

## St Albans City and District Council Parking Strategy 2023 – 2028



# Introduction

The Council aims to deliver an efficient service that provides fair, easy, and safe parking across St Albans. Our responsibilities include on-street parking provision, car parks, civil parking enforcement, residential parking, and managing parking demand.

This strategy is designed to help shape, manage, and deliver the Council's vision for parking, and set out how we manage kerbside space and off-street car parks. The aim is to reduce the impact of parking on the environment, while continuing to provide essential parking space to support our local businesses, residents, and visitors.

A consultation on the broad principles of the strategy was conducted from 26th September 2022 to 26th October 2022 and attracted a good response rate with a wide range of views were provided. This proved to be a very useful and informative exercise and though it is not always possible to develop policies or make decisions based on views from service users alone, responses have helped us to shape this strategy. We have also considered other influencing factors to provide a service that is fair and equal to all users, supports those most in need, and ensures the service can continue to meet statutory and operational needs.

As we transition through a difficult period for local authorities, we need to look at how services are delivered and managed within the constraints that we face. Tough economic, sustainability and operational decisions will need to be made. Free and heavily discounted parking services are no longer possible in the current financial climate.

Robust policies delivering on our economic and climate commitments are needed and services and fee structures need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that we can continue to carry out our statutory duties enabling the safe movement of traffic and providing suitable and adequate kerbside parking space.

As well as setting out how parking services will be delivered and enforced, this strategy sets out to change and influence people's behaviour when applying for services and to think about the impact their parking choices have on the environment.

The parking strategy delivers our vision for delivering essential parking services across the District to meet the needs of all our road and services users, including residents, local businesses, and visitors, and deliver against our climate change objectives.

To do this we have developed four key strategic objectives:

- Tackling climate change.
- Improved enforcement and making the best use of available parking space.
- Improving access to services.
- Making good use of digital technology.

The objectives of this strategy will be delivered over the next five years through the development and review of parking policies and activities aimed at improving the delivery of our services. This strategy is aligned to the Council's overall key outcomes of:



- **A thriving community** - provide appropriate parking where needed.
- **A great place to live and work** - enable greener and more sustainable transport choices and reduce congestion caused by parked vehicles.
- **A vibrant economy** - ensure parking charges are fair and parking meets the needs of our visitors and service users.
- **A cost-effective council** - make best use of the parking space available and deliver efficiencies in providing services.

The funding for the delivery of this strategy will come from:

- General parking revenue.
- Use of any surplus parking income in line with legislation.
- The use of available grants.
- The delivery of a more efficient and cost-effective parking operation.

We remain committed to ensuring that, where change is identified or planned, this is done in an open and fair manner and where necessary, impact assessments are conducted.

