

Stevenage Borough Council

Annual Parking Report 2023-24



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Why do we manage parking?

Since 2005 Stevenage Borough Council has had the power, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (the local Traffic Authority) to manage on street parking within the town. This means the council can make, and enforce, local parking rules.

Having these powers, the council is expected to use them and before taking them on we developed a Parking Strategy. The 2004 Parking Strategy identified ways that parking affects the community and set out a range of ways that parking should be managed in future to support local and national policy aims.

Managing parking to support these aims benefits everyone who lives in, or visits, Stevenage. That could be by removing hazardous or obstructive parking so that the roads can be used safely and easily, by ensuring that customers are able to visit businesses, or by nudging people to consider using other modes of transport that are better for their health while reducing both traffic congestion and pollution.

Council parking enforcement also means that we can help deal with most illegal parking, freeing up the Police who would otherwise have to do so. The council can enforce against:

- breaking specific rules such as parking on double yellow lines or in an enforceable bus stop, parking for longer than is allowed or not paying when you are supposed to;
- parking that obstructs where the pavement has been lowered (or the road surface has been raised) to give access to a driveway or so that people can cross the road; and
- parking more than 50cm out from the kerb into the road (double parking).

The council doesn't set out to make money from parking but is expected by the government to make its parking service self-funding so that it doesn't form a burden on council taxpayers generally who after all may not even own a car. If the council makes more money from on-street parking fees and parking enforcement than it spends on managing parking, this either goes to offset any loss in past years or is used to fund specific things allowed by law such as transport or environmental improvements and building or maintaining parking facilities.

How do we manage parking?

Parking is largely managed by making rules about what drivers can and can't do and upholding those rules through enforcement if they are broken. The council can only enforce through issuing Penalty Charge Notices ("parking tickets" or PCNs).

It should be remembered that most drivers don't seek to park illegally and may never receive a PCN. If they do, it is because based on what the Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO or "traffic warden") can see they believe that the vehicle has been parked in a way that breaks the rules. CEOs don't receive any sort of reward for issuing PCNs and one of the services KPIs is avoiding CEO errors, with a target error rate of under 1% so if anything, CEOs are incentivised not to issue PCNs unless they are certain that it is correct to do so.

Every year many tickets are correctly issued in this way, and when challenged by the driver correctly cancelled as they provide information or evidence that wasn't available to the CEO. The Parking Office at East Herts District Council considers all PCN challenges on the Stevenage Borough Council's behalf, so drivers are assured a fair and consistent hearing from a third party that has nothing to gain from their decision.

The rules that we make generally fall into two categories: preventing parking and creating opportunities for it.

Preventing parking usually means placing yellow lines. That could be double yellow lines that apply all the time somewhere that parking would create a hazard or obstruction, or a single yellow line to address a problem that only happens at certain times such as parking pressure from commuters. It can also mean banning parking on the verge or pavement to protect the environment and so that pedestrians aren't hindered by parked cars.

Creating opportunities means making it easier for one user to stop, but often at the cost of someone else being able to park. For example, we might have to make a bus stop enforceable so that buses can use it, meaning that cars that had been blocking it would have to be parked somewhere else. It can also mean setting conditions on parking, such as in the High Street where a time limit was introduced so that rather than being occupied all day by workers parking spaces would become available for customers to use, giving them the opportunity to support local businesses.

We also use charges to manage parking, where it is helpful to encourage turnover or steer long stay parking to other facilities while allowing some flexibility in how long drivers can park for. This is used in the town centre, where charges encourage drivers to park only as long as they need while allowing them to park all day if they must – but make it cheaper to use a car park for all day parking so that premium on-street space can be used for shorter visits. It is also used together with a three-hour

time limit to encourage turnover of parking near the hospital to maximise parking availability for visitors and outpatients.

