

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance Response to the Proposed Off-Street Car Parking Charges for Cambridge 2024-2025

The effective management of car parking can play a vital part in reducing congestion, improving air quality, encouraging sustainable travel, and enhancing the streets in our city. We think that the city council should adopt a more effective car park pricing strategy that aligns with its vision, corporate plan and climate change strategy, and supports its ongoing commitments to provide a high quality parking service while reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality and promoting a greener, low-carbon environment.

We think that such a strategy should include a pricing structure that:

- better manages demand for parking at the Grand Arcade
- disincentivises short stays at peak times
- incentivises parking in the Grafton East, which is currently underutilised
- supports the provision of better public transport in the evenings

In addition, the city council should set out how its car parking strategy aligns with its vision and supports its ongoing commitments.

Understanding Existing Data

In lieu of further information in the consultation, we have drawn on the recent data presented in the Transport update COVID-19 Transport Impacts and Recovery document by the county council. This included an overview of all the multi-storey car parks within Cambridge.

Figure 1 shows the total number of monthly transactions for each multi-storey car park. Here we can see that the Grand Arcade Car Park is by far the busiest destination with over 45,000 additional monthly transactions. This is a significant problem as traffic heading to and exiting the Grand Arcade is one of the primary causes of congestion in the city centre. The congestion causes delays to buses and creates issues for people walking and cycling, especially at peak times on weekends. For example:

- queuing traffic on Trumpington Street, Pembroke Street and Downing Street delays Trumpington Park&Ride buses, [which travel down these streets](#)
- queuing traffic on Pembroke Street, Downing Street and Tennis Court Road makes cycling less safe and less pleasant (there is no cycle lane on the north side of Pembroke St/Downing St)
- high traffic volumes reduce pedestrian safety and make the experience of spending time in the city centre much less pleasant on Bene't St and St Andrew's St.

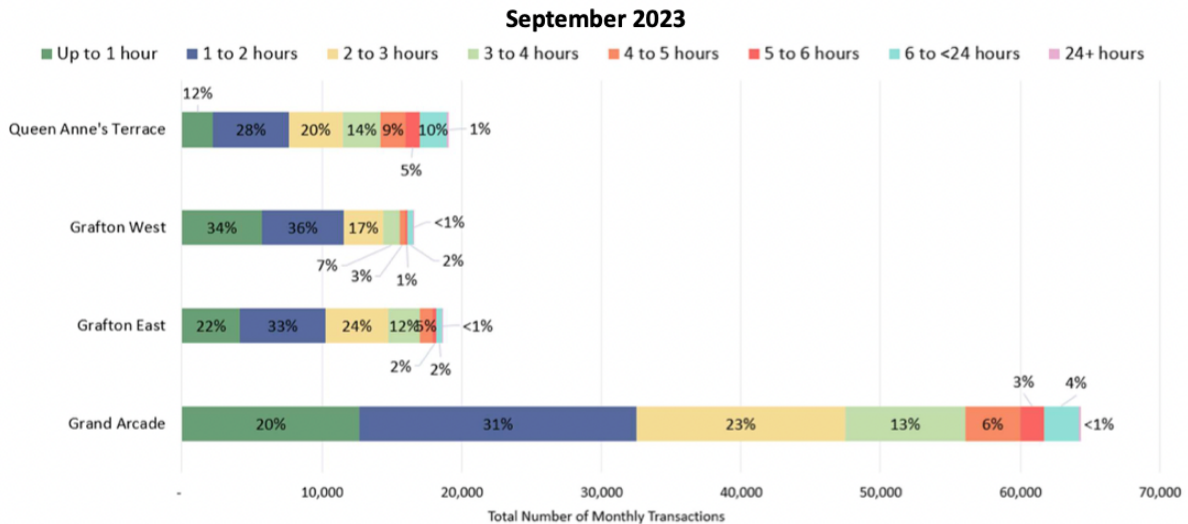


Figure 1 - Total number of monthly transactions

Using the data from Figure 1 along with the total number of spaces in each car park, we can also begin to understand the utilisation rate of each car park (further information would be beneficial to gain a deeper understanding). Here we can see that Grafton West and Grand Arcade have much higher rates of utilisation than Queen Anne and Grafton East. Any parking strategy should be looking to rebalance the utilisation rates to alleviate some of the negative externalities caused by congestion.