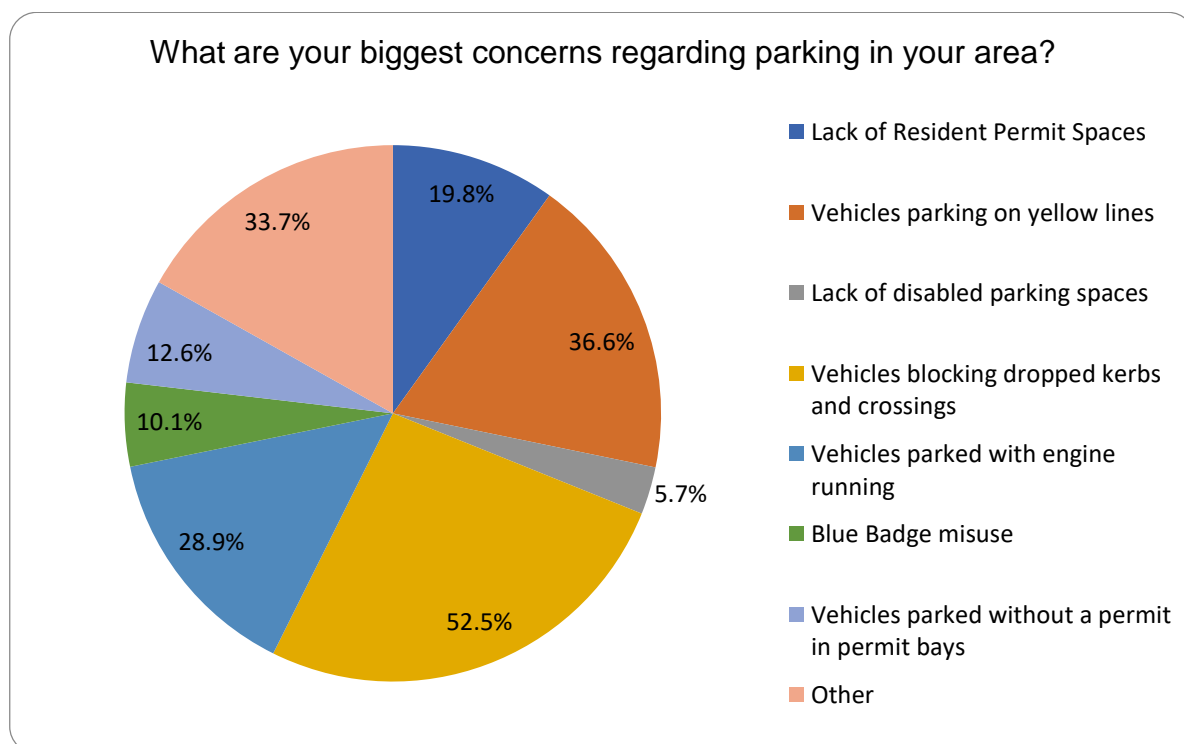
## Parking Service Overview

The management of parking is essential for all local authorities. In St Albans, powers to enforce and implement parking restrictions are delegated to the Council by Hertfordshire County Council (whilst the county remains responsible for the management of the highway).

The demand for parking space continues to grow since the pandemic. As lockdown eased, we have seen an increase in demand which has gradually returned to pre pandemic levels.

The Department of Transport statistics from December 2022 indicates that, since January 2022, weekday usage across all transport modes has increased. Road traffic figures are closest to pre-Covid usage, with figures consistently above 90%. In contrast, usage recovery across public transport modes has been slower, remaining below the pre-Covid baseline despite increasing across the year.

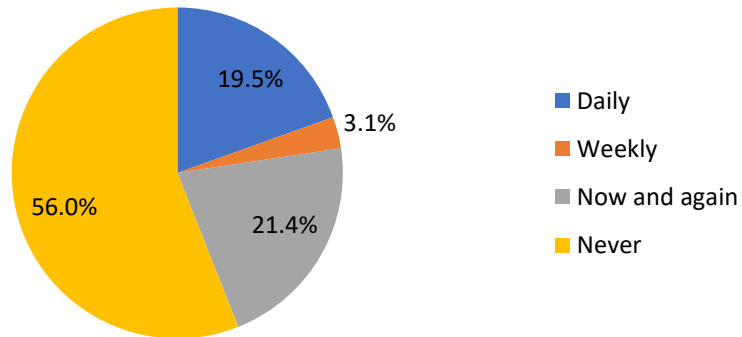
Although it is encouraging to see a return to daily life and visitors returning, this does increase the demand for parking which can result in daily challenges and issues which affects our residents, businesses, and other road users. The results of the recent parking consultation outlined various parking concerns:



The large number of respondents indicating that they encounter issues of vehicles parking near their home to drop off/pick up children from school suggests that the impact of poor and inconsiderate parking during the school run is widespread.



How often do you have issues with vehicles parking near your home to drop off/pick up children from school during term time?



To meet increasing demand, it is not always possible to increase the amount of parking space. Therefore, the Council must look at ways to make best use of the limited space available. We can do this by implementing parking restrictions and charges, and through enforcement and control of parking hours.

