

Town Centre Car Parking

Interim Statement of Council Policy

September 2009

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 **Bolton's Unitary Development Plan** was adopted in April 2005. It contains a policy that relates specifically to car parking provision in Bolton Town Centre – **UDP Policy TC10**. The policy states:-

TC10. The Council will not permit the development of new car parking within the inner road box of Bolton Town Centre other than that which is identified for car park development shown on the Town Centre Inset Map and listed under Policy TC7. (For the purpose of this Policy the inner road box is defined by Deansgate, Knowsley Street, St. George's Street, Bridge Street, Bradshawgate, Great Moor Street and Blackhorse Street)

The present extent of Policy TC10 is shown on the map at Appendix 1.

- 1.2 The reasoned justification for this policy states:-

The Council, due to its desire to reduce the amount of extraneous traffic in the town centre, will not grant planning permission for new car parks inside the town centre inner road box, even where such use is temporary pending future redevelopment of the site.

- 1.3 Whilst the reasoning for the policy is still relevant, it is nevertheless now over four years old. The context, in terms of both national and regional planning policy, statement, guidance and best practice, has now advanced to a position where the Council considers it to be both necessary and justified in the public interest to extend the boundary of the area where new surface level car parking will be resisted so that it covers the whole of Bolton Town Centre, as shown on the map at Appendix 1. It is the view of the Council that this stance is fully justified by national and regional planning policy.

- 1.4 Policy TC10 references **Policy TC7**, which relates to multi-storey car parking sites and states:-

TC7. The Council will protect the following sites, as shown on the Town Centre Inset Map, for multi-storey car parking:

- (i) MCP1 Folds Road 0.6ha
- (ii) MCP2 Brightmet Street 0.7ha (part)
- (iii) (iii) MCP3 The Beehive 0.6ha (part)

- 1.5 The reasoned justification for this policy states:-

The Council's approved car parking policy aims to reduce the amount of surface level car parking and encourage the development of multi-storey car parks to accommodate those spaces lost.

- 1.6 As with Policy TC10, the reasoning for this policy remains entirely relevant, though the detail of the policy has been superseded by developments. The Council's strategy for town centre car parking rests on the provision of three edge of centre large multi-storey car parks, but instead of the three sites reserved by Policy TC7, these would be constructed at Deane Road, Topp Way and Brightmet Street. Construction of the two facilities at Deane Road and Topp Way has now commenced. When complete, these facilities will allow visitors to park within a reasonable distance of key sites within the town centre, without causing additional traffic congestion within its roads and streets. As surface level car parking is considered to be an ineffective and wasteful use of valuable land in town centres, the completion of the multi-storey car parks will also allow for the beneficial redevelopment of existing sites in Bolton Town Centre for appropriate uses. It is now, therefore, considered to be an appropriate time to reconsider parking provision for the whole of Bolton Town Centre.

2.0 Changed Policy Context

- 2.1 **Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development** sets out the Government's key objectives for the planning system and places sustainable development at the heart of the development process. At paragraph 13 it states:-

Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should ensure that development plans contribute to global sustainability by addressing the causes and potential impacts of climate change – through policies which reduce energy use, reduce emissions (for example, by encouraging patterns of development which reduce the need to travel by private car)

Local planning authorities must strike a balance between the need to balance the vitality and viability of their town centres (which includes the economic contribution that they make) with the need to reduce the need to travel by private car. The Council considers it to be an appropriate balance to restrict new car parking in the town centre whilst making provision for high quality multi-storey car parks with information systems that will reduce the time spent by visitors searching for car parking spaces in the town centre.

- 2.2 Bolton Town Centre is the primary transport hub for the whole of the Borough. It is, by definition, the most accessible location in Bolton, by all modes of transport and particularly by the most sustainable modes of transport. The use of town centre land for surface level car parking does not represent the most effective and beneficial use of accessible land available to users of public transport. Planning Policy Statement 1 states at paragraph 27 that Local Planning Authorities should:-

Reduce the need to travel and encourage accessible public transport provision to secure more sustainable patterns of transport development. Planning should actively manage patterns of urban growth to make the fullest use of public transport and focus development in existing centres and near to major public transport interchanges.

The reuse of land previously used for town centre surface level car parking will allow the Council to better focus new development in Bolton Town Centre, near to major public transport interchanges, in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 1.

- 2.3 Although a replacement has been drafted, **Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres** remains active and is consistent with Planning Policy Statement 1. It states at paragraph 2.49 that:-

The Government is seeking to reduce the need to travel, to encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling and reduce reliance on the private

car, to facilitate multipurpose journeys and to ensure that everyone has access to a range of facilities.

