

A Parking Strategy for Dedham



Introduction

Colchester Borough Council owns the two public car parks in Dedham and parking services are provided by the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) which also controls on-street parking and parking regulations on the highway. Both authorities are keen to work with local stakeholders to attain the best fit for parking, travel and access to the Dedham Vale area. As a result, the North Essex Parking Partnership and Colchester Borough Council together are looking at the general provision and requirements of all the parking in Dedham.

There is a need for a Strategy to bring consistency to the local parking provision and tackle some longstanding issues of capacity, turnover and usage at peak times, access, charging and maintenance, which may as a consequence provide a local income to support other activities in the area.

About this document

This document considers and brings together the issues around parking, especially in off-street car parks and on-street parking places where the authorities have direct control of the operations in Dedham.

This document:

- Defines the current position with regard to off-street parking, including the wider area, determine what gaps there might be in the level and quality of the service and what actions the Borough and stakeholders might take so those gaps might be filled;
- Takes into account the need to achieve sustainability and a common strategy for businesses, local people and visitors and set out what is considered to be a fair pricing structure across the area and how any income generated by changes to the service might be used to help support both the parking service and enable investment in the local area.

Whilst this strategy addresses off-street parking, any strategy for off-street parking needs to be closely linked with the County Council's decriminalised Civil Parking Enforcement scheme (CPE) covering both the layout and enforcement of permissive parking bays and parking restrictions on the highway which is also administered by the NEPP. This document therefore also considers these issues in consultation with the highway authority, in this case Essex County Council.

It should be acknowledged that the area also falls within the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and therefore should comply with the general vision for the heritage and conservation of the area, for example by influencing visitor travel behaviour and reducing signage clutter.

This document outlines a Parking Strategy for both the car parks and parking areas in Dedham and is based on principles that reflect:

- National, regional and local objectives for transport and the environment – as they relate to parking;
- A share of income locally to fund local initiatives;
- Any improvements to the overall parking service provided which may be required – and a way of funding these and associated local improvements, considering that the service is currently free at the point of delivery.

Vision in context for Dedham

A clear strategy and plan will help provide a customer-focussed parking service, which is fair, attractive, accessible and strategically priced, whilst providing and maintaining an important revenue stream for each of the partner stakeholders, in their own account, and to provide a fair, economic, consistent and efficient enforcement services, maintaining the enforcement service at an enhanced level.

In relation to this vision the Dedham Vale AONB commentary on the area relating to Transport is particularly relevant:

“In popular areas congestion and on street parking can be an issue. The number of visitors is not usually in itself a problem, rather the problems caused by congestion and parking issues at peak times”.

Such are the issues in Dedham, and any changes or proposed solutions here need to be considered on the local and strategic levels. The commentary goes on to outline a number of traffic priorities:

- *“There are options for using more sustainable transport methods.*
- *Development takes into account transport implications”*

In relation to visitors

“Though concern has sometimes surrounded the actual number of visitors, it is the ways in which visitors travel to and around the area that has the highest potential to cause problems for the local population and impact on the landscape.

The Dedham Vale AONB visitor survey 2009 indicated that:

- *92% of visitors came by car*
- *The majority of visitors will visit more than one site per visit*
- *66% are day visitors*

Source: The Dedham Vale AONB visitor survey 2009

This can cause problems relating to visual intrusion, parking and the contribution to climate change. The issues relating to the reliance on cars to get to the area continue to be addressed by the Visitor Management Group. The Visitor Management Group is made up of representatives of local authority tourism staff, countryside charities and local businesses.”

The following options and requirements have been included.

- A fair partnership between the stakeholders with local input governed by a Service Level Agreement (SLA);
- Consistent, efficient and fair enforcement of Colchester Borough and Essex County Council parking areas;
- Management and protection of areas where parking is not desired (for instance in the village centre);
- Parking charging options to provide a fund to support other local schemes, maintenance and enforcement, but not necessarily to generate surpluses;
- Efficient cash collection from a choice of appropriate ticketing systems – including a choice of machine and phone payment;
- Encouragement of turnover in parking areas by effecting good space usage and more visits to the village's shops through car park stay length management using appropriate tariffs;
- Efficiencies in staffing costs, offset overheads and release other resources for appropriate tasks;
- Funding for maintenance and repairs

Business Model

The aim of this Strategy is to provide a meaningful income to the stakeholders from the car parks in their village to provide for their maintenance and operation as well as providing funds that can be used locally by the Parish Council.

