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Cabinet Member for City Services

21 October 2020

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Councillor P Hetherton.

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Transportation and Highways

**Ward(s) affected:**

St Michael's

**Title:**

Proposed closure of Council operated car parks

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

Coventry City Council adopted the City Centre Parking Strategy in September 2016. The strategy recognised the need to manage off-street parking. The main aims are as follows:

- To ensure the right amount of parking to meet changing demands;
- To ensure parking spaces are in the right location and where they are needed;
- To ensure facilities are adequate and of the right quality to create demand and attract usage;
- To explore opportunities through redevelopment to upgrade, rationalise and consolidate car parks in a way that improves the distribution of parking across the city centre;
- To ensure facilities are affordable, competitive, support growth and help to achieve our financial targets.

In January 2017, Cabinet approved a report to construct a new multi-storey car park in Salt Lane. The report included a second phase of work to explore the possible redevelopment of the existing New Union Street multi-storey car park together with the adjacent Cheylesmore surface car park. The Salt Lane multi-storey car park project was completed as planned. However, the potential redevelopment of New Union Street / Cheylesmore was halted pending further consideration.

In recent months, demand for city centre parking has gone into decline due to Coronavirus and this is expected to result in a financially unsustainable over-supply of parking spaces unless management actions are taken to redress the situation. Consequently, this report seeks approval for the closure of six Council operated car parks to help reduce the amount of surplus spaces available in the short to medium term, pending a detailed review of the Parking Strategy to consider the long term options including the possible disposal, redevelopment, or re-purposing of the assets. The car parks in question are:-

- New Union Street multi-storey car park
- Cheylesmore surface level car park
- City Arcades roof-top car park
- Moat Street car park
- Leicester Row surface car park
- Whitefriars Street surface car park

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member for City Services is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the temporary closure of New Union Street and Cheylesmore car parks, both of which are in a poor condition and in need of significant financial investment.
- 2) Subject to recommendation 1, approve that Salt Lane car park is reclassified as 'long stay' and amend the parking charges in Salt Lane accordingly so that there is no detrimental financial impact to the general public arising from the closure of New Union Street and Cheylesmore car parks.
- 3) Approve the temporary closure of City Arcade, Whitefriars Street and Leicester Row car parks as they are under-utilised and are not in the right location.
- 4) Approve the permanent closure of Moat Street car park in line with plans to redesign and remodel Ring Road junction 7 as part of the Air Quality Action Plan.
- 5) Subject to the approval of recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4 above, further approve that officers commence the legal process to remove the six car parks from the Off-Street Parking Places Order 2005.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix A – map of Coventry city centre showing the location of car parks

**Background papers:**

Cabinet Report – Coventry local air quality action plan (21 July 2020)

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s47594/Coventry%20Local%20Air%20Quality%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

Cabinet Report – City Centre car park strategy 2016 – 2026.

**Other useful documents:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:** Proposed closure of Council operated car parks

## 1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The city centre car parking strategy was approved by Cabinet in September 2016. The strategy includes clear aims and objectives for managing parking provision to ensure the right balance of spaces to meet future demands for parking whilst improving the quality of the facilities and ensuring they are in the right locations.
- 1.2 Coventry City Council operates twenty-three public car parks across the city comprising 3,840 spaces. Eighteen of the car parks are in, or near to, the city centre and these car parks have capacity for 3,600 spaces.
- 1.3 Prior to the completion of Salt Lane car park in 2019, demand for parking had been increasing for some time and this growth in demand was expected to continue. Indeed, prior to March 2020, the city centre car parks were generally busy and average occupancy across the car park estate was above 65% of total capacity.
- 1.4 Since April 2020, demand for city centre parking has been significantly impacted due to COVID19, lockdown, and changes in travel behaviours in general. Some of these changes are expected to be long-lasting if not permanent, and the way in which parking provision is managed must adapt and evolve with it.
- 1.5 During the period April to September 2020, car park occupancy levels have been less than 25% of total capacity. Consequently, there has regularly been fewer than 900 spaces occupied and more than 75% (or 2,700) empty spaces.
- 1.6 The current gap between car park supply and demand figures is financially unsustainable without management interventions and actions.
- 1.7 It is proposed that officers review the City Centre car parking strategy and continue to monitor the changes in demand for parking with the aim of bringing a report to Cabinet and Scrutiny Board 4 during Winter 2020 that outlines the long term options for managing the car park estate.
- 1.8 In the short term, this report proposes the decommissioning and closure of six city centre public car parks with the aim of shrinking the car park estate and reduce the overall total capacity by 874 spaces (24%) which will help to close the gap between parking provision and demand, whilst reducing some operational running costs.
- 1.9 It is proposed that the following car parks are closed at the earliest opportunity pending a further review of the City Centre Car Parking Strategy.
  - i. New Union Street multi-storey car park (MSCP) (240 spaces)
  - ii. Cheylesmore surface car park (45 spaces)
  - iii. City Arcade roof top car park (231 spaces)
  - iv. Leicester Row car park (80 spaces)
  - v. Moat Street surface car park (153 spaces)
  - vi. Whitefriars Street surface car park (125 spaces)