It goes on to state that, in considering town centre development, Local Planning Authorities should take account of:-

. . . the impact on car use, traffic and congestion.

Clearly, the impact on town centre traffic is a material consideration when considering applications for town centre uses such as surface level car parks. It is the Council's view that such uses should be resisted in the interests of reducing traffic and congestion.

- 2.4 The Government has published design guidance relating to town centres entitled **Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools**. Its introduction states that although the Guidance does not form part of PPS6, it should be taken into account by planning authorities in developing relevant planning policies and may be relevant in the determination of planning applications.

Paragraphs 2.9 – 2.11 relate specifically to surface level car parking and state that:-

Large amounts of surface level parking are likely to detract from the overall appearance of a development and its surrounding area and are unlikely to maximise the development potential of available land.

The guidance goes on to state that:-

Car parking and service areas should be carefully located within a development so as to minimise visual impact. Car parking should normally be located to the rear, underneath or, where appropriate, above new development. Where surface car parking is proposed, this should be conceived within the overall landscape proposals for the development and link into the wider area.

In seeking to extend the TC10 surface level parking restriction, the Council therefore recognises the visual harm that areas of parking cause to town centres, together with the benefits of bringing these sites forward for appropriate development.

- 2.5 At paragraph 2.14, the Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools encourages Local Planning Authorities to:-

seek to improve the quality, convenience and safety of access on foot, by bicycle and public transport in an inclusive way, including where appropriate,

consider drawing up and implementing a strategy for improving pedestrian routes to and within the town centre; and closely integrate proposals to improve accessibility with improvements to traffic management and the management of car parking.

It is considered that the extension of the TC10 surface level parking restriction would be entirely consistent with this guidance as it is part of a package of traffic management measures which include improved public transport provision, a bus gyratory system and the construction of edge of centre multi-storey car parks.

- 2.6 The Guidance on Design and Implementation tools refers at 2.15 to “**Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access**”, a report by The National Retail Planning Forum described as “A companion guide to PPG6”. The report seeks to address the problem of poor accessibility in town centres, and the resulting detrimental impact on their vitality and viability. At paragraph 3.7 it states that:-

One of the most fundamental problems identified is the priority afforded to traffic rather than people on foot.

At paragraph 4.1 it states that the solution to this problem is to

Relocate car parking closer to main attractions. This can sometimes be achieved by providing multi-storey parking to replace surface parking. Surface car parking makes poor use of centrally located land.

The Council agrees that surface level parking is an inefficient use of sustainably located land which could preferably be used for more beneficial purposes such as residential, retail or economic uses, or a combination of these uses or other uses appropriate for a town centre. The three locations chosen for the multi-storey car parks are consistent with this guidance in that they are located close to the Market Place Shopping Centre, the University / Colleges hub and the commercially focused area of Merchant’s Quarter. In choosing these three locations, the Council has therefore sought parking provision close to its retail, education and commercial sectors – without requiring vehicles to travel through Bolton Town Centre.

- 2.7 The supplement to **Planning Policy Statement 1: Planning and Climate Change** recommends that one way of tackling the problem of climate change would be

an appropriate approach to the provision and management of car parking

2.8 **Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport** opens by stating that:-

the continued growth in road traffic is damaging our towns

Planning Policy Guidance 13 goes on to list its three key objectives as being to:-

1. promote more sustainable transport choices for both people and for moving freight;
2. promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling, and
3. reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

The Council considers that its decision to extend the TC10 surface level parking restriction is consistent with these three key national policy objectives as it is package of traffic management measures which include improved public transport provision, relates specifically to the most accessible and sustainably located part of the Borough and prioritises pedestrians and walking above vehicle movements within the town centre area

2.9 Planning Policy Guidance 13 sets out the circumstances where it is appropriate to change the emphasis and priorities in provision between different transport modes, in pursuit of wider Government objectives. It states at paragraph 6 that Local Planning Authorities should:-

use parking policies, alongside other planning and transport measures, to promote sustainable transport choices and reduce reliance on the car for work and other journeys

and:-

give priority to people over ease of traffic movement and plan to provide more road space to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport in town centres

As noted previously, the Council's considers its approach to town centre parking to be entirely consistent with these aims.

2.10 Planning Policy Guidance 13 para 49 relates to parking at new development, but is still relevant. It states that:-

The availability of car parking has a major influence on the means of transport people choose for their journeys. Some studies suggest that levels of parking can be more significant than levels of public transport provision in determining means of travel (particularly for the journey to work) even for locations very well served by public transport. Car parking also takes up a large amount of space in development, is costly to business and reduces densities. Reducing the amount of parking in new development (and in the

expansion and change of use in existing development) is essential, as part of a package of planning and transport measures, to promote sustainable travel choices.

