

Date:
O&S (P&G) - 1st July 2026
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

Wards
All

Open / Exempt
Open

Key Decision?
Yes

Mayoral Car Parking Offer

Executive Summary: This report provides information on the grant proposal made by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to the Council that asks for the implementation of 'free after 4pm' parking Monday to Friday. This would represent a reduction in chargeable hours. The proposed scheme would operate from 1st October 2026 until 31st March 2028. By return, the Mayor has proposed a grant (£370,000 p/a (pro rata)) to the Council to offset any loss of income that the Council would ordinarily have expected to receive.

The report summarises the offer, its implications, and puts forward a series of recommendations should Members wish to move forward with accepting the proposal.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended in respect of the funding proposal to:

1. Note the proposal for grant funding which has been made by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA); and
2. Note that sufficient powers exist for Officers to accept said grant funding in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder; and
3. Endorse that Officers, on behalf of the Council, should undertake steps to formally accept the funding – including formalising necessary grant agreements and payment profiles etc.

Cabinet is recommended in respect of the deployment of the funding and implementation of a 'free after 4pm parking Monday to Friday' scheme to:

4. Agree to the use of the grant funding to implement a 'free after 4pm parking Monday to Friday' scheme based on the recommended option (at section 3) as set out within this paper.
5. Delegate responsibility for the implementation of the aforementioned scheme to the Corporate Director (Place) in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene as necessary including:

- a) To make and confirm necessary changes to the Parking Places Orders where required and to make and confirm the Notice of Variation required to implement the agreed charges; and;
- b) To make and confirm necessary changes to the Parking Places Orders where required and to make and confirm the Notice of Variation to reinstate the current (until 1800 Monday to Friday) chargeable hours from 1st April 2028 or sooner if the operation of the scheme results in unintended or unforeseen detrimental impacts including but not limited to financially impacting the Council (e.g. where loss of income exceeds the grant contribution), or other detrimental impact occurs to people, place or the Council as a consequence of operation; and;
- c) To undertake any other activities necessary to implement, vary or cease the scheme including any necessary changes and reinstatement works.

Key Corporate Plan Priorities

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | <i>Improving quality of life for local people</i> |
| 2 | <i>Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations</i> |

Place Strategy Priorities

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | <i>Supporting economic growth</i> |
| 2 | <i>Boosting town centre vitality and Improving accessibility</i> |

Report Author(s)

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide details of the grant proposal made by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to the Council.
- 1.2** This proposal asks the Council to consider a 'free after 4pm parking Monday to Friday' scheme from 1st October 2026 until 31st March 2028. This would represent a reduction in chargeable hours. The scheme proposal is accompanied by a grant funding offer to mitigate the budget impact to the Council to offset any loss of income that the Council would ordinarily have expected to receive.
- 1.3** The report summarises the grant proposal, its implications, and puts forward a series of recommendations should Members wish to move forward with accepting the grant.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

- 2.1** An approach was made by the office of the Mayor of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to the Council following the elections in 2025 to discuss options for a CPCA-funded free parking scheme focussed on St Neots.
- 2.2** The CPCA did not provide the Council with a budget envelope to work within. It was discussed what a scheme might look like (e.g. a free day, free after a particular time) so that officers of the Council could calculate initial costs.
- 2.3** The Council communicated to the CPCA that the grant proposal should:
 - Cover a period up to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) being enacted and new authorities being created.
 - Backfill in full, the equivalent loss of income based on the modelling information provided.
 - Be a whole Huntingdonshire district solution (not just St Neots).
 - Be a scheme which focuses timing on the evening economy as this approach would align with our Economic Growth Strategy.
- 2.4** Refined were developed by officers of the Council to inform the grant proposal that has now been made to the Council.
- 2.5** The Mayor believes this scheme will attract more visitors, support city centre businesses and attractions, help local traders compete with out-of-town and online retailers, and strengthen the evening economy. It is contingent on the CPCA to measure and document any economic benefit to the scheme they have chosen to fund.
- 2.6** Members will be aware that the Council's current Car Parking Strategy was adopted in 2018 and applied until 2023. During this time, it was agreed that the Council

would deviate from this strategy enabling the pursuit of Civil Enforcement in Huntingdonshire. Key principles included *implementing technology that positively assists our car park users* which led to the installation of equipment that facilitated card and contactless payment, along with *promoting environmental sustainability by supporting alternative fuel and travel methods* that supported our installation of cycle shelters and our early works implementing EV charge points.