When the council sets out to make new rules or to change existing ones, we consult the public to try to make sure that we get it right. This typically includes informal surveys as well as formal public consultation exercises, to understand who will be affected by any changes and how. It is rare for a change to please everyone, but great care is taken to ensure all points of view are considered. A final decision is then made by the Executive Member for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, the senior councillor who oversees our work together with the Ward Councillors who represent the area affected.

Most changes to parking rules are subject to a long and tightly controlled legal process, so that motorists are not penalised through hasty or unconsidered changes. Given the work involved the council can only carry out a few projects to change parking rules each year, and these are prioritised based on the nature and history of each request or concern together with the need to make best use of available resources. This means that we are normally working on a mixture of large and small projects, in order to get them all done as quickly as possible – though it still typically takes at least nine months to complete even a simple change.

We keep records of all requests for changes to parking and reports of problems, so that when we have capacity to start a new project, we can consider what the next priority should be.

The council also sometimes builds parking. In the past large sums have been spent on this, but it was found that where parking was built car ownership would increase in following years so the benefit of it being easier to find a parking space would often be relatively short lived. In recent years, changes to council funding have meant ever greater financial constraints and significant reductions in the budget available to build parking bays. In June 2019 the council declared a Climate Emergency and set a target for net-zero emissions by 2030, which makes it harder to justify building more parking as it both encourages car ownership and driving and removes valuable if small areas of green space. Although it often seems an “obvious” or “easy” solution to those who want it, parking construction is now something that must be the exception rather than the rule.

What have we done this year?

Several projects to update parking restrictions were successfully progressed after investigations and public consultations were undertaken this financial year.

Chells and Manor wards parking restrictions

In 2021-22 financial year as part of the Personal Injury Crash Project we investigated several sites where people have been hurt and parking was considered a contributory factor in causing the crash. Additional locations subject to complaints related to road safety were also investigated. The aim was to identify what restrictions if any should be proposed to help prevent reoccurrence and improve road safety. A few projects proposing 'no waiting at any time' restrictions were added to our work programme to be progressed within next financial years according to resources available. Restrictions were introduced at several locations in the financial year 2022-23 and additional parking restrictions to improve road safety were proposed at new location throughout 2023-24 financial year.

In Chells and Manor Wards parking at several locations in Austen Paths, Aylward Drive, Brittain Way, Byron Close, Chells Lane, Chells Way, Columbus Close, Cornfields, Dryden Crescent, Elliot Road, Ferrier Road, Keats Close, Keller Close, Newton Road, Priestley Road, Scott Road, Siddons Road, The White Way, and Warwick Road were reported to cause a hazard and/or an obstruction. Those reports were brought forward to us by residents, local councillors, bus operators, Council's refuse collection team and others. Concerns were also raised regarding pavement parking in Priestley Road, a street where the verge and footway parking was not formally prohibited as this was adopted as public highway land in recent years.

Two Traffic Regulation Orders proposing parking restrictions at locations mentioned above were formally proposed in June 2023. Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement the restrictions with several amendments. Both Traffic Regulation Orders came into force in January 2024 introducing 'no waiting at any time' restrictions at several locations and formally prohibiting the verge and footway parking in Priestley Road.

Parking changes in Marshgate

Marshgate, a street in Stevenage Town Centre, was subject to substantial redevelopment, resulting in changes to the street scene.

This has resulted in the need to adjust the layout of disabled person's parking bays in the street, in order that Blue Badge holders can park without difficulty or causing to seek a space, and without causing an obstruction, either of which may add to traffic congestion in the area.

The amendments to the street scene, and realignment of disabled person's parking bays in Marshgate, also necessitated an amendment to the extents of "no waiting, no loading" restrictions. If this were not done around the disabled person's parking bays, the council was not able to address obstructive parking that would prevent their use and disrupt the flow of traffic on the carriageway. It was also necessary to shorten the loading bay in the northwestern corner of the street in order that pedestrians can cross the carriageway with unimpeded sightlines and can both see and be seen by drivers to help reduce the likelihood of anybody being injured in a crash.