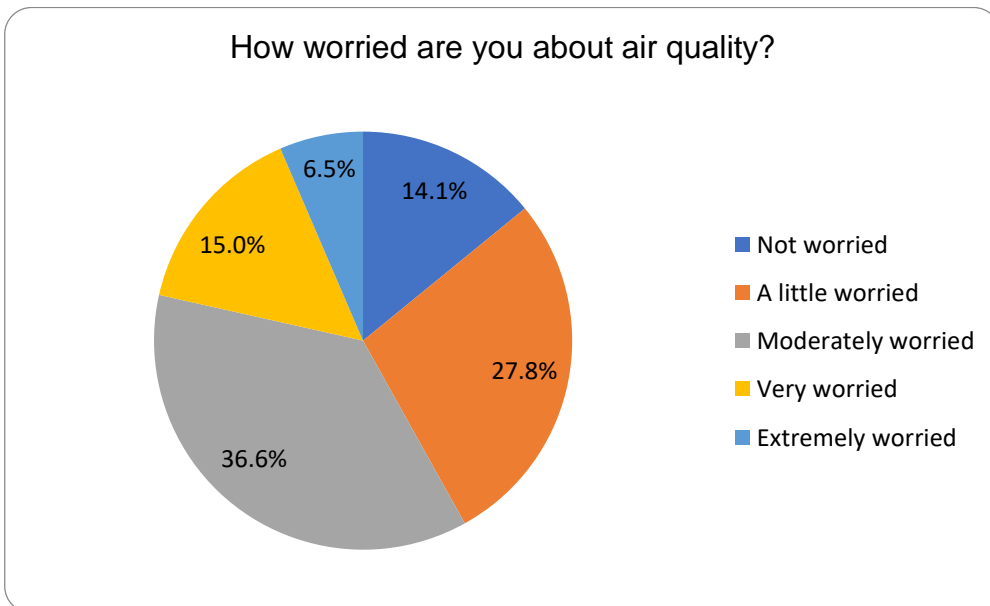
# Strategy Overview

This document outlines our parking strategies for the next five years. These strategies will be delivered via specific projects.

## 1. Tackling the Climate Crisis

On 10 July 2019, the Council voted unanimously to declare a Climate Emergency. All services are committed to helping the Council reach its goal of carbon net zero by 2030, twenty years in advance of the government's current 2050 net zero target.

Concern about air quality was reflected in a public consultation on the principles of the parking strategy with 85.9% of respondents having some level of concern about air quality.



To do this we need to look at how our services are provided. The projects outlined in this strategy will deliver both operational and environmental efficiencies. This will be directly, such as through the introduction of emission-based charging, or indirectly, through reducing things like printing and paper use by introducing virtual services.

### Idling Vehicles

Reducing emissions is one of the most effective ways to improve air quality. Motorists who leave their engines running when parked cause unnecessary, harmful air pollution. Government figures show that, every minute, an idling car produces enough exhaust emissions to fill 150 balloons with harmful chemicals, including cyanide, NOx and PM2.5. The Idling Action St Albans Campaign has raised awareness of the impact of idling vehicles on health and air quality.





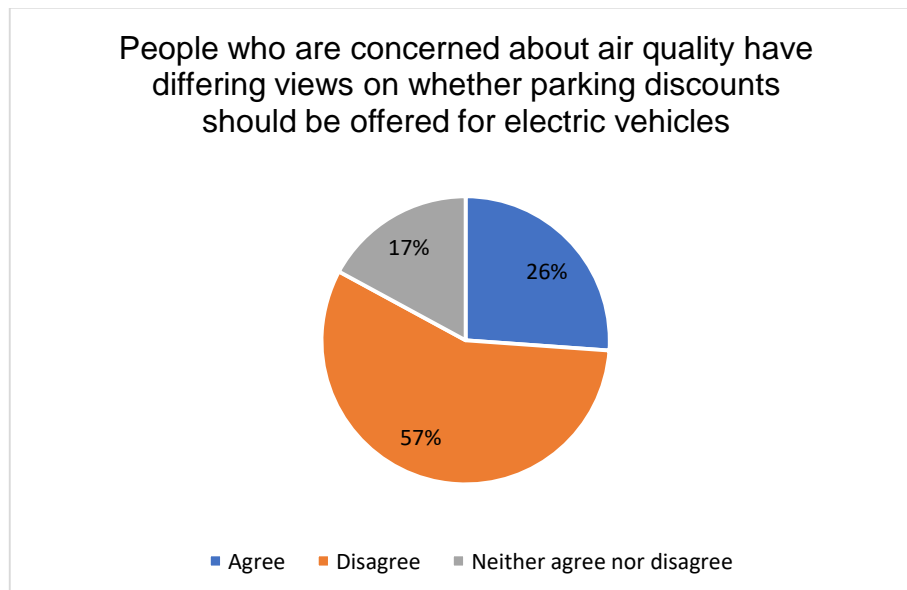
To support this essential work, we will consider how enforcement can be used to help reduce vehicle idling.

## Emission Based Charging

In April 2022, we introduced Phase 1 of our emission-based charging strategy for residents' parking permits. The aim of the strategy is to influence driver behaviour and encourage members of the public to choose more environmentally friendly vehicles by charging more for higher polluting vehicles.

