Date:
Cabinet - 14 July 2026

Report by:
Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery
Operations Manager, Parking & Markets Services

Lead Cllr:
Cllr J Kerr - Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste & Street Scene

Mayoral Car Parking Offer

Supplement: Recommendations of O&S (P&G) 1st July 2026

Cabinet: 14th July 2026

Introduction

At Overview & Scrutiny (P&G) on 1st July 2026, Councillors put forward two recommendations in relation to the report to Cabinet.

Recommendation 1

Councillor Martin put forward a motion for an additional Recommendation for Cabinet to not go ahead as planned. This motion was seconded by Councillor Tomlinson.

1. That we do not go ahead as currently planned

2. That we write to the Mayor, explaining that we will wait for the Parking Strategy and determine what the best option is from this.

3. Any future recommendation that comes forward to the Panel does not include a delegation to vary or cease the Scheme to Officers. Any variation or cessation of the Scheme should come through the Democratic cycle and be a decision for elected Councillors not Officers.

Officers have no further comments to make in respect of the above, these are clearly options that are open to Cabinet.

Recommendation 2

The panel request that Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

1. That further details of full costings and the business case as to who the parking proposal funding will actually benefit and how."

Officers have requested information pertaining to this point, and that has been set out as the substantive part of this supplement.

The second recommendation relates to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Business Case for Mayoral Free Car Parking.

Following the meeting Officers asked the CPCA for a copy of the Business Case and this has been supplied. HDC was not involved in the completion of the Business Case, and it is a wholly CPCA document; due to commercial sensitivity they have asked that the Business Case not be shared.

Officers have reviewed the document and this supplement incorporates summaries from the Business Case where relevant.

Business Case Extracts
(HDC Officer comments shown in italics where relevant)

The Business Case prepared by the CPCA, sets out proposals for a trial of free parking in Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) town-centre car parks. The initiative is intended to support economic activity, increase accessibility, and improve the vibrancy of town centers in Huntingdon, St Neots and St Ives. The scheme would provide free parking after 4:00pm on weekdays in selected HDC-owned car parks from October 2026 until March 2028, funded entirely by the CPCA at a cost of £555,000 for the 18-month period.

The proposal originates from a mayoral manifesto commitment aimed at boosting town-centre footfall and supporting local businesses.

The business case argues that free evening parking can encourage greater use of town centres during quieter periods, helping retail, hospitality and leisure businesses attract more customers. Evidence cited includes Newcastle's successful "Alive After Five" initiative, which combined free evening parking with extended shopping hours and promotional activities, and recommendations from the Government-backed Portas Review, which highlighted parking policy as an important tool for supporting high streets.

At a high level, this approach is understood and would support HDC and partners delivering events in the town centres of Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots, for example the Sunset Beats and Bites Event delivered by Huntingdon Town Council and Business

Improvement District and the Evening Food Markets in St Ives and St Neots delivered by HDC Markets Team.

Strategically, the proposal aligns primarily with the CPCA's Growth objective by seeking to improve access to town centres, increase footfall, and support local businesses. It also contributes indirectly to the objectives of Jobs and Resilience by supporting town-centre employment and strengthening local economies. The initiative complements wider CPCA investments in transport, heritage, tourism and market-town regeneration, and is intended to form part of a broader programme to improve access to urban centres through multiple transport modes.

From an HDC perspective there is no disagreement with these aims, and it is recognised that there is some alignment with the Councils own Place Strategy and Economic Growth Strategy.

The Economic Case considered a range of delivery options. These included offering free parking across the whole region, providing free parking all day in Huntingdonshire, expanding free parking to all HDC-owned car parks, using private car parks, or investing equivalent funding in public transport. The preferred option was a targeted approach focused on HDC-owned town-centre car parks during afternoon and evening periods. This option was judged to offer the best balance between achieving the policy objectives and remaining within the available budget.

HDC have no comments to add on this point, with the impacts on HDC considered within the substantive report on this matter.

Expected outputs include the introduction of free parking in selected locations, installation of clear signage, and delivery of a communications campaign. Desired outcomes include increased town-centre footfall, higher visitor numbers at attractions and events, improved business performance, greater car park usage, and enhanced public perceptions of town centres. Success will be measured through footfall data, business surveys, public feedback, and other indicators such as occupancy rates and spending activity.

From an HDC perspective, these outputs and measurables would be those anticipated, although it is noted that some of these are hard to quantify and there are practical issues around measurement which would need to be overcome by the CPCA.

Financially, the trial would be funded through a grant agreement between the CPCA and HDC. Expenditure is spread across the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years. As a pilot, direct economic returns cannot be quantified in advance, so monitoring and evaluation will be central to determining whether the scheme delivers value for money and whether similar initiatives should be extended in the future.

From an HDC perspective, matters relating to how the project is funded and value for money are solely for the CPCA.

The project will be monitored through regular reporting, quarterly governance meetings, and independent evaluation. A 12-month review is planned for October 2027, followed by a final impact evaluation after the trial ends in March 2028. Unless future funding arrangements are agreed, the free-parking subsidy will cease at the end of the trial, with HDC reverting to their normal parking arrangements.

As indicated earlier, there are practical issues around measurement, monitoring and evaluation which are for the CPCA to address. But it is noted that the business case recognises the need for the scheme to allow for reversion at the end of the period, unless a further decision is taken by HDC.

It is not for HDC to consider the appropriateness of the business case or factors such as value for money in relation to the project as a whole – that is a matter for the CPCA and the Mayor. Clearly, the Mayor is content to proceed. Any further questions or queries or concerns regarding the underlying scheme, and its business case are matters which should be directed to the CPCA.

The decision before Cabinet is whether they wish to support acceptance of the funding and provide the appropriate authorisations and powers to enable Officers to deliver the scheme sought by the CPCA. The recommendations for those decisions are as set out in the substantive report; with additional factors for Members consideration set out within the first supplement presented, the comments from O&S, and this further supplement.