Clearly, the location of area of surface level parking within Bolton Town Centre will contribute to the traffic within the centre as drivers seek parking spaces. Locating good quality parking spaces on the periphery of the centre will reduce these individual vehicle movements. Paragraph 49 also refers to the inefficiency of surface level parking in town centre.

- 2.11 Conversely, paragraph 50 of Planning Policy Guidance 13 recognises the benefits that quality parking provision can deliver to town centres by noting that:-

Good quality secure parking is important to maintain the vitality and viability of town centres, and to enable retail and leisure uses to flourish.

The Council considers that the delivery of the three edge of town multi-storey car parks will provide this good quality secure parking.

As with many planning issues, it is a question of balance between the competing demands of the need to ensure that vehicle borne shoppers, workers and leisure users are not entirely prevented from accessing centrally located facilities, whilst recognising the harm the increased congestion and inefficient use of land can cause. Paragraph 56 of Planning Policy Guidance 13 recognises this by stating that:-

A balance has to be struck between encouraging new investment in town centres by providing adequate levels of parking, and potentially increasing traffic congestion caused by too many cars. – and - parking provision consistent with the town centre parking strategy

In striking this balance, Local Authorities should take account of the guidance contained with the above policies, and use their planning powers to adopt a sustainable traffic management plan whilst bringing forward former car parking sites for appropriate development. Paragraph 58 of Planning Policy Guidance 13 relates specifically to this approach:-

Authorities should generally refuse planning permission for car parks which do not accord with this guidance or the policies set out in the development plan or local transport plan and where appropriate should encourage redevelopment or re-use of existing parking.

- 2.12 Clearly, the Council's approach of restricting centrally located surface level parking whilst providing edge of centre parking, seeking to reduce town centre traffic levels and bringing forward sites for beneficial development is consistent with the policies described above.

3.0 Relationship with Development Plan Policies

- 3.1 Together with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, Bolton's UDP is the statutory development plan for the Borough and was adopted in April 2005. **UDP Policy A1** is the overriding key policy relating to transport matters and states that:-

The Council will permit proposals that result in an integrated, and sustainable, land use and transport system.

The reasoned justification for this policy states that:-

The Council aims to reduce the need to travel and to bring about modal shift from the car to alternative, more sustainable forms of transport. The results will be improved air quality and less congestion on the Borough's roads.

Since 2005, one of the Council's stated aims has been the adoption of sustainable forms of transport together with the reduction of congestion. It is considered that an extension of the TC10 surface level parking restriction would be entirely consistent with these aims.

- 3.2 **UDP Policy A6** relates specifically to parking and states that:-

The Council will require new development to provide car parking based on the Council's maximum car parking standards.

This policy therefore sees the limitation of parking provision as a key method of bringing about modal change and reducing traffic congestion. The reasoned justification for this policy states that:-

Car parking is a major use of land and its supply is frequently a factor influencing trip generation. There is a balance to be struck between providing more car parking spaces in centres to deal with increasing demand, arising from growing car ownership levels and the centres' improving attractiveness to visitors, and the need to reduce car dependency and achieve a shift towards more sustainable modes.

The justification goes on to set out the Council's approach to town centre parking:-

The Council's approach to town centre car parking is to rationalise the current level of provision by creating high quality parking environments on fewer sites but in purpose built, well designed and security conscious facilities.

As noted earlier, the construction of two such facilities has now commenced and therefore the rationalisation and restriction of surface level car parking

facilities can commence without harm to the vitality and viability of Bolton Town Centre.

3.3 **UDP Policy A16** states that:-

The Council will permit development proposals that improve the environment for pedestrians.

As the reduction of town centre traffic would improve the environment for pedestrians in Bolton Town Centre, the extension of the TC10 surface level parking restriction would be entirely consistent with the aims of UDP Policies A1, A6 and A16.

3.4 **Policy RT2** of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West relates to managing travel demand. It encourages Local Planning Authorities to adopt a holistic approach to traffic management and advises that:-

Measures to discourage car use should consider improvements to and promotion of public transport, walking and cycling

and also refers to:-

incentives to change travel behaviour

The policy goes on to outline a range of tools available to Local Planning Authorities seeking to bring about such a change:-