Continuing this emission-based parking charges strategy will strengthen our approach to environmental parking management, particularly by addressing the vehicular emissions that contribute towards climate change and poor air quality.

Phase 2 of our emission-based charging strategy will come into effect from 1 April 2023. All resident parking permits issued after this date will be charged by emissions. The consultation results indicated that our residents disagree that electric vehicles should be offered discounts:



We will therefore review the current concessions provided to electric vehicles (1<sup>st</sup> resident permit at no cost and no parking charges at charging points) as part of this year's fees and charges review.

We will consider what further we can do to positively impact the environment using emission-based pricing structures. This will include:

- Introducing emission-based charging across all permit types.
- Introducing emission-based parking charging at Pay & Display bays.
- Introducing a surcharge for diesel cars that do not meet the euro six emissions standard.

## Paperless (virtual) Permits

We currently issue paper permits. This impacts the environment, including through:

- Paper use,
- Printing,
- Emissions from deliveries.

Technology exists which makes this unnecessary. By issuing virtual permits, we will be able to reduce our carbon footprint, while also making it easier for permit holders to use the service. Not only will this reduce waste and be more sustainable, it will improve convenience, speed up the application and issuing process and be an effective way of reducing parking permit fraud.

Virtual permits still allow residents to park their vehicle in their designated zone, but without the need to display a physical permit in their windscreen. Our Civil Enforcement Officers will be able to check permits are in order using their handheld devices.

## Visitor Permits

Like permits, our visitor vouchers are paper/card based and result in similar impacts on the environment. We issue 200,000 scratch cards per year. Using these scratch cards can often result in errors that can invalidate the scratch card or result in a penalty charge notice (PCN) being served.

The same technology will allow us to create a virtual visitor voucher. These are simple to use and are available immediately upon purchase removing the need for collection or postage.

Although we will be changing to virtual permits, we intend to continue to make scratch cards available for the time being for residents who want to use them. There will, however, be an administrative charge made to cover the costs of processing and postage. These costs will be subject to yearly reviews.

## Cashless Parking

The maintenance and upkeep of Pay and Display machines both on street and in our carparks is costly and creates an avoidable impact on the environment. The current stock of Pay and Display machines are also old and are prone to breakdown. The cost of replacing these machines is not a viable option as this would require significant investment.

Cashless parking offers a quick, environmentally friendly, and straightforward way to pay for parking. The use of cash is reducing in the UK; cash currently accounts for 15% of all payments in the UK and this is projected by the Bank of England to decline to 6% by 2031. Over 60% of motorists use our Pay by Phone services.

With virtual services, there are no requirements for machines, paper tickets, maintenance visits or cash collections, reducing the overall emissions produced from their use and upkeep.





There are also benefits for customers:

- No need to have the correct change.
- Once the app is downloaded, it is quick and easy to use, and can be used across multiple locations.
- There is the potential to extend your stay via the app without needing to return to the car.
- SMS reminders are available to alert you when the allotted parking time is due to expire.

We will conduct a phased approach to removing the machines from use. Customers without a smartphone, who do not wish to use the service, will still be able to pay for parking using PayPoint terminals located in local shops or by calling a dedicated payment telephone line, or using text messaging services.

## Electric Charging Points

Parking Services will continue to assess the need to introduce charging points across the car park estate, where it is viable to do so, and where there is a need to support users.

## Car Clubs

Car Clubs can provide a sustainable alternative to private vehicle ownership, and help reduce parking pressures, especially around town centres. They also help tackle congestion and poor air quality. Car clubs offers 'pay as you go cars' to those who only use their car occasionally or do not want the expense of owning and running their own vehicle. The vehicles are parked in dedicated bays across town centres, making them easily accessible, and can be used by the hour or per day. We will continue to work with our colleagues and external contractors to explore the viability of introducing further schemes over the next five years.

## Parking Fleet Vehicles

It is important that we lead by example, and we have started reducing our own high emission vehicles. In 2022 we replaced the existing motor scooters used on patrols with electrical bikes. In 2023 we will be replacing the remaining fleet vehicles with new electrical vehicles and will ensure in future that all fleet vehicles are fully electric.

## Projects

Project name	Target Date
Electrical Parking Fleet	August 2023
Introduction of Virtual Permits/Vouchers	September 2023
Introduction of Cashless Parking	January 2025
Emission-based charging	April 2023
Further Car Clubs	April 2025



## 2. Enforcement/Parking/Fees and Charges

The ability to enforce parking restrictions is an essential tool in ensuring we can provide parking for all our users and keep our town centres clear from congestion and safe for all road users. In the same way, fees and charges are a valuable tool in managing the availability of parking space. Technology developments have given councils the opportunity to deliver services more efficiently and in a smarter way.

