In many cases, it was not found to be likely that pursuing parking restrictions would substantially improve road safety. However, some locations were identified where the introduction of parking controls by making a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) or other measures are considered likely to be expedient for avoiding danger to persons or other traffic using the road or for preventing the likelihood of any such danger arising.

Informal road markings were introduced at several locations as part of the Council’s road lining maintenance schedule in 2021-22 financial year. A few smaller projects proposing ‘no waiting at any time’ restrictions have been added to our work programme and some of these will be progressed in 2022-23 financial year.

Marshgate

As part of the regeneration of the town centre, the physical street layout in Marshgate has changed. Alterations include a new footway being provided, construction of a build out to assist pedestrians crossing the road, reconfiguration of the “island” in the north-western corner of the street and a previously public area to the west of that becoming private.

Some of the disabled parking facilities were relocated, a new loading layby was constructed to allow deliveries and collection from and servicing of adjacent premises, four new parking spaces for electric vehicles were introduced and works to install charging points will be completed in 2022-23 financial year. Also, no waiting no loading at any time restrictions were introduced to prevent obstruction and ensure emergency access to the newly redeveloped Queensway premises.

Additional improvements to parking facilities in Marshgate will be proposed in the next financial year once the redevelopment of Marshgate car park site will be completed.

Alleyns Road Permit Parking survey

In December 2020 parking permit restrictions were introduced in several residential streets in Old Town area in proximity of the High Street. After consulting with residents of Alleyns Road these restrictions were not introduced in their street at the time. The decision was to resurvey these residents after the implementation of these controls in other streets to see if this had a significant impact on parking in their street.

The survey was carried out in September/October 2021 and the results showed that the majority Alleyns Road residents were not in favour of parking permit restrictions, so the project was terminated.

Harrow Court car park

In response to concerns from residents of Harrow Court, we investigated measures to deal with the misuse of disabled parking space, hazardous and obstructive parking in the car park serving Harrow Court.

Following public consultation undertaken in November/December 2021, an off-street parking place order was implemented in February 2022 which improved parking provisions for disabled persons by allowing the Council to enforce against vehicles parking in existing disabled bay without displaying a valid blue badge. Also, the restrictions introduced prevent hazardous or obstructive parking from taking place and ensure vehicle access is maintained including for emergency vehicles by allowing the enforcement against vehicles not parked within a marked parking space.

Broadwater

Following the introduction in 2019 of parking restrictions across the Broadwater area (Longmeadow and Roebuck Wards), several adjustments were found to be needed either to add restrictions where they had been omitted or to remove small areas of restrictions that had unforeseen consequences.

A formal consultation on these alterations had been planned for May 2020 but was postponed due to the pandemic. The consultation was carried out in May/June 2021.

Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement most proposed parking controls as advertised for formal parking consultation. However, at locations such as Fellowes Way junctions with Broadwater Crescent and Woodland Way, and Hertford Road junction with Balmoral Close, the initial proposals were modified, and we gave those likely to be affected by these modifications the opportunity to make representations. After taking in consideration the representations made, it was decided to implement the proposals including those modifications. The two proposed Traffic Regulation Orders were implemented in February 2022.

Old Town parking review

In December 2021 the Council commissioned a consultant to carry out a parking review of the Old Town Ward.

The brief included considering all the requests/complaints from residents, councillors and other stakeholders held in our street files for this ward, together with on-street survey work and targeted inspections (such as visiting school locations during term time at the start/end of the school day) as appropriate. The only public road not included in this parking review was the High Street section between Sish Lane and James Way.

The project also included a review of the parking permit scheme introduced in December 2020 in several residential streets in proximity of the High Street. The purpose of this review is to understand whether the scheme has been successful by reviewing feedback received from residents since implementation and carrying out site surveys within and outside the operational hours of this permit scheme.

Although the target completion date of this area wide parking review was 31 March 2022, the completion of this project was delayed, and it is estimated that the report will be released in autumn 2022.

Woodfield parking restrictions

Following various reports received by the Council about obstructive parking taking place in Wansbeck Close, Boswell Gardens and Foster Close we included a project in our work programme for 2021-22 financial year to investigate these locations.

An informal survey was carried out in October 2021 when we found that most residents who replied were concerned about parking in these streets and supported the introduction of waiting restrictions. After taking in consideration the resident's suggestions and discussing them with local councillors of this ward a formal public consultation was undertaken in February 2022 and its findings reported back to councillors at the start of 2022-23 financial year. Implementation is programmed for July 2022.

Cycle parking/Lockable bike shelters

Living in a flat or small house with little or no space to safely store a bike can be a significant barrier to cycling and the benefits it offers, in reduced transport costs and improved health for the individual and improved air quality and reduced healthcare costs for society.