A map showing the location of the above car parks is included as Appendix A to this report.

- 1.10 It is proposed that a report is brought to the respective Cabinet and Scrutiny Board 4 meetings in Winter 2020, to focus on reimagining car parks and the opportunities arising

from the recent reduction in demands for parking and the shift to other healthier travel behaviours.

1.11 **New Union Street MSCP & Cheylesmore car parks** - are centrally located close to junction 5 of the ring road and approximately 150 metres from The Wave. In the main, the car parks serve the surrounding office and commerce buildings. Pre-COVID19, both car parks were well used by commuters during Monday to Friday. Both car parks are underused during the weekend.

1.11.1 New Union Street car park has capacity for 240 cars whereas Cheylesmore has 45 spaces. There are two disabled parking bays in these two car parks.

1.11.2 New Union Street MSCP includes a lift for access to the upper level albeit that this hasn't been operational for many years and is deemed to be beyond economical repair. Nowadays, access to the upper levels is by stairs only and so the car park does not appeal to customers with limited mobility.

There is evidence of anti-social behaviour taking place within the car park and it isn't up to modern day standards.

Both New Union Street and Cheylesmore car parks are out-dated and need a significant amount of repair work carrying out. They will continue to deteriorate over time without investment. An intrusive structural and conditions survey of New Union Street MSCP car park was carried out in 2018. It identified that a significant level of capital investment of circa £1million would be needed to upgrade and improve the car parks to modern day standards.

Suffice to say, the quality of the two car parks is sub-standard and not conducive to the surrounding area, the aspirations for a vibrant local economy, or as a 'car park of choice' for potential customers using The Wave.

Current occupancy levels are c31% of total capacity.

1.11.3 It is therefore proposed that the car parks are closed to the public and that customers who regularly use these car parks are sign-posted to nearby Salt Lane MSCP, instead, where this is ample spare capacity.

1.11.4 It is further proposed that Salt Lane MSCP is reclassified as 'long stay' and that parking charges in the car park are reduced to the level currently charged in New Union Street and Cheylesmore and other long stay car parks so that there is no financial detriment on customers who are displaced to Salt Lane car park.

1.11.5 Officers would like to explore potential redevelopment and regeneration opportunities for the site once the New Union Street / Cheylesmore car parks are closed.

1.12 **City Arcade roof top car park** – is located above the City Arcade shops and is adjacent to the Market roof top and Lower Precinct car parks which are privately operated.

City Arcade has capacity for 231 cars. It has no disabled parking bays.

Pre-COVID19 daily occupancy levels were about 11% of total capacity. Post COVID19, it's about 6%.

Vehicular entrance to the car park is via a spiral ramp off Greyfriars Rd. The exit is via the Market roof top and Lower Precinct car parks which are privately operated and connected

to the Lower Precinct shopping centre. Consequently, the car park opening and closing times are restricted to align with the opening times of the shopping centre.

Pedestrian access to City Arcade car park is via two steep metal staircases that are located at either end of City Arcade. Consequently, the car park is inaccessible to members of the public with limited mobility. Furthermore, as the car park is at roof-top level it is exposed to the elements. This can make access even more treacherous or inaccessible during the winter months which often results in the car park being temporarily closed.

