

Setting Strategic Direction

A Parking Strategy for Royston

Report for North Hertfordshire District Council

June 2008



Revised Version June 2008

Document Control

Project Title: A Parking Strategy for Royston

MVA Project Number: C3654600

Document Type: Draft Strategy

Directory & File Name: Q:\Projects\C36546 Royston Parking Strategy\Reports\Draft Parking Strategy\Draft Parking Strategy 301007.Doc

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Distribution

Issue	Date	Distribution	Comments
1	25/10/2007	NHDC	First Draft for Comment
2	15/11/2007	NHDC	Second Draft for Review
3	20/11/2007	NHDC	Final Parking Strategy
4	18/04/2008	NHDC	Final revisions following public consultation

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Introduction

This document, a Parking Strategy for Royston, responds to a recognised need for a strategy that addresses the parking issues that face the market town of Royston both now and in the future. The preparation of this document is part of a programme to produce individual parking strategy documents for each of the four main towns in the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) area.

This Strategy, when adopted by the Council, will supercede NHDC's Parking Strategy 2004-2009 when considering the context of parking activity in Royston town centre. The document supports the Royston Town Centre Strategy, and the actions and proposals contained in this Strategy are aligned with the wider aims of the Town Centre Strategy document.

Context

Royston is a market town in North Hertfordshire, the town centre area of which is perceived to be in decline; the number of town centre visitors is decreasing and the proportion of retail units which remain unoccupied is higher than the national average.

The development of a specific Town Centre Strategy is intended to contribute to a reversal in this trend, and the strategy identifies measures which are aimed at improving the vitality, amenity and economic health of the town centre in the years to 2021.

The Council recognises that the level and distribution of car parking provision has an important role to play in the re-vitalisation of Royston town centre. This Parking Strategy document identifies the direction that parking policy relating to Royston town centre will take over the next 10-15 years in support of the aims of the Town Centre Strategy.

Aims of the Parking Strategy

This document identifies a number of key parking elements which will have impact on the successful delivery of the Town Centre Strategy. Draft Policy Guidance 16 states that the main aims of the Royston Town Centre Strategy with regard to car parking are:

- The maintenance of sufficient town centre parking capacity to support the aims of the Town Centre Strategy, to encourage those who already visit the town centre to stay for longer and to bring new visitors into the town;
- The rationalisation of on-street parking provision to benefit town centre users and the streetscape, whilst maintaining a level of service to town centre users;
- A limited reduction in the proportion of parking spaces in the heart of the town centre over time, led by an increase in retail activity and economic vitality to meet the Town Centre Strategy aims of an improved public realm and pedestrian environment;
- The allocation of sufficient long-stay parking provision to meet the needs of businesses and town centre workers;

Summary

- The discouragement of town centre related parking in residential streets and at locations where road safety may be compromised;
- The provision of parking for blue badge holders at appropriate locations around the town centre; and
- The facilitation of loading/unloading activity at appropriate locations within the town centre.

The background to these issues, along with measures and controls to be adopted over the lifetime of the Parking Strategy, are fully explained in the chapters that follow.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) has recognised the need for a parking strategy for the North Hertfordshire area for a number of years. The currently adopted NHDC Parking Strategy 2004-2009 has provided a framework for the management of the impacts of car parking in the district both from the viewpoint of managing existing parking provision and demand, and managing the impacts of changes in parking provision brought about by development.
- 1.1.2 The District Parking Strategy identifies a total of 18 parking objectives for the NHDC area, linked to five strategic objectives derived from national and regional development and transport policy. The identification of these specific parking objectives creates a local framework which allows specific measures to be implemented that will contribute to the achievement of the objectives, but which also recognise the diverse nature of communities and conditions that prevail within the NHDC area.
- 1.1.3 The strategy also recognises that a different approach to parking issues is required in the District's main towns (Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston & Baldock) from that needed in larger rural settlements and in other rural areas, and identifies specific parking objectives for each of these areas.
- 1.1.4 In the period since the NHDC Parking Strategy 2004-2009 was adopted, it has become apparent that the differing contexts of the district's four main towns are such that the application of a district wide parking strategy does not necessarily promote the best use of available parking in each town.
- 1.1.5 In recognition of this, in 2007 NHDC began a programme that will lead to the production of a further four Parking Strategy documents, each of which will be geared to the specific parking requirements of the town to which it relates. This document, A Parking Strategy for Royston, is the first of these tailored strategies to be prepared, and a further three will be developed for Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock in future years.

2 Parking Strategy Development

2.1 The Task

2.1.1 When considering a new parking strategy, a number of important factors need to be considered. Firstly, the differing types of parking activity that occur within the town need to be identified. In the case of Royston, these include:

- Designated off-street town centre car parks;
- On-street town centre parking areas;
- Blue badge-holder parking provision;
- Residential on-street parking;
- Rail station parking capacity and impacts;
- Private non-residential parking (mainly business parking areas);
- Deliveries to shops and businesses; and
- Taxi waiting areas.

2.1.2 Following this, the effects and impacts of a number of variables on parking activity must be considered, in both the short and longer-term. These variables include:

- Capacity and location of off-street parking provision;
- Location and suitability of on-street parking provision;
- Car parking tariffs;
- Public transport availability, cost and proximity;
- Demand for car parking, both current and future;
- Environmental impacts; and
- The likely impacts of future development.

2.2 Data Gathering

2.2.1 In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of parking activity in Royston, both quantitative data and attitudinal information has been collected during the months of July - September 2007. The scope of the information collected is summarised below, and the findings of the surveys undertaken are presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Parking Surveys

2.2.2 Car park and on-street parking surveys were undertaken on three days in July 2007 (Tuesday 17th, Wednesday 18th and Saturday 21st) to establish parking patterns in NHDC operated off-street car parks and at on-street parking locations throughout the town.

Stakeholder Consultations

- 2.2.3 The opinions and perceptions of a number of key stakeholders who have an interest in the operation and success of the town have been sought, including: Royston Town Council, the Royston Town Centre Forum, Royston's Town Centre Manager, NHDC Parking Services and NHDC financial departments.

Town Centre Visitor Consultations

- 2.2.4 The opinions and perceptions of 200 town centre visitors were also sought by conducting interview surveys in the town centre during two days in September 2007;

Town Centre Catchment Area Consultations

- 2.2.5 The views of residents within the wider catchment area of Royston town centre were sought by undertaking a postal questionnaire survey in September 2007. This survey had the particular purpose of collecting the views of residents who choose not to visit Royston or who do so infrequently.

Rail Station User Survey

- 2.2.6 A survey of users of Royston railway station was undertaken in July 2007 in order to establish the proportion of station users who arrive by car and the effects of car parking on the area around the station.
- 2.2.7 The data and outcomes of these studies are reported fully in a Parking Surveys report and a series of Information Notes.

