Parish Council | Parking Desktop Study

Q: Managing car use to boost local economy in a way that minimises the environmental impact and guidance on how you might assess the negative environmental impact of providing more car parking capacity vs. supporting local business and encouraging tourists.

A: This is a tricky one and will need more than one day spent on it (probably by a specialist consultancy!). But here are a few things I found that might guide you or at least give you some thought:

Parking management

There is a lot out there on sustainable parking management and dealing with congestion/traffic in town and cities – mostly focussed on introducing tariffs to discourage private vehicles.

I came across two studies by the Association of Town & City Management (ATCM) & British Parking Association (BPA) that are worth a read if you have not already:

(i) Re-Think! Parking on the High Street
Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres
2013

This study looks at "what evidence can be collated and what can be learned regarding the relationship between car parking provision and town centre prosperity."

They tried to make sense of the disparity of views surrounding this topic - increasing capacity for cars on the high street improving trading for businesses vs. restricting cars leading to cuts in congestion and pollution making the high street more attractive for pedestrians and increasing dwell time.

The report was produce with the aim of "encouraging local authorities to think about the role car parking provision plays in the vibrancy of town centres and consequently produce sensible parking management policies". It is also about "helping the business community understand the reasons why restricting provision through a range of measures, including tariffs, can sometimes play a positive role in supporting the town centre".

Whilst they did find a relationship between the quantity of car parking and footfall (towns with higher footfall have more parking spaces), there is not enough evidence to imply a causal relationship. They state that "simply increasing the quantity of car park spaces would not necessarily have a positive impact on footfall". The relationship between footfall and the cost of parking was not so clear-cut

https://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/documents/re-thinking_car_parking.pdf

(ii) In-Town Parking: What Works?
Innovative Practices in Parking Provision
2014

This study offers good practice case studies on parking solutions that have worked

elsewhere in the UK & USA inc. Oxford, Colchester, and Dundee. It then identified common success factors and how they might be implemented elsewhere e.g., intelligent and flexible tariffs to target specific groups of users, Wayfinding (Parksmart), holistic transport/parking policies that consider more than just one mode of transport and links between them.

https://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Library/Reports%20and%20research/What_Works.pdf

I note from the above:

- In 2014, location (unsurprisingly) was ranked 1st in the top 10 factors for people when selecting car parking. Tariffs were number 4.

- For parking restraint to not damage the city centre, alternative options must be of sufficiently high quality to be viable for commuters, visitors, and shoppers.

- Unrestricted parking leads to pollution and spaces being occupied by the wrong users at inappropriate times. Both studies mention the importance of 'knowing your customer' which seems like a **good starting place**. Different people use parking for different reasons - Who is taking up the parking spaces and why? Who ***needs*** the parking space? If tourists, where are they coming from and what for?

  They suggest finding answers to the following questions to guide you in deciding where and when the solutions need to be placed:

  - Why are people using a car park? Shopping, commuting, leisure, tourism, delivery of products to businesses etc…?
  - How long is the parking required for?
  - Where, in the town centre, is the ideal parking place for them?
  - Are they visiting during particularly busy periods, and if so, are there any suitable incentives that may encourage them to visit during quieter periods?

  You can use this to target specific types of users at different times of the day e.g., ensure disabled car users benefit from convenient and cost-effective access to the town centre, entice shoppers into the town centre, but encourage commuters to park edge-of-town.

  See the Colchester case study

- In Rugby, to encourage people to use underutilised carparks at the edge of the town centre rather than in-centre car parking, free parking passes were given to local retailers to distribute to customers, permitting four hours free parking. This meant retailers could reward valued customers and encourage repeat business.

- Oxford faced the challenge of needing to maintain the historic centre and cater to very high number of pedestrians and cyclists (whilst maintaining good levels of access for shoppers, commuters, and tourists). The city restricts parking in the centre and has 5 peripheral park

and ride sites. It appears that parking restraint in the centre of Oxford has not had an overall detrimental effect on the city centre success.

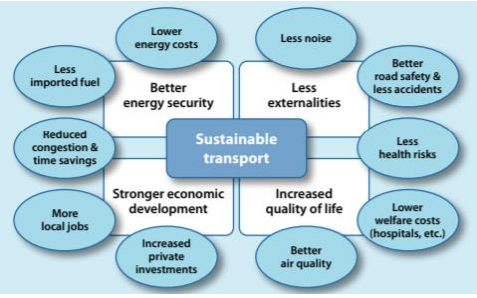
- I didn't have time to go through this, but might be worth a read - Evaluating the impact of a workplace parking levy on local traffic congestion: The case of Nottingham UK (Dale et al. 2017).

Environmental

It is difficult to find studies advocating for car-use in a way that minimises environmental impact (beyond reducing or moderating demand) especially as concerns around the climate emergency and support for net-zero grows!

From an environmental/climate standpoint, I feel you will need to make argument for **why you need** (and why it is beneficial) to increase parking capacity instead of investing in better public transport links, encouraging active travel initiatives, and discouraging car-use. You might want to show that you've considered if the journey absolutely has to be made by private motor vehicle or if there are any incentives that can be used to encourage a change? If car is found to be necessary, have you encouraged car-sharing or car clubs? There is an opportunity cost that you will have to argue against – could the space be use for leisure, business, or making room for cycle parking?