Car park	No. of spaces	Monthly transactions	Monthly utilisation per space per month
Grand Arcade	953	64000	67
Grafton East	874	16500	19
Grafton West	279	18500	66
Queen Anne	570	19000	33

Table 1 - Monthly transactions per space

Developing an Effective Parking Strategy

1) Reducing demand at the Grand Arcade at busy times

The current and proposed difference between the peak and off-peak prices will do little to incentivize a change in travel behaviour. We would therefore like to see a greater difference between peak and off-peak charging rates. One way to achieve this would be to apply a peak surcharge, for example £3, instead of a variable peak rate. This has the added benefit of disincentivizing short-term stays within peak times – these journeys have the biggest negative impact on the network. This will also simplify the parking tariff structure, something that is desired according to customer feedback.

We would also like to see peak parking rate periods at the Grand Arcade reviewed. Currently, peak time on Saturday is between 11am and 1pm; however, congestion on the weekend occurs well past 1pm.

By flattening the peak demand at the Grand Arcade the city council will then be able to work with the County Council to bring about wider improvements. This would include the pedestrianisation of Bene't Street and improved access arrangements to the car park itself. It should also be noted that cycle parking at the Grand Arcade is regularly full. A long-term strategy to increase cycle parking provision in the city centre should be undertaken.

2) Reducing short stays at the Grand Arcade

The Grand Arcade also has a significant number of stays under 1 hour, adding to congestion while only providing a short dwell time for shoppers. An effective parking management plan should look to disincentive these journeys. A minimum time charge could be applied for the Grand Arcade Car Park over the weekend so that all spaces are paid automatically for e.g. two hours. This would disincentivize the journeys most impactful on the road network as well as promoting longer dwell times for shoppers.

3) Improve the Utilisation of Grafton East

The Grafton East car park is an underutilised asset that can help to reduce the impact of cars on the city centre. One simple way this can be achieved is by reducing the cost of parking to align with Queen Anne Terrace. This will help to reduce pressure on both the Grand Arcade and Grafton West car park. It would also have the added benefit of bringing more footfall to Fitzroy Street and the surrounding area.

4) Supporting the provision of better public transport in the evening

Free evening parking from 6pm onwards in multi storey car parks was introduced last year, however, no information as to the impacts of this initiative on the night time economy has been provided.

We consider that the provision of free parking from 6pm onwards disincentivizes public transport use (public transport provision winds down much later in the evening) and contributes towards congestion in the evening peak. We would suggest the introduction of an evening tariff at the Grand Arcade and Park Street multistoreys. A flat evening rate of £4 would be similar to that currently operating in Oxford; this would ensure that sustainable transport options remain an attractive alternative.

We would fully endorse the use of any additional revenue generated to support the night-time economy. One way to do this would be to support the county council and Stagecoach to extend the operating hours of the Park&Ride services. The Park&Ride currently stops at 8.30pm; extending this service would provide people (especially young workers in the night time economy) with a greater array of travel options.

5) How does the parking strategy align with the city's vision and ongoing commitments?

The consultation document states that the changes are part of the city council's ongoing commitment to:

- Providing a high-quality parking service while working to reduce traffic congestion
- Improve air quality
- Promoting a greener, low-carbon environment.

No details are given currently, however, as to how any of the proposed changes will support the city council with the stated commitments or how current parking arrangements impact the city and the wider transport system. These details should be provided in future consultations.

Conclusion

The city council must use this consultation as an opportunity to undertake a deeper review of its car-parking strategy. It's clear from the small amount of data presented and the general state of congestion in Cambridge city centre that a more ambitious approach is required. We would recommend that a full review of the situation be undertaken. This review must consider the full data set and can also test some of the potential interventions set out in this response. It should also provide a wider commentary on the parking situation for Cambridge, setting out how well the city is performing against its long-term targets to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and promote a greener, low-carbon environment.