2.3 Seeking Answers

- 2.3.1 The data gathered by these different workstreams has been used to answer some important questions both about parking activity in Royston, both within the town centre area and in selected residential areas of the town, and about the concerns and perceptions of the people who use and work in the town.

- Does Royston town centre have sufficient parking capacity to meet current demand?
- Are existing car parks located so as to allow best use of their facilities?
- Is the current on-street parking provision sited in appropriate locations?
- What is the effect of car parking charges on parking activity?
- Are there any residential locations with specific parking problems?
- What effects does car parking at the station have on surrounding streets?
- Can changes to the town's parking regime contribute to its economic revitalisation?; and
- What will happen in the future?

2.4 Approach of the Strategy

- 2.4.1 In developing a parking strategy for Royston it has become clear that measures that may be considered appropriate for addressing current problems and issues may become less appropriate in future years as the nature of activity within the town evolves. Above all, a parking strategy that seeks to be relevant for a period of up to 15 years must be flexible enough to be able to embrace the changes that may occur within the town during that period.
- 2.4.2 Foremost amongst the aims of this strategy is to support the Royston Town Centre Strategy, which provides a vision of the direction of Royston's town centre development over the next 15 years, whilst effectively addressing existing parking related problems and issues in the short and medium terms.
- 2.4.3 Thus, when referring to the town centre area in particular, this Parking Strategy for Royston has been structured to present measures for implementation in the short (0-5 years), medium (5-10 years) and long (10+ years) term, to reflect the changes that are likely to occur within the town over time and allow the management of the parking impacts that may result.

2.5 A Strategy Specific to Royston

- 2.5.1 In developing the strategy, a number of factors specific to Royston also need to be taken into consideration. Many of the stakeholders and members of the public consulted as part of the preparation of the strategy consider Royston town centre to be in a state of decline, with an increasing number of retail units standing empty and reducing patronage of the twice-weekly market.
- 2.5.2 Royston Town Council, the Royston Town Centre Forum and other members of the retail community are committed to encouraging increased numbers of visitors into the town centre as part of an effort to create a climate of increased economic vitality and vibrancy within the town centre, and many consider parking conditions to be a key element in facilitating improvements.
- 2.5.3 In developing a parking strategy for Royston, the opinions and perceptions of key stakeholders and members of the public have been fully considered alongside the data that has been collected as part of the strategy development process and which forms the parking activity baseline upon which the strategy has been constructed.
- 2.5.4 The parking strategy that has evolved from this exercise is intended to support the aims that the town centre community has for the revitalisation of the town centre, but also to underpin the longer-term vision for Royston as set out in the Royston Town Centre Strategy document currently being developed by NHDC.

2.6 Policy Context

National Policy

- 2.6.1 Government recognises the importance of market towns as a focus for the more rural community and for local economy, and is sensitive to the planning issues that pertain to maintaining the economic vitality of town centres and creating the necessary vibrancy and momentum to allow market towns to prosper.
- 2.6.2 PPS6 – Positive Planning for Town Centres states that “market towns and villages should be the main service centres in rural areas, providing a range of facilities, shops and services at a scale appropriate to the needs and size of their catchment areas. They should provide focus for economic development and rural-based industries, including markets for locally produced food and other products, and for tourism. However, the health and vitality of many of these towns has declined in recent years, and many more are vulnerable to changing economic and lifestyle patterns.”

PPG13 – Transport recognises the importance of the role parking policy plays in ensuring the economic success of town centres, and is mindful that the provision of town centre car parking comes at a cost. It also states that car parking charges should be used to encourage the use of alternative transport modes to the private car.

- 2.6.3 When seeking to meet the overarching national transport policy objectives of promoting more sustainable transport choices for people; promoting accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling; and reducing the need to travel, especially by car, local authorities are encouraged both to:

“actively manage the pattern of urban growth to make the fullest use of public transport, and focus major generators of travel demand in city, town and district centres and near to major public transport interchanges”; and

“ensure that development comprising jobs, shopping, leisure and services offers a realistic choice of access by public transport, walking, and cycling, recognising that this may be less achievable in some rural areas”.

Regional Policy

- 2.6.4 In the East of England Plan (published on 12th May 2008 and technically known as the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), the East of England Regional Assembly, as part of its Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), recognises that the level of public transport accessibility is one of the key factors influencing parking policy.
- 2.6.5 The Plan states that regional car parking standards are required to support the transport policy envisaged by the RTS, and that a common approach within the region and into adjoining regions is desirable to avoid competition across regional boundaries.
- 2.6.6 However, the Plan also recognises the diversity of the communities it is required to serve:

“The region exhibits a wide range of social and economic circumstances that necessitates a flexible approach to the setting of maximum levels of parking at a local level”.

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Thus, it is for local authorities to identify current levels of accessibility and apply the RTS framework locally. In doing this they will want to take into account factors such as the economic buoyancy of the area, and the pressures on historic centres”.

- 2.6.7 Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan does not refer to county-wide policy for parking but instead indicates that local area policies such in areas such as parking should be decided locally through the development of Local Area Plans.

Local Policy

- 2.6.8 North Hertfordshire District Council is currently developing its Local Development Framework (LDF), which will revise local planning policy to take into account changes in the planning process. This document will provide the framework for future local planning policy, of which a Parking Strategy specific to Royston is a part.

Until such a time as these documents are complete, parking within North Hertfordshire follows NHDC's Parking Strategy 2004-2009 (Adopted by the council on 27th July 2004). The Strategy identifies that the Council will use parking, both on and off-street, to maintain the vitality of town centres and minimise out-of-town developments.

- 2.6.9 The strategy also notes the need for council car parks to be broadly self-financing and for income generated by parking charges to cover the cost of parking expenditure, in accordance with Government and Audit Commission guidance.
- 2.6.10 Any surplus of parking revenue must be re-invested in transport-related projects by regulation, and any shortfall has to be met by reviewing charges.

3 Existing Situation

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 In order to provide a baseline upon which to build the strategy, a number of surveys were undertaken between July and September 2007, and these have been described in Chapter 2. This chapter summarises the findings of this work.
- 3.1.2 These findings are reported in further detail in a series of reports and Information Notes prepared by MVA Consultancy and entitled:
- Royston Town Centre Parking Data Analysis (September 2007);
 - Information Note No.1 – Royston Rail User Survey Findings;
 - Information Note No.2 – Royston Town Centre Interview Findings and Pedestrian Counts; and
 - Information Note No.3 – Royston Postal Questionnaire Findings

3.2 Town Centre Parking Activity

- 3.2.1 Parking activity within Council operated car parks is influenced by the activities of Royston market, which is held in two of the main town centre car parks on Wednesdays and Saturdays. This has the effect of reducing the parking stock in the 'core' town centre area by 69%, and the overall off-street parking provision by 11%, on these days.