### Targeted (Hot Spot) Enforcement

The introduction of a new Parking IT system in April 2023 will provide us with improved data for use in identifying problem areas. We will use this to develop plans that will allow us to deploy our enforcement teams more effectively.

### Civil Enforcement Officers

The work of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) helps ensure that motorists comply with parking regulations. If motorists believe that there are no CEOs patrolling, they are more likely to park in contravention of parking regulations.

We will continue to recruit and deploy CEOs to enforce parking regulations and learn from enforcement trends. We will make appropriate use of equipment such as body cameras to ensure our staff can perform their duties safely.

### Penalty Charge Notice Challenges/Policy

Parking services will be delivered in line with legislation and best practice. We aim to be transparent in what we do and how we do it and will review all policies and procedures with this in mind. These will be published and reviewed annually.

### Car Parks

The Council operates fifteen fee paying car parks across St Albans and Harpenden. These car parks provide over 2,785 spaces and over 100 disabled parking spaces. These are key community assets and support local businesses and town centres.

The car parks are old and are expensive to maintain, especially multi-storey car parks due to the structural defects that can occur, the machines and technology required to operate them, and lift access.

We will be drafting a Car Park Improvement Plan in 2023. This will identify the essential maintenance work that is needed, and how best to use the space available. We will also investigate other ways in which the car parks can be used both to benefit residents and visitors, and to raise income to contribute towards their maintenance.

In 2023 we will commission an occupancy survey of all council owned car parks, and conduct condition surveys to create a maintenance log.

### Free Car Parks

Once the occupancy surveys have been conducted, a further review of free car parks will be conducted to decide on the future use of these assets. Where necessary, further consultations may be required in line with Council procedures.

## **Subsidised Parking Westminster/Amenbury**

Westminster Lodge and Amenbury car parks provide free parking sessions to leisure centre users; the number of paid parking sessions at these locations is generally low. The free sessions can be abused and used by non-leisure centre users.

Although this parking is subsidised, the car parks still need to be maintained. Surfaces must be maintained and vegetation removed, parking equipment must be supplied, contract costs met, and enforcement of regulations carried out.

To continue to provide free parking may not be a sustainable option.

Options include:

- subsidised minimal parking costs for leisure centre users
- technology to limit sessions or user types
- introduction of modern enforcement methods to control use

## **School Parking**

Parking issues caused by parents picking up or dropping off children continues to create regular problems. Although schools do much to promote sustainable modes of transport, highlight the impact of emissions on air quality and encourage those parents who do drive to park responsibly, parents often do not follow this advice.

Parking at school start and end times can cause inconvenience to residents by blocking drives or causing congestion on the roads around the schools. Although we can introduce restrictions, these are often ignored, or parents move their cars only when approached by a CEO.

As identified in this report, there is resident support to tackle this issue. As this will involve changes or closures to the highway, a joined-up approach with the County Council will be required. Our aim is to support schools and the County Council to introduce School Street Schemes around schools where the problems are most extreme. These will prevent unauthorised vehicles from entering roads around these schools at specific times of the day during term times. This will discourage parents from using their cars to drop off children in the immediate area, but will allow access to residents, vulnerable road users such as disabled badge holders, delivery vehicles, and utility companies.

## **Fees and Charges**

The use of parking charges is an important tool which can influence the turnover of parking spaces and help regulate demand. The cost of parking must be at a level to adequately cover the cost of managing parking operations, parking spaces and other parking related services such as enforcement and resident parking schemes, as well as manage demand.

Parking operations are expensive to run, and it is important that the costs of doing so are met from revenue collected from parking, rather than subsidised at the expense of other public services. Parking revenue comes from the Penalty Charge Notices

issued to motorists, paid parking income, and from fees and charges for other services such as permits and parking suspensions. This income goes towards:

- maintaining signs, lines and posts
- implementing traffic regulation orders
- parking enforcement
- issuing permits
- considering appeals against fines
- back-office support

The Department for Transport has clear guidance and outlines that parking charges should be balanced and not be set too high that it encourages drivers to risk parking illegally, but not too low that it encourages congestion and unnecessary vehicle use. We will therefore take a fair and transparent approach to the setting of fees and charges which will be reviewed on a regular basis. Prices will be set at levels that encourage motorists to consider travelling by more sustainable means such as walking, cycling and public transport. Prices will also be set as to not prejudice those who do choose to use their vehicle by being too high.