In 2021-22 financial year Stevenage Borough Council installed the first Cycle Hangar in the town and a further two are planned for installation in 2022-23 financial year to help provide cycle storage for those who need it. A Cycle Hangar is a lockable, sheltered storage pod for up to six bicycles, with stands to hold them upright and hoops to lock them to.

Residents can contact the Council's parking team to make suggestions where potential future cycle hangars should be installed subject to evidence of demand, availability of suitable space and funding.

Do we make money from parking?

Contrary to what a lot of people believe, the council doesn't profit from parking enforcement. On average from 2011 to 2021 parking enforcement cost the council around £377,000 a year while generating under £270,000 in penalty charges, and that is before other costs of parking management such as maintaining the traffic signs and road markings is considered.

It is only because charges for parking are used to help manage demand that in some recent years on-street parking management has been self-funding except in 2020-21 financial year when the effects of the coronavirus pandemic meant that the service again operated at a significant loss.

The total revenue cost of on-street parking management shown in the council's records for 2021-22 was £573,959. The bulk of this comprises payments to East Herts District Council for providing enforcement patrols and administering penalty charges issued including consideration of any challenges or appeals.

The second largest sum was internal staff costs within the council, followed by the cost of maintaining the traffic signs and road markings needed for parking enforcement.

Other costs included buying materials such as special papers to allow parking permits to be printed, monitoring and maintenance costs for pay and display machines and electric car chargers, and internal recharges within the council such as postage costs.

The capital spending on parking management projects in 2021-22 was £9,788 on projects to introduce new restrictions or change existing parking rules.

The council's income from penalty charges was £316,631. Payments for on-street parking totalled £367,240 which includes £25,962 received from the sale of residents' parking permits and visitor vouchers. A further £10,653 was received in other payments such as

fees for suspending parking bays and charges for bar markings across driveways. The total income received was £694,588 resulting in a revenue surplus of £120,629. Once capital is also considered, the surplus was £110,841 which will be used to cover part of the deficit from 2020-21 financial year shown in our records as £213,650. This is to ensure that the cost of parking enforcement falls onto motorists who benefit from the service rather than local taxpayers in general.

How many people get tickets and what happens next?

In 2021-22, a total of 12,322 PCNs were issued on behalf of the council. 7,377 of these were higher-level penalty charge notices for more serious contraventions such as parking on the zigzags at a pedestrian crossing. 4,945 were lower-level penalty charge notices for less serious contraventions such as parking in a bay for longer than is allowed.

Though most drivers who receive a PCN pay it, often quite quickly as there is a discounted rate for prompt payment, many take up the option to challenge it. That could be because they think the enforcement officer has got it wrong, or because they feel they deserve the benefit of the doubt, or any other reason. As soon as a challenge is received the case is put on hold, and the challenge is considered by one of the Parking Office team at East Herts District Council. As has been mentioned, there is nothing for them to gain or lose from their decision, and drivers are assured a fair and consistent hearing. If a driver is unsuccessful in challenging their PCN, the process allows them to appeal to the independent adjudicator, the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT), for a final decision. Very few cases from Stevenage go to the TPT each year, and the council's decision is usually found to be correct. If it is not, both we and the Parking Office learn from this to improve how enforcement is carried out and decisions are made.

In 2021-22 7,855 PCNs were paid, of which 6,414 received a 50% discount for prompt payment within 14 days. 3,115 PCNs were challenged or appealed, as a result of which 1,715 were cancelled. A further 607 PCNs were written off for other reasons such as mistakes made by enforcement officers or being unable to trace the driver. Naturally some PCNs issued in the previous year would only have been paid, challenged or cancelled in 2021-22, and some PCNs issued in 2021-22 will only be paid, challenged or cancelled in the following year.

Stevenage Borough Council doesn't immobilise or remove vehicles as part of its parking enforcement regime.

Table 1: PCN Statistics

Financial year	PCNs issued			PCNs paid		PCNs challenged or appealed	PCNs cancelled	
	Total	Higher rate	Lower rate	Total	At a discount		after a challenge or appeal	for other reasons
2016-17	10,981	6,479	4,502	7,677	6,580	2,645	2,207	
2017-18	10,823	6,813	4,010	7,454	6,001	3,009	2,460	
2018-19	10,929	6,793	4,136	6,968	5,758	2,557	1,779	
2019-20	13,327	9,010	4,317	8,852	7,237	3,003	3,182	
2020-21	7,781	5,046	2,735	5,116	4,150	2,046	1,424	607
2021-22	12,322	7,377	4,945	7,855	6,414	3,115	1,715	607

Chart 1: PCN statistics