Non-market Days

- 3.2.2 The three smaller core town centre car parks (Angel Pavement, Priory Gardens and John Street) operate at close to capacity on non-market days, although the fourth, larger, car park (Market Place) has spare capacity throughout the day.
- 3.2.3 Parking durations in all of these car parks are mainly of less than one hour, with a reduced number of stays of up to two hours and minimal medium or long stay activity.
- 3.2.4 The larger 'long-stay' car parks (The Warren and the Civic Centre) also have spare capacity throughout the day. The numbers of cars parked for medium or long durations is greater in these car parks, but the predominant activity in both locations is mainly related to durations of one hour or less.

Market Days

- 3.2.5 The two core town centre car parks which remain in use on market days (Priory Gardens and John Street) are well used and operate at, or even over, the capacity of marked parking bays throughout the day. Parking displaced by the closure of Market Place and Angel Pavement car parks appears to migrate to both The Warren and Civic Centre car parks on these days.
- 3.2.6 The pattern of activity on both market days shows a peak in town centre visits in mid-to-late morning, with afternoon accumulations being below that of a non-market day.

General Observations

- 3.2.7 Off-street parking provision is currently sufficient to meet demand on all of the days surveyed and offers spare capacity at all times. During the busiest survey periods a minimum of 165 (of a total of 529) car parking spaces remained unused. This would be more than sufficient to accommodate displaced parking in the event that all on-street parking provision was removed from the town centre area.
- 3.2.8 The number of vehicles visiting NHDC car parks was highest on the Wednesday surveyed and lowest on the Saturday. This may indicate that a proportion of people who visit Royston town centre use the town for their everyday needs but visit larger towns which are further afield at the weekend.
- 3.2.9 Overall, 59.5% of all recorded off-street parking activity relates to durations of less than one hour, and a further 23% relates to durations of between 1 and 2 hours. Long-stay parking of over six hours accounts for just 3.3% of activity.
- 3.2.10 The low level of long-stay parking may be attributable to the number of small pockets of private non-residential parking that are scattered throughout the town; many businesses have a small courtyard or service area which is used for parking. Long-term parking has also been recorded and observed on unrestricted, often residential, roads outside the town centre.
- 3.2.11 On-street parking bays within the town centre are well used, with a high turnover of vehicles and parking durations predominantly of less than one hour. There appears to be a high incidence of illegal parking activity, again of short duration. Consultation with NHDC parking services has revealed that this area is not considered a hot-spot for the issue of Penalty Charge Notices, which may be due to the short durations associated with this illegal activity.
- 3.2.12 Although marked loading bays are provided in the High Street Controlled Zone, loading activity is not prohibited outside these areas, and indiscriminate loading activity may take place legally. Loading activity is permitted at any time throughout the town centre.

3.3 Parking in Other Surveyed Areas

- 3.3.1 On-street parking surveys were also carried out in a number of largely unrestricted roads outside the core town centre area. These roads were selected as they were known or suspected to have issues related to parking activity. These issues are of two main types:
- Overflow parking related to town centre activity; and
 - On-street parking related to users of Royston rail station.
- 3.3.2 The roads known or suspected to accommodate parking associated with town centre users that were included in the surveys are:
- Newmarket Road/Priory Close/Hollies Close;
 - King James Way and Princes Mews;
 - Coronation Avenue/Days Close; and

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- Beldam Avenue/Grange Bottom.

3.3.3 Roads known or suspected to have parking issues related to rail station users that were included in the surveys are:

- Rock Road, Phillips Avenue, North Close, Orchard Way and Weston Close.

3.3.4 Analysis of the survey data indicates that parking activity in these areas is likely to be as summarised below:

Newmarket Road/Priory Close/Hollies Close

3.3.5 The survey data and site observations have confirmed that this area is used by town centre visitors for both long and short stay parking. Parking activity on Newmarket Road has an adverse effect on road safety as it poses visibility difficulties for drivers exiting Priory Close.

King James Way and Princes Mews

3.3.6 Data shows that these unrestricted areas are likely to be used for parking by town centre visitors. Princes Mews offers a direct pedestrian route to the High Street, and exhibits short-stay parking activity which is consistent with use by shoppers.

3.3.7 King James Way is subject to both long and short-stay parking activity which is not consistent with use by residents.

Coronation Avenue/Days Close

3.3.8 This area operates below its parking capacity at all surveyed times, and parking activity is mainly consistent with residential use. However, there may be a small amount short stay activity associated with town centre users.

Beldam Avenue/Grange Bottom

3.3.9 The consistent level of parking accumulation throughout the survey period suggests largely residential parking activity. However, spaces vacated by residents who use their cars to travel to work may become occupied by town centre visitors or workers.

Rock Road, Phillips Avenue, North Close, Orchard Way and Weston Avenue

3.3.10 Again, the consistent level of parking accumulation throughout the survey period suggests largely residential parking activity. The area as a whole has spare parking capacity at all times. Residents who use their cars to travel to work may provide parking for users of the station, but this activity is not considered to be widespread.

3.4 Town Centre User Interviews

3.4.1 A total of 200 town centre visitors were interviewed on a Thursday and a Saturday in September 2007. The purpose of the surveys was to identify the proportion of town centre visitors who travelled by car, the attitudes of drivers to the parking facilities offered by the town, and the general attitudes of visitors to the town centre environment as a whole.

3.4.2 The key findings from the interview surveys were that:

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- 53% of town centre users arrived by car and 39% on foot;
- 'Convenience' was stated as the key reason for driving into the town centre.
- There were few complaints about the availability of public transport services;
- 52.5% of those who arrived by car parked in main town centre car parks and 47.5% in alternative places, primarily on the High Street and in the Somerfields (Princes Mews) car parks;
- 64% of users were satisfied or very satisfied with the town's car parking facilities;
- Shopping was the most common reason for the visiting the town, followed by visits for local amenities i.e. bank, post office;
- Out of 200 visits, 85.5% were of 2 hours duration or less;
- Most people interviewed visit Royston 2-3 times a week;
- Improvements to the shopping environment would encourage people to visit the town centre more often; and
- 93.5% of people were satisfied with the walking environment presented by the town.

3.5 Postal Questionnaire Surveys

- 3.5.1 2500 postal questionnaires were distributed within the Royston catchment area in September 2007. A total of 772 responses were received. The key findings of this work are summarised below:

Car Use

- 3.5.2 The vast majority, 95% of visitors, usually arrive in Royston by car. This is despite a large majority of people stating they had no problem accessing public transport (financially or geographically), and the frequency of identified issues with parking.

