

Stevenage Borough Council

Annual Parking Report 2022-23



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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 must be the exception rather than the rule.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE THIS YEAR?

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

MARTINS WOOD 'NO WAITING' RESTRICTIONS

In 2021-22 financial year as part of the Personal Injury Crash Project we investigated several sites where people have been hurt and parking was considered a contributory factor in causing the crash. Additional locations subject to complaints related to road safety were also investigated. The aim was to identify what restrictions if any should be proposed to help prevent reoccurrence and improve road safety. A few projects proposing 'no waiting at any time' restrictions were added to our work programme to be progressed within next financial years according to resources available.

In Martins Wood area several locations in Ascot Crescent, Derby Way, Mildmay Road, Sefton Road and Vardon Road were reported to cause a hazard and/or an obstruction. Those reports were brought forward to us by residents, local councillors, bus operators, Council's refuse collection team and others. Concerns were raised regarding school related parking in Mildmay Road, vehicles parking dangerously causing obstructions of several junctions or other locations in the named roads and/or obstruction to the route of the public bus service.

A Traffic Regulation Order proposing waiting restrictions at locations mentioned above was formally proposed in September 2022. Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement restrictions with several amendments. The proposed Traffic Regulation Order was scheduled to be implemented in the early part of 2023-24 financial year.

PARKING AND TRAFFIC CHANGES IN DANESTRETE AND DANESGATE

As part of the regeneration of the town centre, planning permission was granted for the redevelopment of former Matalan site. The physical street layouts in Danestrete and Danesgate adjacent to this site were changed. Alterations were approved for implementation as part of two phases and appropriate Traffic Regulation Orders were drafted.

A Temporary Traffic Regulation Order was implemented to allow necessary road closures needed to undertake physical road works.

The main changes of the first phase included the removal of existing roundabout in Danestrete that served the entrance to the former Matalan site and an increase in road width in Danesgate adjacent to its junction with Danestrete to help create two-way traffic. To help facilitate the road layout changes two Permanent Traffic Regulation Orders were progressed to modify existing traffic and parking restrictions such as revocation of one-way traffic and loading bay in Danesgate, and relocation of existing disabled parking bays in Danesgate adjacent to its junction with Danestrete. Furthermore, the Order implemented in March 2023 proposed the

prohibition of waiting, loading or unloading in parts of Danesgate and Danestrete to prevent hazardous or obstructive parking from taking place following the completion of first phase works.

The second phase works will include additional improvements to parking facilities in Danestrete and Danesgate such as introduction of new loading bays, disabled parking spaces, an electric car club and cycle parking. These will be progressed once the redevelopment works at former Matalan site will be completed.

RAILWAY NORTH CAR PARK

Following the redevelopment of Railway North Car Park adjacent to the Stevenage Railway Station, the Council proposed an off-street parking place order to ensure efficient use of all created parking bays including designated disabled parking spaces, motorcycle parking bays and electric vehicle parking spaces by setting new charges and allowing parking enforcement of this increased parking capacity.

This allowed the Council to encourage the use of the off-street parking places for short and long stay parking and reduce the demand for on-street parking and circulating traffic seeking parking.

Following public consultation undertaken in January 2023, the off-street parking place order was scheduled for implementation in May 2023.

SWINGATE CAR CLUB

Following the Council's decision to redevelop the former Swingate House site, the adjacent car club parking bays needed to be relocated to continue to facilitate transport for residents and workers without a vehicle, helping reduce emissions and improve air quality.

The existing four electric vehicles parking bays in Swingate fitted with appropriate electric vehicle charging infrastructure were underutilised and a decision was made to repurpose two of these bays into car club parking bays. A formal consultation was undertaken in January 2023.

Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement the proposed car club bays. The two proposed Traffic Regulation Order was implemented in March 2023.

This car club is managed by Enterprise Car Club on behalf of the Council and is designed to provide individuals and businesses the flexibility of access to full electric

vehicles at any time by booking them with significant time in advance or at the last minute, subject to availability.

OLD TOWN ON-STREET PARKING

In January 2022 Stevenage Borough Council commissioned a consultant to undertake a parking study of the Old Town area of Stevenage, to provide an independent assessment of any existing parking issues and make recommendations about how the Council should deal with them.

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.

One of the most important interventions recommended by the independent Old Town Parking Study report was for the Council to act against unsafe parking such as vehicles parked in proximity of junctions. Therefore, after discussions with local ward councillors a Traffic Regulation Order proposing 'no waiting at any time' restrictions at various locations across Old Town ward was advertised in January 2023 and residents invited to take part in the formal public consultation throughout February 2023. Furthermore, a Parking Place Order was advertised proposing the implementation of enforceable disabled persons' vehicles parking places at several locations with an aim to maintain and improve the amenity of the area for disabled residents by enabling them to park. At the end of the formal consultation a report was written, and a final decision was expected to be taken at the start of 2023-24 financial year.

The independent Old Town Parking Study report also included a review of the parking permit scheme introduced in December 2020 in several residential streets in proximity of the High Street, Stevenage. The purpose of this review was 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. The report's findings showed that the permit scheme has been successful, and it recommended that modifications were not required at this stage.

DANESTRETE PEDESTRIAN ZONE

Following the approval of Danestrete bus station relocation, Stevenage Borough Council carried out a public engagement exercise asking the local community what

they would like to see happening with the current bus station area once the space will become vacant and until SG1 Phase Two redevelopment plan will commence.

A significant number of responses were received, and the majority suggested that new community facilities should be introduced. Therefore, a temporary planning application was submitted and subsequently approved to transform the former bus station area in Danestrete, Stevenage into a flexible multi-use space able to hosts various events and activities such as market days, performance events, ice or roller skating, and others.

To improve road safety and the amenity of the area, the Council proposed a Pedestrian Zone with Prohibition of Waiting on that length of Danestrete, Stevenage between its junctions with Danesgate and Westgate.

A formal consultation was carried out in September 2022 when we found that most who replied were concerned that the proposed pedestrian zone prohibited cycling on that length of Danestrete and did not support the introduction of the proposed pedestrian zone restrictions. After taking in consideration those views and discussing them with the Portfolio Holder and local cycling groups it has been decided to abandon the proposed restrictions.

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 were installed 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 2022-23 was £711,055. 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 2022-23 was £9,125 on projects to introduce new restrictions or change existing parking rules.

The council's income from penalty charges was £352,035. Payments for on-street parking totalled £541,665 which includes £24,334 received from the sale of residents' parking permits and visitor vouchers. A further £55,977 was received in other payments such as fees for suspending parking bays and charges for bar markings across driveways. The total income received was £950,055 resulting in a revenue surplus of £239,000. Once capital is also considered, the surplus was £229,876 which will mainly be used to cover deficit from previous financial years. 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 2022-23, a total of 11,937 PCNs were issued on behalf of the council. 7,447 of these were higher-level penalty charge notices for more serious contraventions such as parking on the zigzags at a pedestrian crossing. 4,490 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 2022-23 8,162 PCNs were paid, of which 6,424 received a 50% discount for prompt payment within 14 days. 2,740 PCNs were challenged or appealed, as a result of which 1,865 were cancelled. A further 584 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 2022-23, and some PCNs issued in 2022-23 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	4,640	7,454	6001	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
2022-23	11,937	7,447	4,490	8,162	6,424	2,740	1,865	584

