

# Policy Committee

15 June 2026



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

<b>Title</b>	Off-Street Parking Charges 2026/27
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director Commissioning Report</b>	Emma Gee, Executive Director Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
<b>Report author</b>	Phil Grant, Parking Service Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Councillor John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
<b>Council priority</b>	Deliver a sustainable & healthy environment & reduce Reading's carbon footprint
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>To note the contents of this report.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Authorises the alignment of weekend tariffs with weekday tariffs at Queens Road, Broad Street Mall, and Civic B car parks as set out in Appendix 1.</li><li>2. Authorises an increase to the first-hour tariff at Queens Road, Broad Street Mall, and Civic B to match the second-hour charge (Appendix 1).</li><li>3. Approves a reduction in tariffs at Green Park to align with comparable car parks and address under-utilisation (Appendix 2).</li><li>4. Approves increases to off-street parking fees as set out in Appendix 3, rounded to the nearest 10p.</li><li>5. Authorise the Director of Environmental and Commercial Services to publish a Notice of Variation under Section 35c of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to bring these changes into effect.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report proposes a package of updates to the Council's off-street parking tariffs to modernise and simplify the structure, improve consistency, support town-centre activity, and ensure charges remain aligned with wider transport, environmental and public health objectives. These revisions follow a detailed review of usage data, benchmarking activity, and site-specific considerations.
- 1.2 The proposals aim to simplify the tariff structure, align pricing with demand and inflation, support town-centre vitality, encourage sustainable travel, and ensure consistency across the Council's car park portfolio.

### Key elements include:

- Standardising tariffs across the Council's three main town centre multi-storey car parks (Queens Road, Broad Street Mall, Civic B), including applying the same tariff throughout the week.
- Increasing the minimum stay from 1 hour to 2 hours at the multi-storey sites to support longer dwell times and economic activity.
- Reducing charges at Green Park car park to address persistent under-utilisation and better align with comparable locations.
- Increasing off-street parking tariffs by 5%, rounded to the nearest 10p.

1.3 The combined effect of these changes is projected to generate £244k in additional income for 2026/27. Any resulting surplus, in line with Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, will be reinvested into transport and highway-related improvements.

## **2. Policy Context**

2.1 Parking management supports the Council's strategic objectives in multiple ways, including improving air quality, reducing congestion, supporting sustainable transport, and helping to manage kerbside and off-street demand. The Council's statutory and policy framework for parking management includes:

- Reading Transport Strategy 2040, which sets a pathway towards a low-carbon, accessible transport network.
- Reading's Air Quality Action Plan (2024), approved by DEFRA, which identifies transport emissions as a major contributor to local pollution and sets out interventions to reduce NO<sub>2</sub> (nitrogen dioxide) levels.
- Council Plan 2025–28, establishing priorities around sustainable environments, economic vibrancy, health, wellbeing, and climate resilience.
- National policy context including the Traffic Management Act 2004 and the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which set the legal duties governing traffic management, parking enforcement, and the purpose of parking charges.

## **3. Background and Demand Trends**

3.1 Parking fees have evolved incrementally over several years, resulting in inconsistencies in minimum stay requirements, tariff structures, and weekend/weekday differentials.

3.2 Vehicle ownership continues to rise across the Southeast, contributing to increased pressure on the highway and parking networks. From 2011 to 2021, the region saw a 4.35% rise in vehicles per household.

3.3 Reading's vehicle ownership increased from 74,000 in 2015 to 81,800 in 2024, reflecting sustained demand for parking.

3.4 Off-street parking provision plays a vital role in relieving congestion, supporting economic vibrancy, and managing travel behaviour. Under Section 32 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, councils may provide off-street parking the purpose of relieving or preventing congestion of traffic.

3.5 Demand peaks between 10:00am and 14:30pm, with private-sector car parks (e.g., at the Oracle/Riverside) often at capacity. This places pressure on Council-operated multi-storey sites.