Car Parking

- 3.5.3 The main complaints of the drivers surveyed were availability, cost and location of parking. There is a perception that the town centre has an insufficient level of parking provision, although this is not supported by the findings of the parking surveys undertaken in July 2007.
- 3.5.4 As 33% of drivers park on-street rather than in car parks, it would appear that issues such as the location and cost of parking facilities have an important influence on people's parking behaviour. A large proportion of drivers (47.8%) said they felt 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with the parking facilities in the town, and some expressed a reluctance to pay for parking in a town which is considered to be in decline.

Retail Facilities

- 3.5.5 Although 66% of people said that shopping *was* a main purpose for visiting Royston, there were many issues raised against it. These mainly related to the perception of a town centre in decline, a lack of independent/specialist shops, a lack of larger stores and chains, the

number of service providers (estate agents, hairdressers and charity shops), and the number of empty retail units, along with the general appearance/environment of the town.

Durations of Visits

- 3.5.6 Very few survey respondents reported staying in Royston town centre for any substantial length of time, with 671 (92.9%) staying under 2 hours. This suggests that Royston is not a place people visit for extended shopping or leisure activities, but is used more for convenience shopping and activities. This is supported by the high proportion who stated they usually visit the town to visit the bank or post office.

3.6 Station User Survey

- 3.6.1 A survey of station users was carried out on the morning of Friday 20th July 2007. The purpose of the survey was to determine the proportion of station users who drive to the station, and the parking habits of those did so.
- 3.6.2 The highest proportion of station users (50%) arrived at the station either as a driver or a passenger in a car. A high proportion (38%) of users walked to the station. 23 users (2.5%) cycled to the station; seven users arrived by bus, three by taxi, and nine by motorcycle. No respondents answered "other" as their mode of transport.
- 3.6.3 There are only a limited number of rail users who drive to the station and who do not park in the station car park. The majority of users who do not park at the station park in streets close to the station. However, a small proportion park as far away as York Way or in long-stay car parks in the town centre.
- 3.6.4 As only 5% of the drivers park outside the station car park (not including those users who park in the unused land adjacent to the North Car Park), the overall impact of the rail station on on-street parking in Royston can currently be assumed to be limited.
- 3.6.5 Without access to future passenger demand forecasts it is not possible to be certain that the proposed increase in parking capacity will be sufficient to accommodate future demand, but indications given by this survey and the calculated level of suppressed demand would suggest that the increased car parking capacity suggested by First Capital Connect would be sufficient to cater for parking demand at Royston station in the short to medium term.

4 A Parking Strategy for Royston

4.1 Structure of the Strategy

- 4.1.1 Chapter 2 of this document has already identified a number of different types of parking activity that occur within and around the town, and an effective Parking Strategy should contain elements that address specific issues that relate to each of these parking types.
- 4.1.2 This chapter will examine each of these parking types in turn, identify the strategy elements that relate to them and, where appropriate, present measures specific to each type of activity that will contribute to the achievement of the overall Parking Strategy.
- 4.1.3 In drawing up the strategy, the likely impacts that a combination of measures in different areas of parking activity will have on the town have been fully considered, the overall aim being to provide a package of complementary measures.
- 4.1.4 Additionally, the strategy is mindful of the operating conditions that are specific to the town. The preceding chapter on transport and development policy outlines the national and regional transport policies that relate to the encouragement of private car users to change their travel habits and switch to the more sustainable options of public transport, walking and cycling. This policy also recognises that the level to which these objectives can be achieved is dependent on local circumstances. In line with these policies, this strategy seeks to encourage modal shift where it is practicable.
- 4.1.5 The topography of the town is such that walking and cycling offer viable alternatives to car use for people who live in the town, and bus services also provide useful intra-town links. However, bus links to the wider catchment area of the town are currently poor, and this situation is unlikely to change in the short to medium term. As a result, journeys into the town by private car are likely to continue to be significant, and the strategy must both meet the needs of and successfully manage this demand.

4.2 Town Centre Parking

- 4.2.1 The town centre has the greatest mix of car parking activity in the town, comprising car parks to accommodate both long and short-stay parking, short stay on-street parking bays, workplace parking, blue badge holder parking and taxi waiting. Each of these elements presents its own challenges going forward, and these are examined in more detail below.
- 4.2.2 The Royston Town Centre Strategy seeks to provide an environment that will allow an increase in footfall within the town centre, and improve the vitality and economic health of the town. Parking durations throughout the town centre area, at both off-street and on-street locations, are currently predominantly short-stay, with 77% of all town centre parking activity being of under one hour's duration. The provision and management of car parking has a key role to play in facilitating changes in the behaviour of town centre visitors. This Parking Strategy seeks to support the Town Centre Strategy in encouraging those who already visit the town centre to stay for longer and bringing new visitors to the town, whilst improving the town centre environment for visitors by reducing the impacts of vehicle activity.