It must be remembered that the service is not free to provide at the moment – it is simply free to use at the point of delivery. Costs exist in the current system including business rates, maintenance, and enforcement, and this should be offset against the income requirement for Colchester. The sites will require substantial maintenance in the future.

If charges are introduced in the manner described in this document, then it is expected that this package of measures could yield a small income. Details of the financial model are included in the Appendix. The actual income depends upon the levels of charges, the efficiencies gained and on the mixture of any tariffs selected.

Parking Operations

Parking operations will remain in the control of the Borough Council and will continue to be operated by the NEPP under annex to the NEPP Joint Committee Agreement, 2011.

Parking Enforcement

The introduction of “paid for” parking will bring with it a requirement for increased enforcement, and this will have the desired effect in the village where there have been calls for more enforcement generally.

Enforcement will be carried out in accordance with the national Civil Parking Enforcement system, which has its own regulated, fair, consistent and transparent appeals and adjudication and process. The enforcement will be carried out by the NEPP and income from penalties in the car parks will go directly to the Borough Council.

Ancillary improvements

There is the immediate need to make numerous, but minor, improvements to the parking areas currently provided, such as to the surface, the lighting and to manage the hedges/fence lines and trees. These costs (minor works) will be treated as “start up costs”. However, only the new ticket machines will be funded from the income stream. Ongoing maintenance would then firstly be supported from any income from this Strategy.

Off Street Parking Provision - Existing Provision and problems

Analysis

All of the off-street public parking in Dedham is owned by Colchester Borough Council. Existing car park provision is a mixture of types, some parcels of land being metalled, some grassy. All are presently free of charge to park, although penalties apply for misdemeanours such as out of bay parking or taking a disabled person’s bay without a blue badge. Mill Lane car park has restrictions on the maximum stay. The car park enforcement is operated concurrently with on-street bays and yellow lines enforcement.

Converting the car parks to machine control (“pay and display”) would mean that the enforcement could be carried out against the ticket time shown in the vehicle, and make enforcement much more efficient with inspection at more random times made possible.

The restrictions on the highway are in force daily and there is a seasonal overflow car park which is fully used in the times it is presently open. There are clear links to visitor vehicle management.

Car Park Capacity

Off-peak weekday capacity is currently generally sufficient for the needs in the village, albeit this suffers extreme seasonal swings in usage. Most peak-season users of these car parks are said to come as visitors and are mainly day-trippers.

- The Mill Lane car park tends to be used for longer stays and turnover of spaces is therefore not guaranteed. The car park becomes full regularly.
- The Mill Pond car park also becomes full regularly in peak season with cars and also suffers from capacity issues due to long stay parking.

These issues are to the detriment of local shops and businesses that rely on a turnover of trade and there are a number of small businesses nearby. In structuring a shorter stay tariff it would discourage clogging up the car park and in doing so free up a greater, more consistent and balanced turnover of cars (and hence visitors/shoppers) for the nearby businesses. If drivers are able to find a space, congestion in the car park and circulation around the village will reduce.

By charging in the car park for part, some or all stays there may be a better balance to be struck in support of the visitor management schemes and in particular the “hopper” bus.

Car park assets

The areas include:

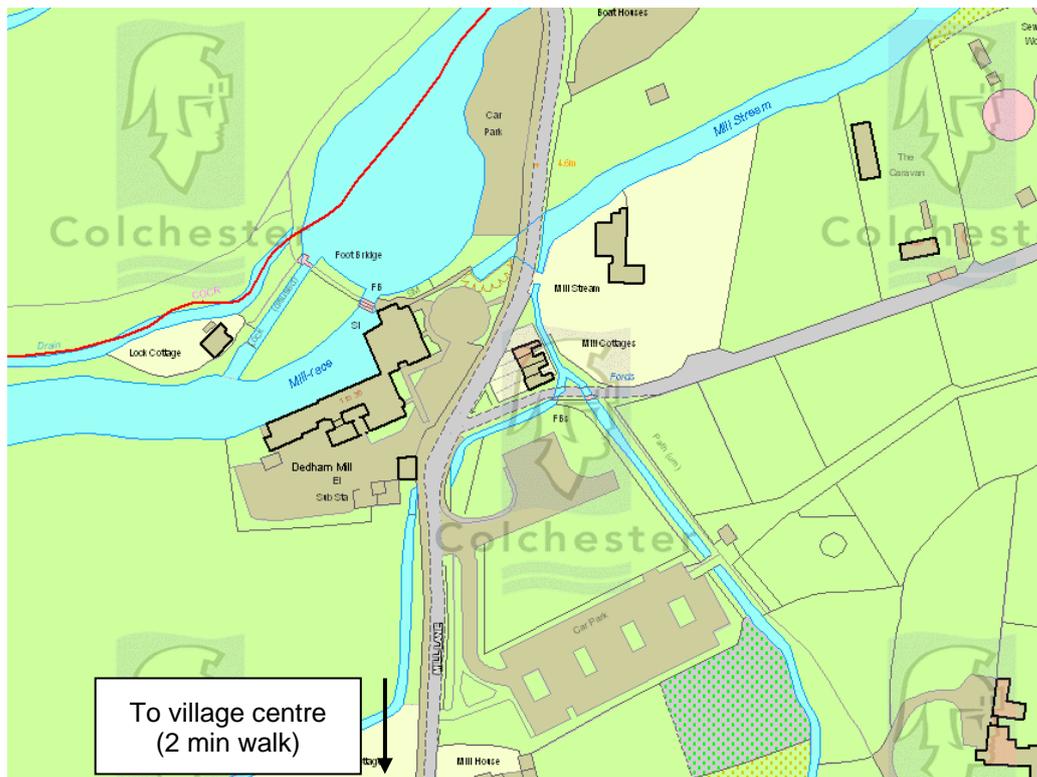
- Land owned and controlled by Colchester Borough Council
 - Mill Lane car park:
 - Main car park area – up to 87 defined parking spaces
 - Overflow car park – approx 40 parking spaces (seasonal)
 - Coach park – 6 unmarked coach bays; and, separately
 - Mill Pond car park
 - approximately 24 unmarked parking spaces

On-street parking areas:

- Highway land in the village centre – limited waiting bays beside and opposite the Church and east of the Memorial.
- There are some distant Highway areas which could take referred parking where there are no restrictions.

Further notes about these sites:

- There is a need to protect the “green areas” from traffic.
- At the Village centre there is a need to protect the area around the memorial, which has had improved restrictions.
- In the Mill Pond car park, there needs to be a balance between provision of parking taking capacity and turnover into account, and use of land for other activity (launching onto the river).



Disabled Drivers' bays

The disabled badge principally a concession to access on the highway, and the badge holders' concession allows parking on some yellow lines, thus several alternatives are available to blue badge holders. Blue Badge holders will be subject to the same charges as all vehicle users.

Disabled badge holders' bays are not provided formally in all car parks – because some car parks are only grassed areas. Part of this strategy involves making improvements to provision wherever possible, including for disabled users.

Financial Issues

Income Generated

The financial significance of car parking is not to be underestimated; however the fees and charges structure should not be purely punitive. The structure of fees has been set at a level to distribute parking and turnover to a level desirable for the location.

Agreement

Similar to other areas where successful Strategies have been developed and implemented the Councils will develop an agreement for the share of income arising from all off-street parking activity. This agreement will be between Colchester Borough Council and Dedham Parish Council.

Setting Tariffs

Making poor choices in tariff design and specification can clearly result in an adverse impact on the vitality of a centre and result in negative financial implications for the Authority, so local knowledge and historical information has been used in the design of the tariff structure

Income – car park

A model of how other income could be generated is shown in the Appendices.

Expenditure – car park

The cost of staffing for the car parks other than those relating to enforcement were for engineering (surveying, car park repairs, opening and closure of the extension car park, fence, post and tree maintenance). Other running costs included NNDR (business rates), energy, maintenance and water.

Other car parks attract business rates (NNDR) and this has been sourced from within existing operational budgets for the presently free car parks operated by Colchester.

Pricing policy

Parking Charges Strategy

Presently none of the car parks are charged for. Some have restrictions on the maximum length of stay, but enforcing this is difficult without timed parking tickets. Therefore, it has been decided to introduce charging at a low level with issued tickets strategically across all parking areas to create an income stream to fund local priorities, repairs, maintenance and such like. Parking charges would also help reduce the present abuse of the stay length and also make enforcement more efficient.