- 3.6 The proposed increase in minimum stay at Queens Road, Broad Street Mall, and Civic B multi storey car parks is intended to encourage longer visits, which is consistent with approaches used by other authorities to influence turnover and support commercial centres.
- 3.7 Planned developments such as the Minster Quarter and the Broad Street Mall redevelopment will add significant new residential and commercial activity in the town centre, increasing the importance of a sustainable approach to parking management.

## 4 The Proposals

- 4.1 Historic tariff changes have been incremental resulting in variations across sites. This review seeks to simplify and harmonise the structure.
- 4.2 Tariff standardisation across Queens Road, Broad Street Mall and Civic B will provide a more consistent and equitable charging structure.
- 4.3 Increasing the minimum stay from 1 hour to 2 hours is intended to support economic activity and manage peak-time congestion.
- 4.4 Maintaining separate weekday and weekend tariffs introduces additional complexity. A single 7 day tariff provides a simpler, more transparent structure while ensuring consistency across all operating days.
- 4.5 A 5% uplift to off-street charges maintains alignment with inflationary pressures on managing these car parks.
- 4.6 Green Park car park has persistently low occupancy despite clear local need. Reducing charges will improve usage and better meet local demand.

## 5. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 5.1 The parking services contribute to the Council's 2025 - 2028 Council Plan themes around:
- **Promote more equal communities in Reading** - The proposed tariff changes help create a fairer and more consistent parking system by removing confusing disparities between sites and reducing unnecessary traffic in neighbourhoods. A clearer, standardised charging approach supports equitable access to the town centre, while reinvestment of any surplus into transport improvements benefits all communities, including those without access to a car.
  - **Secure Reading's economic and cultural success** - A simplified tariff structure and longer minimum stay encourage visitors to spend more time in the town centre, supporting shops, hospitality, and cultural venues. Aligning tariffs across key car parks improves customer experience and keeps Council facilities competitive, helping maintain a strong, resilient local economy.
  - **Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint** - Parking charges are an important tool for reducing unnecessary car trips, lowering emissions, and supporting the Council's Transport Strategy 2040. By discouraging short stays and removing weekend discounts, the new tariffs help cut congestion and improve air quality, addressing issues such as the 61 pollution-related deaths recorded in 2023 and the fact that transport accounts for around 30% of local carbon emissions.
  - **Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children.** - Reducing congestion and pollution has direct public-health benefits, particularly for children, older residents, and those with existing health conditions. Encouraging greater use of active and sustainable travel modes supports healthier lifestyles, while improved traffic flow benefits essential services travelling across the borough.

- **Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future** - Updating and simplifying tariffs helps keep the parking service financially sustainable, operationally efficient and aligned with statutory requirements. Reinvesting surpluses in transport and infrastructure strengthens the Council's long-term resilience and ensures it can continue delivering high-quality services into the future.

5.2 Full details of the Council Plan are published on the Council's website - [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#).

## **6. Environmental and Climate Implications**

6.1 Pricing is a proven tool for managing parking demand and influencing transport choices. The proposed tariff adjustments are designed not to penalise drivers but to keep pace with inflation, ensure parity with market conditions, and support Council objectives around reducing unnecessary car journeys. Removing disparities between weekday and weekend charges reduces the incentive for drivers to circulate between car parks seeking the lowest price behaviour that contributes directly to congestion and emissions.

6.2 The Council's new emissions-based on-street parking and permit charges must be supported by an off-street pricing regime that does not undermine modal-shift goals. Simplifying and harmonising tariffs at multi-storey sites ensures consistent messaging and prevents off-street parking becoming a cheaper alternative that weakens the impact of emissions-based pricing.

6.3 Usage data shows an increase of 3,500 additional transactions in February 2026 compared with February 2025, particularly at Broad Street Mall and Queens Road. While positive for the economy, this increases traffic pressure unless vehicles are managed effectively. Appropriate tariff setting assists in modulating peak-time demand and discouraging short car trips that can feasibly be replaced by sustainable modes.

6.4 Air pollution is a significant public health concern. National analysis estimates 28,000–36,000 UK deaths annually are attributable to long-term exposure to human-made air pollution. Locally, Reading's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2025) applies a comparable methodology estimating 61 of 1,144 deaths among adults aged 30+ in 2023 were attributable to particulate pollution. Measures that reduce unnecessary driving, even marginally, contribute cumulatively to improving health outcomes and reducing exposure among vulnerable groups.