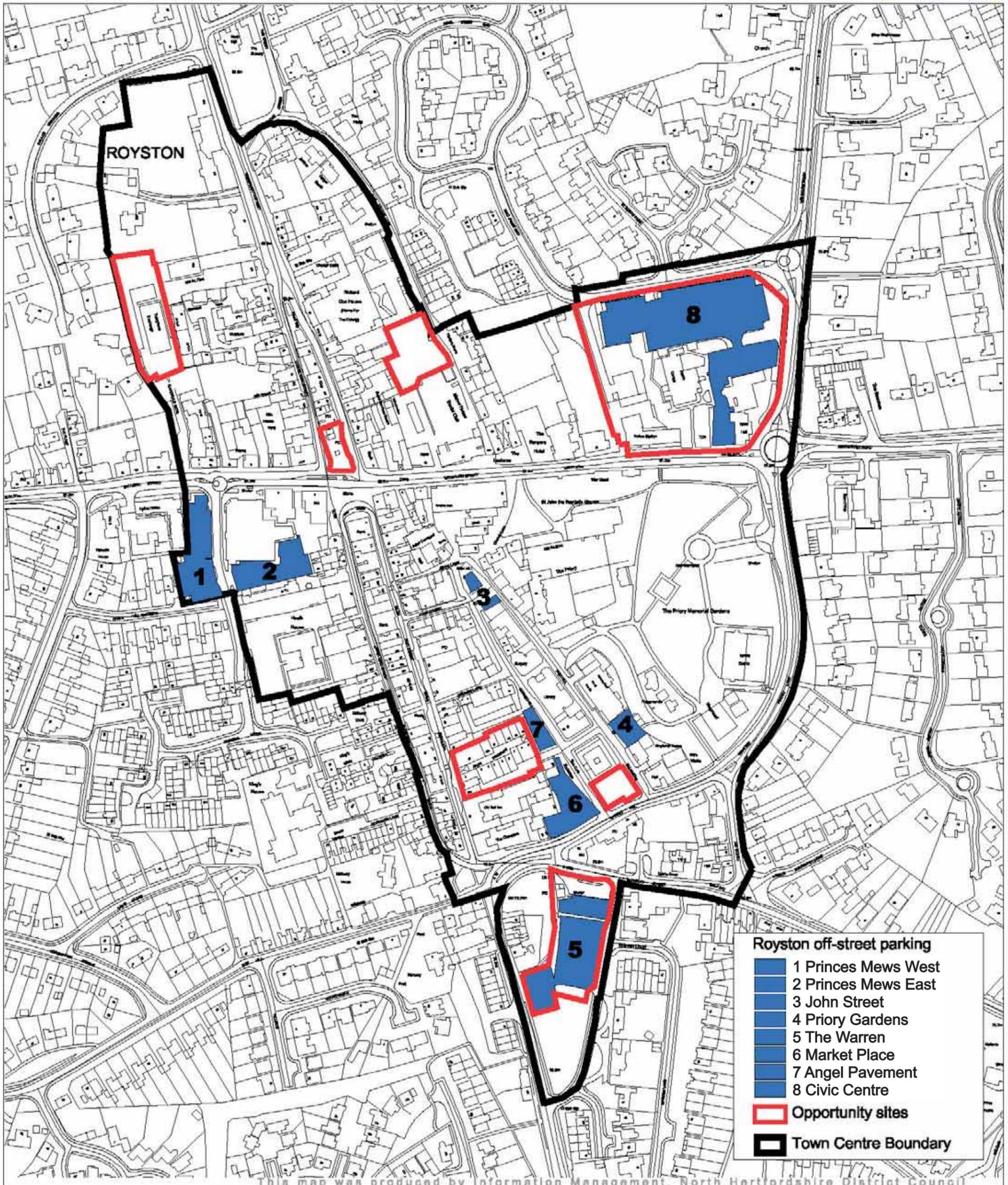
4.3 Council Operated Off-street Car Parking

- 4.3.1 NHDC operates all of the off-street car parking that is available in the town centre, and these are shown in **Figure 4.1**. Charges are levied in all of these car parks. Tariffs are structured to encourage short parking durations only in the 'core' town centre areas of Market Hill and Fish Hill and to allow both short-term and longer durations in the larger car parks at the Civic Centre and The Warren.
- 4.3.2 The proximity of the core town centre car parks to town centre facilities means that they are well used, and combined with the on-street parking that is available in these areas, comprise the busiest area for parking activity within the town. Turnover is high, and parking durations in these car parks are generally under two hours, and typically less than one hour.
- 4.3.3 The two larger car parks have greater parking capacities but are a short walk away from the main shopping area. These car parks offer spare parking capacity at all times. Parking durations are again generally below two hours and typically less than one hour, but there is an increased number of vehicles remaining for longer periods
- 4.3.4 The results of the summer 2007 surveys indicate that:
- The provision of convenient town centre parking is important to town centre visitors;
 - Existing off-street parking capacity is more than sufficient to meet current demand, with spare off-street parking space available at all times;
 - Town centre visitors are reluctant to pay for off-street car parking when free parking is available on-street.
- 4.3.5 The core town centre car parks offer undeniably the most convenient car parking for town centre visitors in terms of walk distance but offer limited capacity, particularly on market days when capacity is reduced by 69% to provide space for the market to be held. This reduction places increased parking pressure on other town centre parking locations, particularly in the core town centre area.
- 4.3.6 Despite currently being less favoured by visitors, the two larger car parks will continue to provide the greater proportion of parking capacity in future years. Sites that are closer to the town centre and could be suitable for car parking are few and these are likely to come forward for retail and other town centre uses rather than for car parking.
- 4.3.7 The balance between long and short-stay parking in the town is currently weighted heavily toward short-stay durations. Long-stay parking activity of over four hours' duration accounts for only 8% of activity. The Royston Town Centre Strategy seeks to increase the length of time spent in the town centre by visitors, but the overall balance of parking activity is expected to remain predominantly short-stay.
- 4.3.8 This Strategy seeks to reduce the amount of parking in residential areas that is associated with town centre activity. This may lead to an increase in long-stay parking in town centre car parks, but this increase is not expected to be significant. Overspill station user parking may also impact on long-stay activity in future years.
- 4.3.9 Many of the stakeholders and members of the public that were consulted during the preparation of this Strategy feel that the parking charges levied in Royston are inappropriate

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Royston Parking Strategy

Figure 4.1 Location of Town Centre Car Parks



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Scale 1 : 2,500



given the current conditions within the town centre, and that they act as a disincentive to town centre visits. As parking tariffs across the NHDC area are uniform, towns such as Letchworth and Hitchin are perceived by some visitors to provide a better retail offer and a greater level of attractiveness for the same parking cost.

- 4.3.10 Parking tariffs provide a tool that allows the regulation, management and rationalisation of car parking in town centre locations. This benefits users through managing parking demand and making best use of parking supply, giving a better service and increasing the chance of finding parking space in convenient and appropriate locations. The cost of operating and maintaining car parks and parking enforcement teams needs to be met, and this is usually achieved through the collection of parking fees.
- 4.3.11 When considering the level of parking charges in towns, factors such as the attractiveness of town centre facilities and accessibility for car-borne and public transport journeys need to be taken into account, alongside issues relating to the funding of car parking operations. Tariffs in Royston have been set on this basis within a district wide context. The continuing review of these tariffs will be undertaken by the Council in order to ensure the appropriateness of charges as the parking requirements of the town change over time. The Council's Transport Fundamental Service Review will consider the approach to setting parking tariffs in more detail and it will consider whether parking tariffs should be set on a town by town basis whilst maintaining overall income levels, which would be a more appropriate way of managing parking provision to support the Town Centre strategy.
- 4.3.12 In the short term, it is not envisaged that the cost of short-stay parking will be reduced, however any review of the District-wide charging regime may have such an implication.
- 4.3.13 Key stakeholders within the town centre community aspire to providing an environment which will allow an increase in the economic vitality of the town centre. In an effort to encourage more town centre visitors, the Royston Town Centre Forum, supported by the Chamber of Commerce and North Herts District Council, has introduced a parking rebate scheme in the town centre. Retailers who join the scheme (membership is voluntary) agree to refund the cost of the first hour's parking to customers who spend over a specified amount.
- 4.3.14 The Council supports this scheme as a means of attracting additional town centre visitors, and has modified its ticketing machines to allow them to dispense the two-part tickets that are required by the scheme. The rebate scheme offers the added benefit of allowing an assessment to be made of the effects of reduced cost parking on town centre visits, and this information will be used to inform future reviews of parking charges policy.
- 4.3.15 Royston Town Council have also supported the introduction an outdoor farmers market to the town, held once a month on a Sunday. Specialist markets and events offer an important opportunity to increase the diversity of produce and merchandise available in the town, and the council intends to be supportive of similar initiatives in future years. In line with this thinking a reduction in parking charges for one-off events may be appropriate to encourage visitors and to underpin the establishment of additional successful enterprise.