Parking charges are determined by a number of factors including:

- Inflation, and the level of RPI/CPI;
- Regional and National comparators;
- Financial considerations, costs and income budgets;
- Level of charges in related and nearby areas;
- Vitality of the local area;
- Trends in ticket sales and current income trend;
- The need to balance demand and supply against capacity, projected capacity as part of regeneration and the efficient turnover of spaces;
- Data from the financial model; and
- Local, and National Transport Policy considerations.

Parking Payment Machines

The car parks will need ticket machines installed in order to collect payment and enable enforcement. Costs have been allowed for in the plan. The preferred method of operation for car parks is pay and display backed by the telephone system, *MiPermit* for operation of the car parks under consideration in this document – see below under “*Mobile Phone Payment*”.

Mobile phone payment

In Colchester’s off-street car parks, payments can be made by mobile phone (using the *MiPermit* system) which enables customers to pay on a registered account without using any coins.

This technology will be enabled in these additional car parks for those who wish to use it (or are already registered elsewhere) and acts as a back up to pay machines, for card use, and for those with no change.

Maintenance

Maintenance Regime

For Colchester, the car park structures, surfaces and lighting are inspected by the Engineering team on a monthly programme. Cleaning is carried out by dedicated staff that are employed by the local Zone team. It should be noted that litter removal is part of a global recharge, so is not easy to quantify the individual car park elements.

Preventative maintenance

The Mill Lane car parks have been provided for a number of years and have only received minimal or routine maintenance. This car park have been partially patched but not resurfaced in recent years. Other areas are not metalled, or are simply grassy fields.

Some areas require attention to improve standards, or to solve some fencing, local drainage and tree overgrowth issues. This will be part of an on-going improvement programme as funds allow.

The Mill Pond car park was improved since parts of it had been swept into the river by successive winter erosion. Further bank stabilisation would be necessary at some point, funded by the income generated by the introduction of this Strategy.

Targets for provision

There are some of the areas in the car parks under consideration which require refurbishment or reconfiguration.

Quality Standard

As a quality standard, accreditation under the British Parking Association (BPA) Park Mark scheme is desirable and has been achieved. Government guidelines set clear requirements that car park providers should aim to meet when building and maintaining car parks.

The Royal Square

This is an area owned by Dedham Parish Council. There is currently no enforceable parking or waiting restrictions in this area.

Car Park Regulations

Car park regulation will to be added to the Colchester Borough Council Off-Street parking regulation orders to ensure that enforcement of the car parks can take place. The types of regulation that can be put in place fall into three categories:

- Limited Waiting – parking is allowed for a set time with no return within a set time. For example, maximum stay 2 hours no return within 3 hours

- Pay and Display – A parking ticket or virtual ticket (purchased via the Mi-Permit system)
- A mixture of both – A free of charge period is allowed. An additional parking time is paid for.

For all of the above options, parking ticket machines would need to be installed. Limited waiting is most efficiently enforced when a parking ticket is displayed showing the time of arrival, even where parking may initially be free of charge.

It is felt that the most appropriate strategy would be for a free period of parking initially with a fee paid if parked beyond the initial period is required. This approach has proved to be successful in other areas where parking charges have been introduced as part of an agreed Strategy.

On-Street Considerations

There are parking and waiting restrictions in Dedham, mainly around the High Street area. It is important that these continue to be enforced to ensure that vehicles are not displaced from the car parks onto restricted areas. Not only would this cause traffic flow issues, but would mean that less space would be available for residents of the High Street who hold an exemption certificate to allow unlimited parking in the limited waiting bays. Changes to the car parks will necessitate more enforcement of the on-street areas by Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) who will be present in any event to enforce the car park and highway schemes.

Powers under which car parks are provided

Off-street car parks are provided using powers under Sections 32 and 35 and Part IV of Schedule 9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA) and other enabling powers with the consent of the County Council in accordance Sections 39(3) of the RTRA1984, and after consultation with the Chief Officer of Police in accordance with Part III of Schedule 9 to the RTRA1984 enabling Colchester to control and regulate the use of off-street car parks for which it is responsible.