Furthermore, a new property entrance meant that the removal of several pay-by-phone parking bays was necessary to allow the safe and unobstructed ingress and egress of vehicles through or adjacent to the space they were occupying. These prohibitions of parking also reduced the level of on-street parking, thereby reducing visual dominance of the urban environment by motor vehicles and so preserving and improving the amenity of the area by supporting the high-quality urban design encapsulated in the aesthetic of the street's redevelopment.

These parking changes in Marshgate were implemented in January 2024 following a public consultation carried out throughout November and December 2023.

Lower Sean / Hydean Way junction protection

In recent years the Council received various reports of unsafe parking at Lower Sean junction with Hydean Way. Those reports were brought forward to us by residents, local councillors, Council's refuse collection team and others. The parking issues in this area were more severe at school drop-off and pick-up hours due to the proximity to the local school.

A Traffic Regulation Order proposing double yellow lines at this junction was formally proposed in June 2023. Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement restrictions and the Order came into force in August 2023.

Marymead Court / Marymead Drive junction protection

The Council received a petition signed by 17 households that asked us to implement double yellow lines at Marymead Court bottleneck junction with Marymead Drive.

Subsequent site investigations confirmed that vehicles parking at that location were liable to cause an obstruction to the passage of traffic especially to emergency vehicles due to the narrow width carriageway in that area.

A Traffic Regulation Order proposing double yellow lines at this junction was formally proposed in June 2023. Following consideration of all consultation responses a decision was made to implement restrictions and the Order came into force in November 2023.

Old Town on-street parking

In January 2022 Stevenage Borough Council commissioned a consultant to undertake a parking study of the Old Town area of Stevenage, to provide an independent assessment of any existing parking issues and make recommendations about how the Council should deal with them.

The brief included considering all the requests/complaints from residents, councillors and other stakeholders held in our street files for this ward, together with on-street survey work and targeted inspections (such as visiting school locations during term time at the start/end of the school day) as appropriate. The only public road not included in this parking review was the High Street section between Sish Lane and James Way.

One of the most important interventions recommended by the independent Old Town Parking Study report was for the Council to act against unsafe parking such as vehicles parked in proximity of junctions. Therefore, after discussions with local ward councillors a Traffic Regulation Order proposing 'no waiting at any time' restrictions at various locations across Old Town ward was advertised in January 2023 and residents invited to take part in the formal public consultation throughout February 2023. Furthermore, a Parking Place Order was advertised proposing the implementation of enforceable disabled persons' vehicles parking places at several locations with an aim to maintain and improve the amenity of the area for disabled residents by enabling them to park.

At the end of the formal consultation a report was written, and in June 2023 a final decision was taken to implement the proposed parking controls with several amendments. Both traffic orders came into force in August 2023.

Amendment of Town Centre on-street pay and display parking

In November 2023 the Council proposed to change the operational hours of Town Centre on-street pay and display parking bays from Monday to Saturday 8am-6pm to Monday-Saturday 8am-8pm. The only parking bays affected were the on-street pay and display areas in parts of Danestrete, Southgate, Swingate, The Quadrant, Westgate and Marshgate, Stevenage.

This amendment was proposed to better manage these parking places and relieve or prevent congestion by encouraging turnover of vehicles and availability of parking spaces at those times, in line with the objectives of the original Orders regulating the parking places. The changes were implemented in January 2024.

Furthermore, it was necessary for the Council to physically upgrade the parking machines by fitting them with 4G modems to ensure they remain operational following the planned phasing out of the 3G networks across UK within the next two years.

At the same time as above physical upgrade, all on-street parking machines were fitted with contactless payment devices and the coins payment method in Town Centre was removed. The upgrade of parking machines can provide motorists flexibility because contactless payments are more convenient than needing to have the correct coins for the required length of stay.