Strategy for Off-street Car Parking

To ensure that Royston has off-street car parking capacity and tariffs that will encourage visits of longer parking duration, supporting the main focus of the Town Centre Strategy's aims of making Royston a thriving and welcoming district centre.

To ensure that off-street parking stock is effectively managed to make best use of land and resources and provide an appropriate balance between long and short-stay parking, to meet the needs of all town centre users.

To ensure that off-street car parks offer a high-quality parking environment with sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of its users and encourage town centre visits.

To monitor the changes in the number of town centre visitors arriving by car, to assess their impact and to review and manage parking supply to ensure best use of available parking stock.

To ensure that future development proposals consider sufficiently the effects that development may have on parking requirements in Royston town centre and provide sufficient public parking to maintain the vitality of the town.

4.4 Strategy Objectives for Off-street parking

- 4.4.1 This Parking Strategy document supports the aims of the Royston Town Centre Strategy, and Parking Strategy objectives and proposals relate directly to Policy Guidance (PG) objectives given in the Town Centre Strategy. The Parking Strategy aims to contribute to these objectives increasingly over time as described below:

Short-term Objectives (1-5 yrs)

- 4.4.2 **OBJECTIVE – To provide and manage town centre car parking to support the overall aims of the Town Centre Strategy, and specifically to increase pedestrian footfall in the core retail area and to improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre as a shopping destination.**
- 4.4.3 One of the main overall objectives of the Royston Town Centre Strategy and of the town centre community is to stimulate an increase in footfall within the town centre, and town centre businesses consider the provision of convenient car parking to be a key factor for attracting new visitors. It is therefore important to maintain an appropriate level of parking capacity to allow for a prospective increase in demand, as identified in PG16(i).
- 4.4.4 Surveys carried out to inform this strategy document have identified a level of unused off-street car parking capacity within the town centre, and this spare capacity will be more than sufficient to accommodate growth in town centre visitor footfall over the short term.
- 4.4.5 In line with PG11, The Town Centre Strategy seeks to provide new and improved areas of public realm within the core of the town centre in the short term. To support this strategy it will be necessary to consider, and where appropriate rationalise, car parking provision in

areas of the town centre where public realm improvements are proposed. The Council has already taken action to mitigate the effects of a possible loss of car parking by converting loading bays at the northern end of the High Street for free short-stay parking use.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 1 – The overall capacity of off-street car parking provision will be maintained at approximately 95% of its current level.

- 4.4.6 There are indications of a current reluctance for visitors to the town centre to pay for short stay parking, and this is largely due to the perception that Royston does not offer a value-for-money experience when compared to other towns.
- 4.4.7 Although car parking within the town centre is inexpensive, there is a clear need for parking charges to meet the costs of car park operation and parking enforcement, it is considered that the efforts of Royston's town centre community to re-invigorate the town centre, along with the Town Centre Strategy's longer-term aims, should be supported fully by this Parking Strategy. An increase in footfall in the town centre can only have a beneficial effect on the town.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 2 - The Council will undertake regular reviews of car parking tariffs which will relate to the District's approach to setting car parking tariffs as part of its Corporate Business Planning process and in accordance with the recommendations of the Transport FSR and Parking Strategy.

- 4.4.8 In addition to reviewing parking tariffs the Council recognises and will seek to support other initiatives to help manage car parking to benefit the overall attractiveness of the town centre. Where other initiatives are introduced the Council will seek to work with stakeholders to implement them and to take the effects into consideration when reviewing parking tariffs and management policy. Royston Town Centre Forum's initiative to provide parking rebates to town centre shoppers offers a practical method of quantifying the effects that reduced parking charges may have on town centre visits.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 3 - The Council will support the principle of a parking tariff rebate scheme and other initiatives to encourage town centre visitors, and will investigate changes to car park management techniques to assist in meeting Town Centre Strategy objectives and encourage longer parking durations.

Medium Term Objectives (5-10 yrs)

- 4.4.9 **OBJECTIVE – To continue to maintain sufficient town centre parking capacity in appropriate locations, to meet the needs of town centre visitors and support the medium-term objectives of the Town Centre Strategy.**
- 4.4.10 As the short-term aims of the Town Centre Strategy in respect of town centre footfall are achieved, it will become increasingly important that the effect that any change in town centre patronage has on parking behaviour is recorded. Additionally, the level of long-stay parking demand will need to be monitored to ensure the balance between available long and short-stay parking remains appropriate.
- 4.4.11 In the event that an increase in car journeys into the town leads to an excess of demand over supply, this demand will need to be effectively managed in order to maintain town centre vitality.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 4 – To regularly review the impacts of traffic circulation and parking demand in the core area, seek to establish the principle of encouraging visitors to use the first car park they encounter and manage changes in car parking activity within the town centre to ensure off-street car parking provision continues to be used effectively.

- 4.4.12 The currently unused parking capacity that has been identified by recent surveys represents a poor use of land resources. Future planning policy is likely to require an increase in development density for sites in town centre locations, and thus sites which are known to be under-utilised offer easily identifiable opportunities. The Royston Town Centre Strategy identifies a number of opportunity sites that may come forward for development in the medium term, some of which are currently used, at least partially, for car parking.
- 4.4.13 When considering the development potential of these sites, it is important that the existing amenity that they provide to the town is not lost to development. It is expected that the private car will continue to be the primary mode of transport in future years for those visitors to Royston town centre who live in outlying villages.
- 4.4.14 Whilst it is important that an appropriate level of development is allowed to take place within the town, the wider aims of the town centre community to provide a thriving district centre should be recognised and supported by both this Parking Strategy and planning policy.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 5 – To ensure that future development proposals within the town consider and provide for sufficient public car parking to encourage the maintenance and growth of a vibrant town centre economy.

Long Term Objectives (10+ yrs)

- 4.4.15 Increases in town centre vitality and shopping activity over time will create an increased need for a town centre environment that is both safe and attractive to users. The longer term objectives of the Town Centre Strategy include the provision of a pedestrian-friendly town centre with a reduced requirement for vehicle access. To assist in achieving this, further encouragement will be given to drivers to use car parking facilities outside the core shopping area.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 6 – To strengthen the requirement for drivers entering the town to use car parks that they encounter first and discourage drivers from entering the core town centre area unnecessarily.