The impact of the proposed closure of the car park is expected to be negligible.

- 1.13 **Leicester Row car park** – is located on the outskirts of the city centre off Foleshill Road and close to Ring Road junction 1.

The car park has 80 spaces and no disabled parking bays.

Occupancy levels pre COVID19 were about 10% of total capacity and even less since then, meaning that the car park has been considerably under-utilised for some considerable time.

The impact of the proposed closure of the car park is expected to be negligible.

- 1.14 **Moat Street car park** – is located close to Ring Road junction 7. The car park has 153 spaces none of which are designated as disabled parking bays.

Prior to March 2020, the car park was popular with commuters and was regularly more than 60% occupied. Since then, the car park has been used by the NHS as a drive-through COVID19 testing unit and has not been available for public parking. With appropriate notice the testing unit can be relocated to another site as necessary.

Notwithstanding the above, in July 2020, Cabinet approved a report titled Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan. The report described a package of measures required to enable Coventry to comply with the Parliamentary Secretary of State for the Environment's direction to implement the local plan to achieve NO2 (Nitrogen Dioxide) compliance for the city. The local plan includes three main elements, one of which is:

**“Enabling dynamic traffic management on the key routes into the City, notably Holyhead Road and Foleshill Road, by implementing highway improvements on these and parallel corridors to reduce traffic congestion [and therefore vehicle emissions]. The specific improvements are focussed on the B4106 at Spon End and Junction 7 on the Ring Road, the Holyhead Road / Barras Lane / Upper Hill Street area, and on Foleshill Road”.**

Therefore, Moat Street car park will cease to exist following a redesign of the road network in the area as part of the air quality improvement measures that have already been approved by Cabinet.

- 1.15 **Whitefriars Street car park** – is located at the southern end of Whitefriars Street off Gosford Street (B4544). The car park has capacity for 125 spaces, none of which are designated as disabled parking spaces.

Despite its location, the car park was popular with commuters prior to lockdown when occupancy levels were regularly above 80% during Monday to Fridays.

In recent months, occupancy levels have dropped to about 45%. Although, this is better than some other city centre car parks, the car park is not in a desirable location that is easily accessible to through traffic. The area is well served by other car parks in the immediate vicinity that are available for use e.g. Gosford Street and Grove Street car parks, both of which are better located and have spare capacity to absorb any displacement from Whitefriars Street car park.

Like Whitefriars Street car park, Gosford Street and Grove Street operate as long-stay car parks with the same charging rates and so there isn't expected to be any detrimental financial impact on customers as a result of the proposed closure.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 The alternative to the proposed way forward is to retain the car parks and keep them open. This option is neither efficient nor financially sustainable in the long term. Hence it is not a realistic option.
- 1.16 The recommended way forward is to proceed with the closure of the six car parks identified in this report in order to reduce provision and manage demand for parking. This option aligns with the key aims and objectives of the car park strategy of managing parking provision to ensure the right amount of parking to meet changing demands; ensuring spaces are in the right location and where they are needed; ensuring facilities are of the right quality to create demand and attract usage; it allows further exploration of redevelopment, rationalisation and consolidation opportunities, whilst ensuring that facilities remain affordable and competitive which helps to support growth in the wider economy.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

No public consultation has taken place around the potential closure of five of the six city centre car parks. The exception being Moat Street car park which is included in the wider consultation on the local Air Quality Improvement Plan and will be subject to further public consultation as the scheme progresses.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

Subject to the approval of this report, the closures of the car parks and any changes to car park prices will be affected following the advertisement of the public notice and the expiry of the minimum statutory 21day notice period.

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

All car park operators, including the Council, must run their car parks as a commercial operation for them to be financially viable.

This report proposes to temporarily close six car parks in order to reduce the amount of surplus spaces in the estate. The significant reduction in car park usage since April 2020 is resulting in a financial pressure to the Council as budgeted income is not achieved. The proposed closures will not solve these pressures alone but will generate savings in running costs to partially offset them.