London Road disabled parking

In September 2020 the Council introduced six disabled parking bays in London Road, Stevenage to improve the parking facilities in Town Centre for disabled persons. Since then, the Council monitored the feedback received from the public and several suggested that these on-street disabled bays were being used by commuters for all day parking.

After taking in consideration the feedback received from the public and following Civil Enforcement Officers observations, it was confirmed that those disabled bays were being used by commuters for long stay parking causing significant issues for disabled persons looking for short stay designated disabled parking whilst visiting the Town Centre especially those attending physiotherapy sessions at the Leisure Centre.

Therefore, in July 2023 the Council proposed to restrict the waiting time of these bays to a maximum stay of three hours with a no return limit of one hour. All comments received throughout the public consultation were in favour of the proposed change. The amendment was implemented in January 2023.

North Road permit parking

North Road, Stevenage was subject to various highway improvements undertaken by Hertfordshire County Council that aimed to improve the highway and make the area more pedestrian and cyclist friendly and reduce the number of parked vehicles to provide safer and better journeys for all users and maintain visibility to provide free flow of traffic.

After taking into consideration the above improvements, the Borough of Stevenage in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council, proposed to extend the eligibility of the existing Burymead parking permit restrictions to include residents of 7, 7A, 11, 13, 15 and 17 North Road by the introduction of two new permit parking bays on the eastern side of North Road opposite numbers 11 and 17.

Following a formal public consultation carried out in December 2023, the proposal was implemented in January 2024.

Neighbourhood Centres parking

This financial year electric vehicle charge points were installed in car parks at several local neighbourhood centres.

To ensure that electric vehicles were able to access these charge points and they are not obstructed by internal combustion engine vehicles, the council proposed to dedicate the adjacent parking spaces for electric and hybrid plug-in vehicles only.

The need to make parking places orders also presented the opportunity for the council to ensure that disabled persons parking bays were not obstructed by vehicles not displaying a blue badge holder, a known source of frustration for disabled car users who find themselves prevented from accessing local destinations and services or forced to wait causing congestion.

A Parking Place Order was advertised in January 2024 and following public consultation it was implemented in March 2024.

Parking out of bay can also make it hard for other drivers to park and obstruct access to and egress from car parks. The mentioned off-street parking places Order allowed that to be enforced against.

Coreys Mill Lane pay and display parking

In November 2023 the Council proposed the replacement of 7 existing parking bays to the edge of Coreys Mill Lane carriageway with 15 parking bays perpendicular to the carriageway to help provide suitable and adequate parking facilities in response of the continued demands for parking in the Coreys Mill Lane area.

Although previous measures introduced in the area have helped to encourage turnover of parking and increase its availability, following the removal of on-street pay and display parking bays in North Road as part of the Highways improvement scheme implemented by Hertfordshire County Council there was still a high level of parking pressure. The creation of additional short-stay parking in Coreys Mill Lane was aimed to help drivers to park and thereby maintain and improve the amenity of the area.

The physical works were completed, and the proposed amendment of the pay and display Order for Coreys Mill Lane come into force in February 2024.

Cycle Parking/Lockable Bike Shelters

Living in a flat or small house with little or no space to safely store a bike can be a significant barrier to cycling and the benefits it offers, in reduced transport costs and improved health for the individual and improved air quality and reduced healthcare costs for society.

In 2021-22 financial year Stevenage Borough Council installed the first Cycle Hangar in the town, two were installed in 2022-23 and one in 2023-24 financial year to help provide cycle storage for those who need it. A Cycle Hangar is a lockable, sheltered

storage pod for up to six bicycles, with stands to hold them upright and hoops to lock them to.

Residents can contact the Council's parking team to make suggestions where potential future cycle hangars should be installed subject to evidence of demand, availability of suitable space and funding.

Do we make money from parking?

Contrary to what a lot of people believe, the council doesn't profit from parking enforcement. On average from 2011 to 2021 parking enforcement cost the council around £377,000 a year while generating under £270,000 in penalty charges, and that is before other costs of parking management such as maintaining the traffic signs and road markings is considered.