4.5 On-street car parking

- 4.5.1 Off-street parking provision in Royston town centre is supplemented by on-street parking bays at a number of locations. Bays that are predominantly used by town centre visitors are located in Fish Hill, Market Hill, the High Street, Lower King Street and Kneesworth Street, with a total capacity of 75 spaces.
- 4.5.2 Parking restrictions vary dependent on the location. Those in the High Street allow 20 minutes waiting only, those in Fish Hill, Market Hill and Lower King Street allow 30 minutes or 1 hour, and those on Kneesworth Street allow 2 hours waiting.

- 4.5.3 Bays closest to the town centre (i.e. at the first four locations given above) are well used, with high turnover and the short parking durations consistent with shopping visits. All of the on-street parking is provided free of charge, which undoubtedly contributes to their popularity.
- 4.5.4 Parking surveys undertaken as part of the development of the strategy have identified a high level of illegal on-street parking activity taking place in the heart of the town, with an average of 170 incidents per day being recorded. This activity often means that vehicles are left in a dangerous or obstructive position, causing increased traffic congestion and risk of accidents.
- 4.5.5 Perceptions within the town centre community are that the provision of free parking is crucial if Royston is to compete with other local centres that may have a more attractive retail offer. Whilst such policy is popular with visitors, it also has negative impacts on the town centre in the form of increased traffic circulation (as drivers search for free spaces), environmental degradation, a vehicle dominated streetscape and an increase in conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, particularly in areas of high pedestrian activity such as the High Street.
- 4.5.6 In the short term, on-street parking in the heart of the town centre is seen as an important attractor of town centre visitors, and provision is soon to be increased through the conversion of loading bays in the High Street to public parking. This approach is not viewed as desirable in the longer term, and it is considered that the provision of on-street parking should be reviewed as the pattern of town centre visits changes, in order to assess the continued appropriateness of the provision of on-street parking in predominantly pedestrian areas. Any reduction in the level of on-street parking will bring benefits to pedestrian movement, air quality and the overall look and feel of the town, and help in creating a more welcoming and relaxed environment in which visitors can enjoy the amenity of the town.
- 4.5.7 On-street parking within the town centre should be provided for use at appropriate times. Such parking can support the evening economy and allows convenient access during quieter shopping periods. In busier periods, for example on market days, vehicle activity within the heart of the town centre will be discouraged in order to promote an improved environment for the increased number of pedestrians which use the town centre on these days.
- 4.5.8 The aim of removing excess vehicle movements from the town centre during periods of peak activity can be achieved by limiting the use of selected on-street parking bays to non-market days only. Demand for on-street parking can also be managed through the introduction of charges, although it is not envisaged that this method of control would be implemented during the lifetime of this strategy.

Strategy for On-street Car Parking

To ensure that sufficient on-street parking is provided to support the wider aims of enhancing the town centre's economic vitality and vibrancy and increasing the attractiveness of the town as a whole for all users.

To ensure on-street parking is sited only in appropriate locations that are safe to use for all road users and do not cause increased or undue traffic congestion.

To continually review the requirement for on-street car parking in the heart of the town centre in the medium to long term and manage supply accordingly.

To maintain an effective level of parking enforcement in the town to deter illegal parking activity and maintain an acceptable level of safety for pedestrians and vehicles.

Short-term Objectives (1-5 yrs)

- 4.5.9 The provision of free on-street parking around the town is considered to be an important attractor of town centre visitors, and provision will be increased by the conversion of loading bays in the High Street to public parking. This is seen as an important short-term measure which is intended to assist in generating increased footfall within the town centre. Other opportunities to provide on-street car parking will be investigated.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 7 – To assess the effects of increased public parking provision in the High Street in regard of pedestrian movement and shopper footfall.

Medium-term Objectives (5-10 yrs)

- 4.5.10 The short term policies given in this document are intended to assist in providing an economic upturn in the town, but In the medium and longer terms it is not considered appropriate to further increase on-street parking provision, due to the negative impacts that increased numbers of vehicles would have on the town centre environment.
- 4.5.11 Monitoring of town centre traffic movements will be important to gauge the impacts of increases in traffic. Where it is considered that town centre users would benefit from a reduction in vehicle movements, on-street parking restrictions should be reviewed with a view to removing vehicle activity from key areas.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 8 – To rationalise on-street parking provision in areas of high pedestrian activity and improve the distribution of parking for blue badge holders within the town centre.

Long-term Objectives (10+ yrs)

- 4.5.12 The Royston Town Centre Strategy sets out a long-term vision for the direction of the town centre which includes the provision of improved and expanded public realm in the heart of the town, and it is intended that long-term parking policy supports these aims.

- 4.5.13 As a continuance of the medium-term policy, the appropriateness and desirability of the continued provision of on-street parking in the heart of the town will be reviewed and managed accordingly.

STRATEGY PROPOSAL 9 – To further rationalise the supply of on-street parking in the town centre to support the aims of the Town Centre Strategy.

4.6 Parking for Blue Badge Holders

- 4.6.1 The town centre car parks offer a total of 16 car parking spaces for blue badge holders, or which half are located in the heart of the town. In addition to this, five on-street spaces are located in Upper King Street, close to the Cross.
- 4.6.2 Whilst this level in provision is adequate in terms of numbers, in line with Town Centre Strategy PG16(vi), the distribution of spaces in the main retail area, particularly in the High Street, will be examined with a view to making improvements where possible.

Strategy for Provision of Blue Badge Holder Parking

To maintain the current level of blue badge holder parking spaces and introduce new spaces in appropriate locations where a need is identified.

To seek to provide a wider distribution of car parking spaces for blue badge holders in the heart of the town.

To ensure that an appropriate level of new blue badge holder parking is provided as part of future development.

4.7 Private Non-residential Parking

- 4.7.1 The layout of the town centre area is such that many buildings have external areas, such as a courtyard or servicing area, associated with them. These areas are often used as car parking for the staff of businesses that occupy these buildings, and represent a significant parking resource. The availability of such private non-residential (PNR) parking contributes to increased peak-hour traffic flow into and out of the town centre, but the council can exercise little control over existing sites.
- 4.7.2 The main control available to the Council for the management of PNR spaces is through the development control process. Thus, any significant new commercial development will be encouraged to produce a workplace Travel Plan for employees in order to demonstrate a commitment to reductions in private car usage, promote alternative transport options and allow better use of development land.
- 4.7.3 Although the Council has the power to introduce charges for parking at the workplace, this is not currently thought to be appropriate for the North Hertfordshire area. The council will continue to review the desirability of introducing such measures in the future should circumstances change.

Strategy for Private Non-residential Parking

To ensure that new commercial development proposals comply with minimum parking standards and include the preparation of a workplace travel plan or plans.