Especially when there are studies that suggests towns and cities can thrive even when parking has been significantly reduced. There can be economic benefits for local shops as those who walk, cycle, and use a bus are more likely to shop in their local area *(Interventions that promote more walking and cycling can increase local retail spend by 40% - Abrantes, Ellerton and Haines-Doran, 2016)*.



Co-benefits that improve the quality of life (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)

You will likely get a lot of push back about this from climate activists and green counsellors. They would want to see that you fully explored viable alternatives to providing more car parking space. This is because the best-practice for dealing with environmental impact of transport is a widely accepted conceptual framework - **AVOID - SHIFT- IMPROVE**.

i. ***Avoid:*** *Avoid planning and transport policies that add extra Carbon to the inventory and encourage car use as opposed to walking, cycling and bus use.*
ii. ***Shift:*** *reducing car-use and switching a proportion of trips to walk, cycle and bus use.*
iii. ***Improve:*** *replacement of fossil fuelled vehicles by low carbon alternatives – e.g., electric cars.*

It a difficult problem which I am sure you already know! With the demand for car parking increasing, increasing provision might not be a long-term solution.

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It seems like car parking strategies (e.g., increasing provision, charges, space optimisation) will be an easier sell if paired with initiatives that reduce car dependency, encourage people to use public transport and making the option of walking & cycling safer.

Some thoughts include:

- Space utilisation – could parking serving offices (or parking spaces not used outside of normal working hours) be made available to users in the evening and those shopping outside of the working hours is a good start? This will be good way to increase capacity without adding to carbon emissions.

- For tourists and commuters – increasing "Park and Ride" parking space or incentives to use parking further away from centre.

- Resident only parking schemes?

- Could funds generated from parking charges be reinvested in developing public transport and the local area? If people start seeing the benefits or a plan for the revenue, they might be more open to it!

- "Tourism without traffic" – a guide demonstrating how tourism without traffic could be an option.

You might find the transport section of Ludlow constituency's Climate Action Plan (South Shropshire Climate Action) useful.

Methodology

You ask how you might go about assessing the negative environmental impact vs. economic benefits for increasing car parking capacity for residents, tourists, and visitors. This is where I think you will benefit most from specialist consultancy. But I had a looked at what is out there:

- One analytical tool that you might use is cost-benefit analysis (CBA) which you are likely familiar with. Although this is quite tricky in this situation as it is difficult to define cost of environmental impact

- It would be good if you were able to quantify the environmental impact in some way. Will car parking provide a shorter distance alternative for longer ones? If so, how much? Can you estimate carbon savings? This will allow easy comparison with alternative options like public transport etc. Also, using cars for shorter journeys is not necessarily a good thing for the environment/carbon emissions. I understand this is a difficult task with a great deal of uncertainty as it's hard to predict people's behaviour!

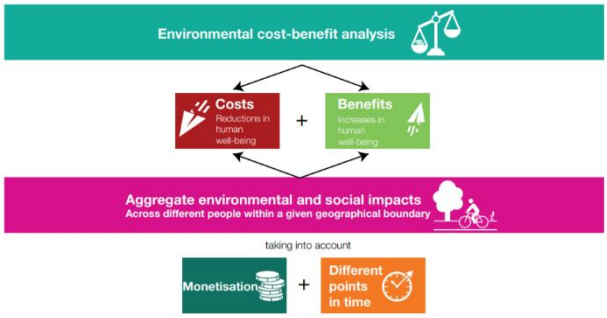
- Unfortunately, I struggled to find any publicly available data that could help you quantify environmental impact of increasing car parking capacity in the time I had to spend on this.

- Less flashy and not analytical, but I suppose you could start with a simple weighted pros and cons list. You assign a number (1-5) to indicate how relevant a pro or con is to your decision. The higher the number, the greater the factor's importance. Clearly defining your goal/priority as a council and 'Knowing your customer' that I mentioned earlier would be

helpful with this.

Some examples
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_05.htm
https://leandecisions.com/2012/09/how-to-create-an-effective-weighted-pro-con-list.html
https://app.croneri.co.uk/topics/environmental-aspects-and-impacts/indepth
(The above talks about how you might evaluate significance of environmental impact.)

There's some in-depth research around environmental cost-benefit analysis and environmental Impact Awareness. It seems quite involved than you need, but have provided links in case you would like a skim:



- https://www.oecd.org/env/tools-evaluation/CBA-brochure-web.pdf
- https://www.gov.uk/guidance/assessing-environmental-impact-guidance

Other reading you might find useful:

- A country in a jam: tackling congestion in our towns and cities
  How councils are dealing with congestion and how they could do more
  2017

- Sustainable Parking Management
  Towards climate-friendly transport technologies and measures
  (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)

- Sustainable Parking Management
  Clean Air - europe| 2015

- What happens when a city bans cars from its streets?
  BBC | 2019

Shital Visana
On behalf of MEA.