## Permit Types

We currently provide a wide range of permit types. These include resident, business, car park, and healthcare permits to name just a few. As part of the overall policy review, we will look to assess the permit types required by service users. Charges for these permits will be reviewed regularly as part of the annual fees and charges review.

## Projects

Project name	Target Date
New parking IT system	April 2023
Fees and charges review	Annually
Free car park review	January 2024
Car park improvement plan	September 2023
Parking policy review	September 2023
School Street Clear Zones	TBC

## 3. Disability and Access to Services

We remain committed to ensuring that disabled motorists have access to parking close to town centres and places of interest and have easy access to other parking services.

### Disabled parking

We will continue to evaluate on and off-street parking to provide convenient parking for disabled drivers. In the past year we have introduced twelve new bays around the centre of St Albans and at the multi-storey car parks. We will continue to review disabled parking across St Albans and surrounding towns and parishes.

Although we cannot always introduce disabled parking at every location requested due to restrictions already in place, we will try to ensure there are sufficient spaces to cater for local needs.

We will also continue to offer disabled drivers the ability to apply for bays in residential areas near to their homes and or places of work to make parking easier.

### Blue Badge enforcement

A common concern raised during the Parking Strategy Consultation was the level of misuse of disabled blue badges which takes spaces away from genuine blue badge holders.

The County Council administers and issues Blue Badges. We are committed to supporting the County Council in tackling all types of Blue Badge fraud. In 2023 we will be working with specialised parking fraud investigators so we can take appropriate action against those who use disabled badges parking permits fraudulently.

### Communication

We want to ensure disabled motorists are aware of the concessions the Blue Badge gives them. Effective communication will also play a key part in the development of services to ensure that we are not indirectly or directly excluding disabled applicants from applying for services.

We will continue to engage with the Council's Access Forum and Shopmobility on these matters. We will also review the current information provided to disabled motorists and ensure there is clear and accessible information available to them.

### Projects

Project name	Target Date
Disabled Parking bays	On-going
Blue Badge Enforcement	April 2023
Communication Plan	June 2023