There will be one-off costs associated with the closure of the six car parks, estimated to be £10k.

There will be on-going cost savings due to the suspension of some services including, cash collections, electricity and lighting, equipment maintenance, winter gritting of sites, and security operations. These are estimated to be circa £30k.

However, the full running cost savings will not be achieved unless the sites are permanently closed/disposed of.

Following a detailed review of the Parking Strategy to consider the long-term options, it may be possible to address the income loss further by pursuing options to redevelop or re-use sites for alternative purposes.

The closure of Moat Street car park is as a result of air quality improvement measures proposed at Ring Road Junction 7. The financial package for the air quality local plan scheme allows for compensatory funding to cover any loss of income arising from the removal of the car park.

## 5.2 Legal implications

Pursuant to section 32 to 35 and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTA) 1984, the Council has statutory powers to charge for off-street parking places and can by Order regulate and charge for the use of these parking places. Parking in Coventry is regulated by the Off-Street Parking Places Order 2005.

The proposed changes to Salt Lane car parking charges will need to be advertised in the press and on-site pursuant to the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 and will constitute a variation to Off-Street Parking Places Order (currently 2005 (as amended)). Such variation requires a minimum 21 days' public notice before bringing the changes into effect. The specifics of the variation come into effect at the determination of the notice period set out in the Notice of Variation.

The proposed car park closures will be advertised also subject to a 21 day objection period. Subject to no objections being received, the car park closures will be reflected in the Off-Street Parking Order by way of formal variation.

In the event of objections being received these will be considered at a public meeting chaired by the Cabinet Member for City Services. The outcome of that meeting will determine whether the proposals are implemented as proposed, revised or abandoned.

## 6 Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?

This review of car parking provision will help to ensure that the demand for parking within Coventry is managed effectively with a sustainable and regular turnover of spaces to support and develop the local economy and regenerate the city centre.

In line with the original aims of the city centre car parking strategy, these proposal will ensure that parking within the city centre remains accessible and caters for all users and activities and that there is a sustainable provision of parking that residents, commuters and visitors are able to easily access.

These proposals also support the Council's core aims, as set out in the Council Plan, by: improving health and wellbeing by improving air quality through the reduction in NO<sub>2</sub> levels.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

The availability of parking is important in supporting the economic vitality of the city centre. Achieving the correct and most appropriate balance between the amount of parking and the demand for it is a difficult challenge to get right as there are many factors involved. Officers will continue to carry out regular monthly monitoring and reviews of car park usage and occupancy data to identify the impact that the proposed changes are having.

#### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

#### **6.4 Equality Impact Assessment / EIA**

There is a negligible impact on disabled drivers who have a Blue Badge arising from the proposed car park closures and the sites have been carefully considered to minimise the impacts.

Overall, the proposed closure of the car parks will result in the loss of two disabled parking spaces in New Union Street car park. Salt Lane car park is the nearest alternative to New Union St. Salt Lane car park has thirty-one disabled parking bays which are free to use by Blue Badge holders.

Blue Badge holders can also park for free in other Council operated car parks and in on-street designated marked bays within the city centre.

The proposal to amend the parking charges in Salt Lane MSCP will ensure that there is no detrimental financial impact to customers as a result of the proposed closure of New Union Street and Cheylesmore car parks.

Similarly, any impacts on customers arising from the proposed closures of City Arcade, and Whitefriars Street car parks are mitigated by the availability of other more accessible car parks close by that are the same price.

Air pollution is a major environmental risk to health and the measures identified in the Air Quality Action Plan will have a beneficial impact on air quality which will benefit those groups of the community who are vulnerable to respiratory diseases.

#### **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None

#### **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

No specific implications have been identified at this stage.

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Members: Councillor P Hetherton	Cabinet Member for City Services		06/10/2020	07/10/2020

This report is published on the council's website: [www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

Appendix A – Map of Coventry city centre showing the location of car parks.

**Coventry City Council Car Parks**

- P&d** Pay & Display Car Park (Long Stay)
- P&d** Pay & Display Car Park (Short Stay)
- Pof** Pay on Foot Car Park (Long Stay)
- Pof** Pay on Foot Car Park (Short Stay)