- 2.7** Members are also aware that the Joint Administration have committed to refreshing the aforementioned strategy following significant local change with the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement in 2025. It is envisaged that the new strategy reflects the current position and car park usage data, whilst informing and providing clear direction for the service and guiding future courses of action. The strategy review commenced in early October 2025 following a procurement exercise. An updated parking strategy is expected to be presented to members for their review at Overview & Scrutiny on 2nd September 2026. This work is being undertaken by Ethos, who are experienced consultants operating in this sector.

3. RECOMMENDED OPTION

- 3.1** The grant proposal made by the CPCA to the Council is for a scheme which:

- Operates 1st October 2026 until 31st March 2028.
- Reduces the chargeable hours in all Council pay and display car parks so that they conclude at 1600 (4pm) instead of the current 1800 (6pm) for 5 days of the week (Monday to Friday).
- Makes no changes to the chargeable hours on Saturday (remaining chargeable until 1800).

- 3.2** The CPCA proposed scheme is accompanied by a grant funding offer of £370,000 p/a (pro rata) discussed in Financial Implications (8.2).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED & NOT RECOMMENDED

- 4.1** A request from the CPCA was made for information to inform options as initially no budget envelope had been assigned to the implementation of a scheme. The early focus was to provide estimates which could then be refined to ensure that the grant proposal returned to the Council is fully funded.

- 4.2** The information provided by the Council to CPCA included:

- **Free after X.** Information provided explored the costs of operating a 'Free after x' scheme, with the start time for operation being 3, 4 and 5pm. Figures were provided for individual and all days.
- **Free hour(s).** This looked at the option to provide a free 1 hour (or 2 hour) parking session to users on selected days of the week.

- 4.3** The Council may choose not to accept this grant proposal and continue to operate the current chargeable hours.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1** The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

6. POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1** Should the proposed scheme and matching grant funding be approved, the Parking Service will undertake the actions to facilitate the implementation which is supported by the recommendations. These actions include:

- A review of the Off-Street Parking Places Order (the Order) and development of the 'Notice of Variation'. The Order is the basis for enforcing restriction and for confirming the charges and hours/days that they apply.
- Updates to car park signage to confirm the chargeable hours and ensure that these are communicated to car park users.
- Changes to the configuration of payment methods to ensure that these align to what is agreed. Changes are required for both the pay & display equipment and to the mobile payment system (MiPermit) and will take approximately 10-12 weeks.

- 6.2** Officers of the Council in the Parking & Economic Development Services Teams are working with CPCA officers to understand what data sources we may be able to provide access to so that CPCA officers can review the effectiveness of the scheme and assess any economic benefit to the scheme they have chosen to fund.

7. POST IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1** Whilst enforcement will be mostly unchanged, should the scheme be approved and implemented, the Parking Service will monitor feedback and concerns. This is necessary because operation of the scheme may lead to prolonged dwell in short stay locations impacting turnover of spaces and reducing access to these locations. Enforcement officers may be utilised to undertake periodic checks to alleviate these issues.
- 7.2** Should the proposal be approved and implemented, the Economic Development service would explore opportunities to maximise the impact of the initiative and encourage additional footfall within Huntingdonshire's market town centres.
- 7.3** Whilst free parking after 4pm may help reduce barriers to visiting town centres later in the day, experience elsewhere suggests that parking incentives are most effective when combined with activities that encourage people to spend more time within town centres and support local businesses.