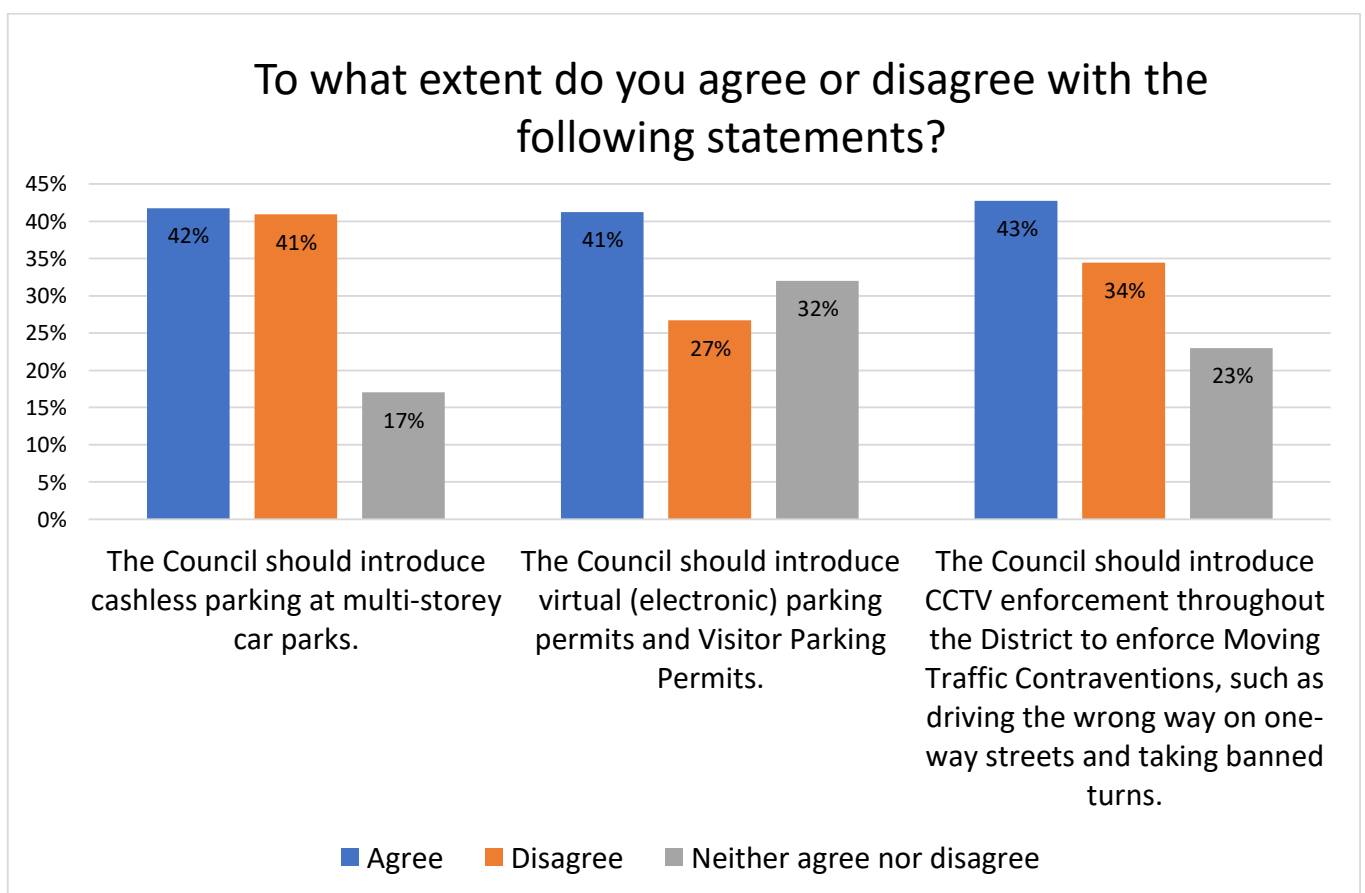


## 4. Digital Technology

The use of technology in the parking industry has developed over the past decade. The developments are linked to both enforcement and to support the way services can be accessed and payments made. These changes are reflected in many other areas of daily life. The use of cash and paper-based services has greatly declined as the Bank of England has noted.

The future use of technology is outlined elsewhere in this strategy including for enforcement and for use in climate measures.

Consultation responses indicated overall agreement with using new technology to improve our services and enforcement capabilities:



Further projects have been identified to develop the use of technology in delivering parking services.

### Traffic Orders

A Traffic Regulation Order is the legal document required to implement and enforce parking restrictions. Without the order any restrictions are not legally enforceable. Our



Parking Development Team receives numerous requests annually for new restrictions and is also working to maintain current restrictions and conduct reviews. The current legal process, which we have a statutory duty to follow, is complicated and time consuming and we are limited to the number of requests we can consider annually.

To improve the way we deliver these services and to make efficiencies, we will introduce new IT software in April 2023. This software will provide customers with user friendly map-based information which will give them a clearer understanding of the proposals being considered. This software will also provide customers and service users with up-to-date information on the restrictions in force and will provide a useful tool for visitors to St Albans.

## Using technology for enforcement

Our Civil Enforcement Officers provide a deterrent to prevent motorists from parking in contravention of restrictions. However, due to the increasing number of Controlled Parking Zones locally, it is not possible, or financially viable, for them to be everywhere. The development of cashless and virtual services will allow us to use Auto Number Plate Recognition technology to enforce parking restrictions. This works via cameras mounted on vehicles which can patrol large areas quickly and often, with the cameras alerting the officers where there are vehicles parked without permits or without paying for parking.

These initiatives will be implemented once the virtual and cashless parking projects have been completed.

## Moving Traffic Enforcement

In April 2022 legislation was passed that allows local authorities outside of London to enforce against moving traffic offences, such as banned turns or one-way streets, through the use of CCTV cameras.

Hertfordshire County Council currently has responsibility for the highway, and therefore this type of enforcement. We are awaiting confirmation as to whether the County Council will pass responsibility for this enforcement to St Albans City and District Council. If this happens then it is our intention to undertake a viability study to assess the need for this type of enforcement.

Project name	Target Date
Traffic Order	April 2023
Moving Traffic Enforcement	TBC
ANPR Enforcement	September 2025



## Review

This strategy will be reviewed annually. All projects will be delivered in line with clear project plans and timeframes and will be delivered in line with the Council's policies and procedures.