It is only because charges for parking are used to help manage demand that in some recent years on-street parking management has been self-funding except in 2020-21 financial year when the effects of the coronavirus pandemic meant that the service again operated at a significant loss.

The total revenue cost of on-street parking management shown in the council's records for 2023-24 was £728,230. The bulk of this comprises payments to East Herts District Council for providing enforcement patrols and administering penalty charges issued including consideration of any challenges or appeals. The second largest sum was internal staff costs within the council, followed by the cost of maintaining the traffic signs and road markings needed for parking enforcement. Other costs included buying materials such as special papers to allow parking permits to be printed, monitoring and maintenance costs for pay and display machines and electric car chargers, and internal recharges within the council such as postage costs.

The capital spending on parking management projects in 2023-24 was £90,100 on projects to introduce new restrictions or change existing parking rules, upgrade parking machines, and create additional parking spaces.

The council's income from penalty charges was £476,473. Payments for on-street parking totalled £525,138 which includes £23,233 received from the sale of residents' parking permits and visitor vouchers. A further £16,065 was received in other payments such as fees for suspending parking bays and charges for bar markings across driveways. The total income received was £1,017,676 resulting in a revenue surplus of £289,445. Once capital is also considered, the surplus was £199,345.

How many people get tickets and what happens next?

In 2023-24, a total of 16,203 PCNs were issued on behalf of the council. 10,534 of these were higher-level penalty charge notices for more serious contraventions such as parking on the zigzags at a pedestrian crossing. 5,669 were lower-level penalty charge notices for less serious contraventions such as parking in a bay for longer than is allowed.

Though most drivers who receive a PCN pay it, often quite quickly as there is a discounted rate for prompt payment, many take up the option to challenge it. That could be because they think the enforcement officer has got it wrong, or because they feel they deserve the benefit of the doubt, or any other reason. As soon as a challenge is received the case is put on hold, and the challenge is considered by one of the Parking Office team at East Herts District Council. As has been mentioned, there is nothing for them to gain or lose from their decision, and drivers are assured a fair and consistent hearing. If a driver is unsuccessful in challenging their PCN, the process allows them to appeal to the independent adjudicator, the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT), for a final decision. Very few cases from Stevenage go to the TPT each year, and the council's decision is usually found to be correct. If it is not, both we and the Parking Office learn from this to improve how enforcement is carried out and decisions are made.

In 2023-24 10,869 PCNs were paid, of which 8,435 received a 50% discount for prompt payment within 14 days. 3,493 PCNs were challenged or appealed, as a result of which 2,707 were cancelled. A further 838 PCNs were written off for other reasons such as mistakes made by enforcement officers or being unable to trace the driver. Naturally some PCNs issued in the previous year would only have been paid, challenged or cancelled in 2023-24, and some PCNs issued in 2023-24 will only be paid, challenged or cancelled in the following year.

Stevenage Borough Council doesn't immobilise or remove vehicles as part of its parking enforcement regime.

Table 1 – PCN Statistics

Financial year	PCNs issued			PCNs paid		PCNs challenged or appealed	PCNs cancelled	
	Total	Higher rate	Lower rate	Total	At a discount		after a challenge or appeal	for other reasons
2016-17	10,981	6,479	4,502	7,677	6,580	2,645	2,207	
2017-18	10,823	6,813	4,640	7,454	6,001	3,009	2,460	
2018-19	10,929	6,793	4,136	6,968	5,758	2,557	1,779	
2019-20	13,327	9,010	4,317	8,852	7,237	3,003	3,182	
2020-21	7,781	5,046	2,735	5,116	4,150	2,046	1,424	607
2021-22	12,322	7,377	4,945	7,855	6,414	3,115	1,715	607
2022-23	11,937	7,447	4,490	8,162	6,424	2,740	1,865	584
2023-24	16,203	10,534	5,669	10,869	8,435	3,493	2,707	838

