

West Berkshire Council Draft Parking Strategy 2024 – 2034

Comments by Thatcham Town Council

1 Introduction

Thatcham Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on West Berkshire Council's draft Parking Strategy. The Town Council supports the proposals that it contains. We have made some comments on the situation specific to Thatcham; some of these should be considered for inclusion in the final strategy, while others relate more to its implementation and operation.

For on-street parking, the charges and time limits are governed by legislation and Statutory Guidance¹.

“Civil parking enforcement should contribute to the authority's transport objectives.

Civil parking enforcement provides a means by which an authority can effectively deliver wider transport strategies and objectives. Enforcement authorities should not view it in isolation or as a way of raising revenue. ... Parking policies, including enforcement, should be proportionate and should not undermine the vitality of town centres.

... raising revenue should not be an objective of civil parking enforcement.”

While these statutory requirements do not apply to the Council's car parks, we believe that it should still follow this guidance for them.

2 Parking Provision

2.1 Signage for Thatcham town centre car parks

There is no signage from the A4 indicating parking for the town centre of Thatcham. The signs at the junction of The Moors for the Kingsland Centre car park only say “P Supermarket”, there is a discrete sign for parking at the junction of the A4 and Brownsfield Road, but no sign at the bend of Brownsfield Road to give directions to the Gilbert Court car park.

PROPOSAL: The parking direction signs for the The Moors junction should include “Town Centre”, either as well as or instead of “supermarket”. Parking direction signs should be made more visible at the A4 and Brownsfield Road junction and installed at the bend on Brownsfield Road directing to Gilbert Court car park.

3 Parking Charges

3.1 Alignment of Kingsland Centre charges with on-street parking

Parking in The Broadway and High Street is free, with a time limit of one hour. The spaces are full for much of the day, with cars driving around The Broadway or waiting in the carriageway for a space to become free. However, at most times there are plenty of spaces in the Kingsland Centre car park.

This would also align the fees regime with the Council's Gilbert Court car park.

PROPOSAL: There should be no charge for the first hour of parking in the Kingsland Centre car park.

¹ Statutory guidance for local authorities in England on civil enforcement of parking contraventions, 20 October 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-enforcement-of-parking-contraventions/guidance-for-local-authorities-on-enforcing-parking-restrictions#objectives-of-civil-parking-enforcement>

3.2 Thatcham Station

There is no evening bus service from Thatcham to Reading. Residents who wish to travel to Reading for the evening must either drive or go by train – and much of Thatcham is too far from the station for residents to walk home on their return. West Berkshire Council should encourage travel by public transport where possible.

The roads adjacent to Thatcham Station are the only location in Thatcham for which there is an on-street parking charge. We assume that the justification for this charge is to manage demand for parking by commuters using the station – who need to park for the whole day, but only on Monday to Friday.

The Town Council does not believe that there is justification, according to the criteria in the Statutory Guidelines, for charging at evenings and weekends on these roads.

PROPOSAL: The chargeable period for parking on-street at Thatcham Station should be reduced to 8AM to Midday, with this four-hour period having the same charge as the current daily rate.

3.3 Alignment of parking charges for Thatcham Town Centre

As noted in paragraph 6.1.8 of the draft strategy, the four car parks serving the centre of Thatcham have different charging schemes, in terms of free period, steps in daytime charging, evening charges and charges for vehicles with blue badges. In addition, these car parks use three different systems for online payments (plus a fourth for the Apcoa-managed station car park).

As identified by Hemingway Design in the Thatcham Town Centre Strategy, this creates uncertainty that (together with the shortage of short-term free parking) discourages people from visiting the town centre.

PROPOSAL: While West Berkshire Council has no direct control over the car parks that it does not manage, we encourage it to work with the private car park operators to reduce the fragmentation of the arrangements for parking in Thatcham town centre.

4 Enforcement

4.1 Footway Parking

One of the most frequent complaints made by residents to Town Councillors is obstruction of footways by antisocial parking. We therefore warmly welcome Proposal EN1, for West Berkshire Council to pursue powers to enforce footway parking if they are made available to local authorities.

PROPOSAL: West Berkshire Council should pursue powers to enforce footway parking at the earliest opportunity.

PROPOSAL: West Berkshire Council should encourage Thames Valley Police to undertake some enforcement of obstruction due to footway parking, including when officers are on general patrol and observe obstruction of footways.

4.2 Obstruction of Mandatory Cycle Lanes

We have observed that heavy goods vehicles often park on the A4 in order to buy food (e.g. from Sainsburys Local, Crown Mead, Subway). In doing so, they are parking on double yellow lines and obstructing a mandatory cycle lane.

PROPOSAL: Civil Parking Enforcement Officers should occasionally undertake parking enforcement along the A4. Lorry drivers are a close community with a small number of major haulers, so word will spread quickly.

4.3 Enforcement of-road parking restrictions

Town Councillors have received reports from residents that some vehicles are parked for long periods on streets with parking restrictions. The online 'report a problem' page does include categories for parking infringements, but this feature of the Council's website is not well known – and that these reports might not be confidential. It also appears that the owners of these vehicles do not expect any enforcement action to be taken.

PROPOSAL: A statement should be added to the 'report a problem' page that the identity of a person reporting a problem is confidential, and will not be disclosed (this is already the case for the similar function for reporting a breach of planning approval).

PROPOSAL: The enforcement by CPE officers outside of the town centre should be increased.

PROPOSAL: The Council should publicise information on the types and location of penalty notices (as the police do with convictions), so that drivers are aware that they will not be immune from enforcement penalties.

4.4 Henwick Worthy

On busy days at weekends, the car parks at Henwick Worthy sports ground are insufficient for the number of players and spectators, and sometimes more than a hundred vehicles are parked on Henwick Lane and surrounding roads. Many of these are parked antisocially, blocking the footway or dropped kerbs for pedestrian crossings, or on double yellow lines.

4.5 School Streets – Francis Baily School

Thatcham Town Council understands the reasons for the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order for Francis Baily school. However, the restrictions of the scheme will have a significant impact on residents of the affected streets and their visitors. We therefore request that any representations by residents and their visitors against enforcement measures are considered sympathetically.

4.6 Community involvement in enforcement of parking restrictions

We understand that South Yorkshire Police have created a web platform that allows members of the public to report parking offences directly to the police and to upload digital photographs. These photographs and reports are triaged by officers, and then used to prosecute those who park vehicles in a dangerous or antisocial manner.

It typically takes nine minutes for a member of the public to report a parking infringement online (which is less than the average time an online report through that police force's generic portal). It then takes between five and fifteen minutes to be processed, which is much less than the typical travel time that would be incurred by a patrol/PCSO having to reactively attend a location. When vehicle removal is justified, this can then be done quickly. In other cases (the great majority), the evidence provided is of sufficient quality for prosecution, if the relevant threshold for an offence has been met. This evidence has been tested in court, and found to be sufficient for conviction.

Behavioral 'nudges' are used to reduce offending, including publicity and social media posts.

PROPOSAL: We request West Berkshire Council to discuss with Thames Valley Police and the Police & Crime Commissioner the potential for this scheme to be implemented in this area.