4.8 Parking and New Development

- 4.8.1 The Royston Town Centre Strategy identifies seven opportunity sites that may come forward for development in the future, and presents some ideas as to the form that development may take. A number of these sites are currently used for car parking, and any development proposals will inevitably seek to make changes to the layout and capacity of the parking provision contained within a site.
- 4.8.2 The wider aims of the Town Centre Strategy include the encouragement of an increase in the vitality and economic health of the town centre, and it is important that sufficient public car parking is made available to support these aims. A shift in the nature of parking activity within the town centre, for example an increase in long-stay parking demand or an increase in short-stay durations from less than one hour to between 1-2 hours, will place an increased demand on existing parking supply.
- 4.8.3 Development proposals should fully consider the impact that development will have on parking supply and distribution, and ensure that a commensurate level of public parking is retained. Whilst a reduction in parking capacity may be sustainable in some locations, the prevailing parking context and the likely impact that the development of other sites may have on the vitality of the town centre in the future must be taken into account.
- 4.8.4 NHDC's Supplementary Planning Document 25 'Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development' describes the current approach to car parking provision at new developments. The document identifies a zonal approach to parking standards, based on Hertfordshire County Council's maximum parking standards but introducing a degree of parking restraint dependent on zone. The level of restraint for application in Royston, a Zone 2 area, is between 25-50% of the maximum parking standards.
- 4.8.5 It is considered that the flexibility offered by these standards will continue to support the overall aims of planning policy in the context of Royston in the future. However, developers should seek to minimise the impacts of new parking demand at developments through the adoption of the minimum applicable standard wherever possible.
- 4.8.6 The principle of car-free development for very small residential sites that are close to town centre amenities or rail stations is supported by the Council. Such sites are largely infill or property conversions on land that is incapable of accommodating parking but can benefit from nearby off-street parking. The Royston Town Centre Strategy identifies that demand for such properties in North Hertfordshire is likely to be very limited, but consideration will be given to proposals of this type in appropriate locations.

4.9 Residential Parking

- 4.9.1 Much of the town outside the town centre area is made up of residential properties, of varying size and type, and with differing requirements for car parking.
- 4.9.2 The town has three Controlled Parking Zones, one to the east of the Old North Road stretching from Serby Avenue to Queens Road and Mill Road, one which addresses problems on Barkway Road and garden Lane, and a third for properties on Sun Hill. The first of these has been introduced to mitigate the impacts of rail station users parking on-street to avoid payment of station parking charges, and the latter two to prevent an overspill of town centre-related parking into residential areas.
- 4.9.3 As part of the preparation of the Parking Strategy, and in line with Town Centre Strategy PG16(v), residential areas with known or suspected on-street parking problems were examined to establish whether a revision of parking restrictions or the introduction of new parking restrictions would be appropriate. As a result of this work, new parking restrictions are to be introduced in Newmarket Road/Priory Close/Hollies Close, King James Way, and at the entrance to Rock Road in the short term.
- 4.9.4 The nature of car parking in residential areas is ever changing. The introduction of new or revised restrictions in known problem areas may lead to displaced parking moving to new locations and creating new issues. Parking demand associated with new developments may also have an effect.
- 4.9.5 It is believed that the introduction of new restrictions in the areas mentioned above will address identified problems, but it is important that the long-term impacts of these changes are monitored to allow any additional issues to be addressed.

Strategy for Residential On-street Car Parking

To ensure that residential roads are not subject to inappropriate levels of on-street car parking by non-residents

To monitor the level and location of on-street residential car parking in all areas of the town and address specific issues as they arise.

4.10 Taxi Waiting

- 4.10.1 Taxis offer an important transport link in rural areas, particularly for those who do not have access to a private car.
- 4.10.2 Provision for taxi waiting in Royston is currently limited to a shared loading/taxi bay at the Cross. Although at the heart of the town, this rank is reached via a necessarily tortuous route through a largely pedestrian area.
- 4.10.3 It is proposed that consideration be given to relocating this rank to a more appropriate location in consultation with taxi operators, possibly in or between Fish Hill or Market Hill, as part of any improvements to the public realm in this area. A revised configuration would

offer the advantage a more coherent layout that is better integrated with the public realm and assist in preventing traffic congestion in the High Street.

Strategy for Taxi Waiting

To ensure that taxis have convenient waiting facilities close to the town centre whilst minimising the impact of vehicle journeys on the town centre core area.

4.11 Emergency Access

- 4.11.1 Access to the town centre for emergency services vehicles will be maintained at all times. Opportunities to make improvements to emergency vehicle access arrangements through the rationalisation of car parking provision will be taken as they arise.
- 4.11.2 The Royston Town Centre Strategy indicates that it may be considered desirable to review the circulation of vehicles within the town centre in future years. Any proposals to alter the pedestrian friendly layout of the town centre's roads will fully consider emergency access issues.

4.12 Rail Station Parking

- 4.12.1 Royston rail station offers an important transport link both to the people of the town and to the residents of its wider catchment area. The station is served by frequent and fast services to London King's Cross and Cambridge, and attracts users both from outlying areas and from other towns which do not have the benefit of such frequent services.
- 4.12.2 A high proportion of station users access the station on foot, but a similarly high proportion arrive by private car, and the adjacent station parking areas are well used.
- 4.12.3 Surveys undertaken in the preparation of this strategy indicate that the station car park has sufficient capacity to meet current demand,
- 4.12.4 Possible future changes to train frequencies are likely to create increased demand for travel and parking. It is understood that the station operator, First Capital Connect, intends to submit proposals for increased parking provision at a point in the future.

Strategy for Rail Station User Car Parking

To support an increase in car and cycle parking provision at Royston station in order to minimise the effects of station related car parking on local residents.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Strategy Overview

- 5.1.1 It can be seen from the preceding chapters that in preparing a Parking Strategy for Royston, a large number of factors and situations need to be considered. Parking activities and habits are often complex, and the interactions and relationships between the different types of activity need to be understood before a cohesive strategy can be identified.
- 5.1.2 The individual strategy elements described in the preceding chapter identify a number of steps that, when combined, are intended to contribute toward the wider aims of the Royston Town Centre Strategy of creating an inviting, vibrant town centre that is easily accessed by residents and visitors alike.
- 5.1.3 When considering parking activity in this context, it is important to ensure that the existing and future parking supply is effectively managed, to achieve best use of parking assets whilst supporting the economy of the town, and allowing improvements in the town centre environment to be made to the benefit of all users.
- 5.1.4 The measures and proposals identified in the Strategy document seek to ensure an adequate level of car parking facilities, with an appropriate distribution, is maintained in Royston both to meet the needs of town centre users and enhance the amenity and user-friendliness of the town centre environment.

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