

## Cotswold District Council - Plans to meet parking demand in Cirencester

The Council owns most of the car parks in Cirencester and has seen a significant growth in demand for parking over the last few years, which means that spaces are now often hard to find at peak times.

To tackle this problem the Council established a Parking Demand Board, and this is chaired by Mayor of Cirencester and District Councillor for Abbey Ward Cllr Mark Harris.

The Board meets frequently and has been exploring a range of options to reduce reliance on cars for travelling into and out of the town – but there is still a proven need to increase parking capacity in car parks (including decked options) to satisfy all of Cirencester’s current and future requirements.

Meeting this challenge is one of the Council's top priorities. For this reason, the work of the Board is overseen by Cllr Mark MacKenzie-Charrington, the CDC Cabinet Member who has been given specific responsibility for addressing concerns about parking in the town.



**COTSWOLD**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



## When did peak time parking become a problem?

Parking capacity wasn't really a big problem in Cirencester until about two years ago. In fact, prior to that time local traders were urging the Council to encourage more people into the town because they were concerned that the car parks were often under-used.

So what changed? Well, Cirencester continued to thrive despite the recession and has evolved into a very successful commercial and retail centre. This means that there are now hundreds more motorists coming into the town during a typical day compared with the number going out.

While demand for parking has risen, capacity in our car parks has reduced slightly (mainly because of improvements to our sites, such as wider bays and additional disabled spaces, to comply with the latest government guidance). It's also worth mentioning that there are very few on-street parking spaces in the town as an alternative to off-street spaces in CDC's car parks.



## What has been done so far?

The Parking Demand Board discussed potential solutions with various local stakeholders groups (including representatives of local residents and the business community) and also engaged independent specialist consultants to advise on the best way forward.

The consultants recommended a number of feasible options to take the pressure off car parking capacity in the town centre. These include the provision of 'park and stride' facilities within easy reach of the town, better cycling and walking access, incentives for off-peak parking (such as our current 'free after three' scheme), and shuttle bus options. However, they stressed that increasing the amount of car parking spaces was the main solution to meet current and future requirements.

The findings of the consultants have clearly shown that the most effective (priority 1) solution is the installation of decking at the Waterloo Car Park in the town. It is possible that we may also develop other car parks in line with the recommendations.



## Why are other sites not being considered?

We have considered all the car parks in Cirencester as well as greenfield sites on the outskirts of town that could provide parking, but have had to discount them for a number of reasons including:

- Ownership and availability of the site for purchase
- Highway access – creating new entrances from a site onto a road is potentially difficult and expensive and may not be agreed by the Highways Agency.
- Traffic flow – ensuring that creating more parking and a higher flow of traffic won't cause significant road congestion.
- Pedestrian access – can people walk safely and quickly into town? For many years the Beeches car park was underused as people considered it too far out of town.
- Size and shape of site – some of our existing car parks are irregular shapes, which means decked parking may not work well and would be proportionately expensive.
- Timescales – We need a solution as soon as possible. Development of greenfield sites is likely to take significantly longer, particularly as they require new access onto the highway and - in some cases - changes to the road layout.
- Cost – whilst the Council charges for parking, it will probably take many decades to recoup the cost of building a decked car park. The more expensive the option, the longer it will take to recover the costs and the weaker the business case to proceed.
- Planning – any new car park or decked parking will require planning permission. The existing local plan and emerging local plan identify sites suitable for parking and expansion with decked parking. The Waterloo is identified for decked parking whilst other sites may have been discounted as they are not considered suitable for this use.

## Why haven't we done something sooner? What is taking so long?

- We have undertaken considerable research to gather evidence regarding how much more parking is needed and which site should be developed.
- We have tried to secure other sites which could provide some additional parking quickly but all of these are owned by other people and we are reliant on their cooperation. Despite significant effort none of these sites have yet been secured for additional parking but discussions are on-going.
- There are limited options – there are no empty plots in the centre of town – even empty buildings with parking have been explored.
- Empty fields on the outskirts of town and sites with existing extensive parking cannot simply be used for public parking - even if the public park there now (for example, sports clubs, supermarkets, and garden centres). Planning permission would be needed and, in most cases, substantial development would be required to make sure the site is accessible to vehicles all year round.



## Moving forward with the Waterloo as the priority choice for decked car parking

Aside from being the priority choice site recommended for expansion by independent experts, the Waterloo Car Park has been earmarked for decked parking for nearly 20 years, as this proposal was included in the previous local plan for Cotswold District 2001 – 2011. Moreover, the emerging Local Plan (2011-2031) also supports the proposal

The Parking Demand Board is aware that there are a range of sensitivities that must be addressed, and will continue to consult with local interest groups, including residents and businesses in the vicinity of the Waterloo site. Working with these members of the community, we will aim to achieve the most sympathetic solutions regarding the look, feel and impact of a decked Waterloo site.

Despite the best efforts of the Council, this vision will take time to realise, bearing in mind issues such as planning regulations, archaeological restraints, conservation concerns, residents' safety and well-being, and highway regulations.

We will also need to create 'decant' sites to accommodate parking requirements while existing spaces are out of commission during construction work at the Waterloo.



## Some more questions and answers ...

**Q. What is CDC doing to ‘future proof’ this solution?**

*A. The Parking Demand Board is developing capacity to satisfy all the development allocated in the Local Plan. It is probable the Board will also continue to monitor and report on these issues long after new parking spaces are created at Waterloo and elsewhere.*

**Q. What about new parking demand arising from the proposed large housing development at Chesterton?**

*A. Any future development will undoubtedly have an effect on car parking and we believe our plans can cater for new demand. However, there is also an opportunity here for us all to change the way we travel, including increased use of public transport, cycling and walking.*

**Q. Could we see an increase in the number of on-street parking spaces in Cirencester?**

*A. This is a matter for Gloucestershire Highways and – working with the Town Council - we will continue to pursue this option with them.*

**Q. Will the Council be reviewing car park charges?**

*A. Our aim is for car parking to be flexible, fairly priced and available. Car park charges will be considered as part of our work to review the best use of car parking space in the town.*

**Q. Can the Council insist that new developments in town must provide adequate parking to avoid adding to the congestion problem?**

*A. The government has instructed local authorities to impose local parking standards for residential and non-residential development only where there is ‘clear and compelling justification that it is necessary to manage the local road network’. As a result, the Council has collected evidence to support the establishment of local parking standards, and these will be tested as part of the independent examination of the Local Plan later this year.*

## If you have a question which isn't answered here ...

Officers from CDC are here today to field any queries you may have. You can also email [parking@cotswold.gov.uk](mailto:parking@cotswold.gov.uk) or talk to your local District Councillor.

Additionally, the Council's website [www.cotswolds.gov.uk](http://www.cotswolds.gov.uk) has a link on the home page to a special Cirencester Parking Project section which contains a wealth of information. This includes further parking-related questions and answers, documentation from consultants about the options for parking expansion, the outcomes of Council parking surveys, relevant media releases, and copies of the Parking Demand Board's meeting notes.