Enforcement

Parking enforcement is carried out under regulations made under the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA). Civil Enforcement Officers can carry out enforcement duties in car parks in the Colchester area, under Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) regulations. Enforcement and car park operations are provided by NEPP, a council operation under powers delegated to Essex County Council.

In order to enforce under TMA, a set of circumstances must be fulfilled and the operation must be carried out according to the legislation.

This could provide the solution for those parking places, the car parks and the highway except that to carry out the enforcement duties, the car parks must be controlled (in policy, strategic and operational terms) by the CPE parking

authority, in this case, the Borough Council, in order to comply with adjudication, debt collection and other enforcement requirements of TMA.

This would not preclude the localism agenda; it is acceptable for the Councils to have separate arrangements for accountability – it simply means that the TMA affects the parking areas at the point of delivery. A Parking Strategy with local Agreement has been successfully implemented elsewhere in the Borough.

Transport policy and plans

Provision and expansion of parking must fit in with the Local Plan objectives, and those of the County Council's Local Transport Plan and wider Transport Strategy, including the national transport strategies.

There is a particular requirement for the scheme to fit well with the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project management plans and aspirations.

The appropriate authorities and organisations have been included in consultation.

Layout & Location

The role of the car park infrastructure is vital in attracting visitors and shoppers and the relationship with the local economy and vibrancy of the Dedham centre is important.

Car and coach parks are situated in the best places to serve the local amenities; the Strategy will ensure this continues to be provided appropriately.

Coach Parking

It is considered by the Council Visitor services and Parking service that coach parking is required on weekdays in the Mill Lane car park so this will be retained. The intention will be to introduce charging for this facility, but this will be delayed for 12 months whilst coach operators are informed. The coach park area will open to use by cars at weekends or on public holidays.

Customer Focus

It is important that the car parks are developed and maintained according to the Council's parking policies and solutions in order to fit within the overall corporate strategic objectives, but also in order to meet the individual needs of the Dedham and local area. Therefore, local input will be maintained through the Parish Council and the Dedham Vale AONB Project.

Accessibility & Parking for Disabled People

The supply of parking provision for disabled people in car parks offers a reasonable supply of space for disabled parking, although location and the overall quality of provision in terms of protected, restricted wider bays could always be improved upon.

Longer and Wider Bays

Following on from the discussion around wider bays for parent and children, wider bays are necessary for larger vehicles such as people carriers, SUVs, 4x4s and especially the new trend in light motor-homes in tourist locations. There is less pressure for space width in some of these locations, where the fields are not metalled – although hardened areas for heavier motor homes, or improved entrances/exit roads may become necessary. Taller vehicles are precluded from using the Mill Lane car park by a height barrier.

The areas surrounding the car parks are adequately controlled by parking restrictions on the highway. Away from the High Street area these on-street restrictions are presently adequate in most locations in order for on and off-street parking controls to achieve their optimum operational function together, protecting areas within walking distance of the car parks at least.

There is a desire and added benefit of making more information available at the car park locations including interpretation boards and directional information. The ideal would be for signage provision to become more consistent whilst cutting down signage clutter. It may be that lines in the Village centre, presently “at any time” yellow lines could be removed or reduced and the area become a Restricted Zone with less signage.

Appendix

Tariffs

Mill Lane and Mill Pond car parks

	Charging period	Tariff
All days 8am – 6pm	Up to 1 hour only	Free
	1-2 hours	£1.00
	2-4 hours	£2.00
	Over 4 hours (day rate)	£4.00
All days 6pm – 8am next day	Overnight charge (valid until 8am)	50p
Season Ticket Permits	Annual	£50 per annum
Coaches	Up to 6 hours	£5.50*
	6 hours and over	£10.00*

* these charges will be applicable from 1 April 2015.

Season Tickets

Each local business in Dedham will be allowed two free season ticket annual permits per establishment as well as unlimited supply of permits at the published charging rate.

Operational & Adjudication issues

In order to comply with the requirements of the Road Traffic Regulation Act, and therefore correctly fall under the Adjudication Process set out in the Traffic Management Act 2004, the car parks must all be operated by the Borough Council and a separate agreement exists with the Parish Council as to any share they receive. The policy must be controlled by the Colchester Borough Council as the primary authority.