6.5 Transport contributes around 30% of all carbon emissions within the borough. Adjustments to tariff structures make car use less attractive for short, discretionary trips and encourage behavioural shifts towards bus, rail, cycling, walking, and Park & Ride.

6.6 The proposed changes reinforce the Air Quality Action Plan (2024) and Transport Strategy 2040, supporting objectives to reduce NO<sub>2</sub> levels, cut carbon emissions, and increase sustainable travel uptake.

6.7 Together, these adjustments create a coherent, integrated approach that supports air-quality improvement, reduces emissions, and promotes healthier, more sustainable travel behaviours across Reading.

## **7. Consultation Requirements**

7.1 In accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 a Notice of Variation will be published in local media and displayed at affected sites.

## **8 Equality Implications**

8.1 No negative implications have been identified that affect those with protected characteristics. An Equality Impact Assessment is shown in Appendix 4.

## **9. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 9.1 Transport contributes approximately 30% of all carbon emissions. By using up to date technology and a pricing strategy, motorists' behaviour can be influenced towards cleaner modes of travel.
- 9.2 The equalisation of the charges for our main town centre car parks will remove any incentive to choose a car park based on price and encourage the customer to choose the most accessible car park in relation to their journey. The increase of the first hour charge to match the rate for two hours encourages longer dwell time, making better use of the journey. The removal of discounted rates at weekends may encourage greater use of park and ride or other public transport.

## 10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended, sets out the conditions for the use of off-street parking places, including the applicable charges and tariff structure.
- 10.2 Section 35C of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 permits a local authority to vary the level of charges for off-street parking places by issuing a Notice of Variation, provided that the variation relates solely to the amount charged. Where changes go beyond the level of charge, for example, by altering the tariff structure, a new order or amendment order would be required, made in accordance with the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.
- 10.3 The proposal to increase the first hour tariff at Queens Road, Broad Street Mall and Civic B so that it aligns with the second hour charge constitutes an adjustment to the level of charge within an existing tariff band. The underlying tariff structure remains unchanged, the charging periods continue to operate as first hour, second hour and subsequent periods, and there is no alteration to the basis on which charges are calculated or applied. The fact that the monetary value of the first and second hour tariffs will be the same does not, of itself, amount to a change in tariff structure.
- 10.4 Accordingly, the proposed changes fall within the scope of section 35C of the 1984 Act and may lawfully be implemented by Notice of Variation.
- 10.5 In accordance with the duty imposed by section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the level of parking charges must be set with a view to securing the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic. In doing so, the authority must have regard to the need to maintain access to premises, the effect on local amenity, the national air quality strategy, and the need to facilitate the passage of public service vehicles.
- 10.6 While the cost of providing, operating and maintaining parking facilities may be taken into account as a relevant secondary consideration, it must not be the primary purpose of setting charges. A local authority may therefore not set parking charges with the intention of generating revenue, although a surplus may lawfully arise as an incidental consequence of charges set for proper statutory purposes.

## 11. Financial Implications

- 11.1 The projected net revenue increase for 2026/27:

Proposal	Expected Impact
Weekend/weekday alignment	£91,583
1-hour → 2-hour minimum stay	£39,667
5% uplift	£112,583
Total	£243,833

11.2 Under section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 any surplus as a result of these changes, after considering inflationary pressures, is required to be reinvested in transport and highways services for the benefit of Reading residents and businesses.

11.3 The financial implications are consistent with the 'Interim Parking Strategy' business case that was approved as part of the MTFS process.

## **12. Timetable for implementation.**

12.1 Subject to the approval of the recommendations set out in this report, implementation will be following the statutory process as set out in paragraph 10 and the changes will be implemented in August 2026.

## **13. Background Papers**

13.1 There are none.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 Proposed changes to main Town Centre car parks.
- Appendix 2 Proposed changes to other car parks.
- Appendix 3 Proposed increase in parking tariffs.
- Appendix 4 Equality Impact Assessment.