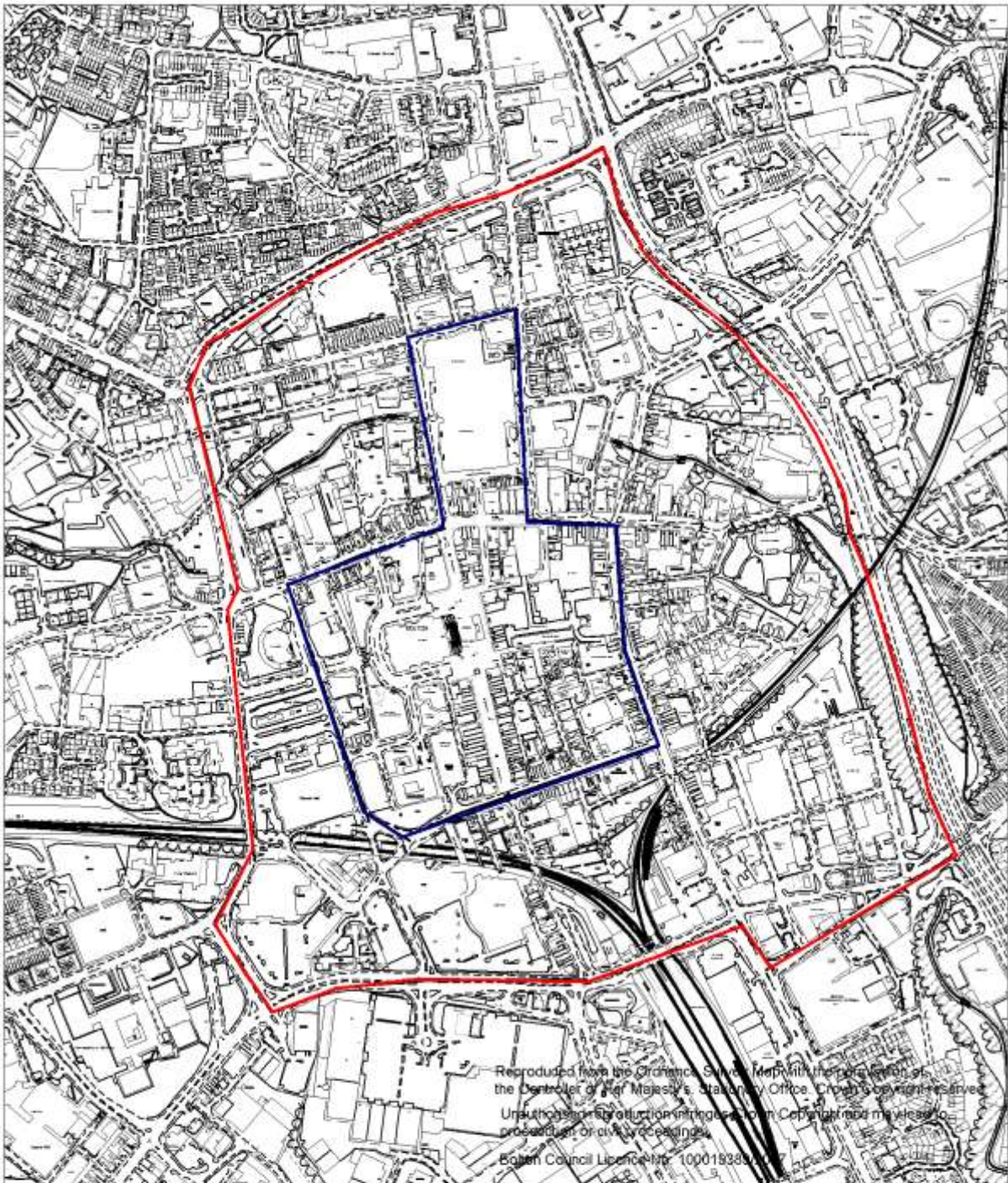
Parking charges, enforcement and provision are all key elements of an effective strategy to manage the demand for travel by car as the availability and cost of parking is potentially a major influence on travel decisions and can promote more sustainable transport choices.

It is considered that the extension of the TC10 surface level parking restriction would be entirely consistent with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West as it is part of a package of traffic management measures which include improved public transport provision, a bus gyratory system and the construction of edge of centre multi-storey car parks.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 It is clear that national and regional planning policy and guidance has advanced in the intervening four years since the adoption of Bolton's Unitary Development Plan in 2005. Whilst much of the plan policies remain relevant, the limited spatial character of UDP Policy TC10 is no longer consistent with policies which seek to further reduce town centre traffic congestion, improve the visual appearance of town centres and bring forward the most accessible and sustainably located sites for beneficial development.
- 4.2 Therefore, for the above reasons, the Council considers it appropriate to extend the boundary of the area covered by a restrictive approach to surface level car parking to the whole of Bolton Town Centre.

Appendix 1 – Town Centre Map



**Development and Regeneration
Department**

Town Hall, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 1RU.
Telephone (01204) 336000 Fax (01204) 336399

**Bolton
Council**

Present extent of Car Parking restriction



Proposed extent of Car Parking restriction