- 7.4** Subject to available resources, partner engagement and future funding opportunities, the Council could consider working with local businesses, Huntingdon Business Improvement District, Town Councils and community organisations to explore complementary initiatives. These may include coordinated late-opening periods, town centre events and markets, promotional campaigns supporting local businesses, seasonal activities, environmental enhancements, and initiatives designed to strengthen the evening economy. Any future interventions would be developed in consultation with stakeholders and aligned with the Council's Economic Growth Strategy, with activity focussed on supporting vibrant, attractive and commercially sustainable market town centres across Huntingdonshire.
- 7.5** At this stage no additional programmes or financial commitments are proposed as part of this decision. Any future initiatives would be subject to separate consideration, funding availability and appropriate approvals.
- 7.6** It is contingent on the CPCA to measure and document any economic benefit to the scheme they have chosen to fund.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

8.1 Council Key Priorities and Performance

There is currently no evidence base to suggest a direct causal link between free parking and increased local retail spend or growth in night-time economy. Therefore, the effects of this proposal on Council policies are untested and uncertain.

The **Council's Corporate Plan** would support boosting the night-time economy of our market towns:

- Improving quality of life for local people - a locally focussed parking scheme could encourage local shopping, helping create livelier, more inclusive places where people feel connected and enjoy spending time
- Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations - a parking scheme could lead to an increase in town centre usage driving higher footfall to local businesses which could see more businesses choose our towns in the future ensuring thriving town centres that remain economically viable and attractive over time.

The **Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy** aims to make town centres more attractive, accessible and economically active, specifically by:

- Boosting town centre vitality and Improving accessibility - reducing costs of visiting our towns could encourage residents to shop local and help to maintain vibrant high streets which is especially important for our rural communities who rely on car ownership, due to limited public transport options.
- Supporting economic growth – should the scheme lead to an increase in visitor numbers, the benefit will be seen by retailers, hospitality businesses and local

services therefore making Huntingdonshire's towns more competitive with out of town retail locations.

Our **Economic Growth Strategy** has ambitions to increase access to town centres, encourage visitor spending and creating a more attractive environment for businesses to grow and invest specifically by;

- Supporting local businesses – the scheme could encourage more people to shop in the town rather than out of town retail centres.
- Boosting the Visitor Economy – the scheme could make it more affordable for people to visit our towns for attractions and events and thereby supporting the Tourism Growth Strategy

The **Local Plan** includes objectives to improving access to town centres and provide support for local businesses including opportunities for retail development which could benefit from the introduction of a parking scheme.

The implementation of the 'free after 4pm parking Monday to Friday' scheme could also support the aims of the **CPCA Corporate Plan** in helping to create conditions for growth and providing support for high streets. The **CPCA Local Growth Plan** has key objectives around connectivity, supporting businesses, attracting investment and enabling economic activity which *could* equally benefit from the scheme introduction.

8.2 Financial Implications

8.2.1 The council depends on income from its car parks to help fund other important public services. For that reason, any potential loss of income was assessed and calculated before proposals were developed. Several options were explored and costed using actual 2024/25 income figures and available parking transaction data.

8.2.2 The method of calculation considers the 'direct losses' associated with tickets purchased after the commencement time (4pm) and the payment required by users arriving before the commencement time (4pm) which would be reduced to reflect the change in chargeable hours.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	All
Start After 4pm	28,245	30,030	31,187	31,983	39,110	32,472	193,027
Before 4pm, End 4-5	16,753	16,299	15,793	16,805	20,266	24,334	110,250
Before 4pm, End 5-6	10,705	11,031	10,397	11,445	13,975	18,084	75,637
By Day (Total)	55,703	57,360	57,377	60,233	73,351	74,890	378,914

8.2.3 The calculated figures do not include losses that may arise due to behavioural changes in instances where users may

- Arrive prior to the commencement of the free period who may delay arrival to avoid payment (e.g. users arriving at 3pm may wait until 4pm).
- Changes to the day of the week visits are made impact income received elsewhere within the week (mitigated if an all-days scheme is implemented).

8.2.4 The council will incur implementation and reversal costs for the various elements to implement the scheme which includes signage works and equipment configuration costs.

8.2.5 The estimated loss of income received through parking charges is £152,012 in 2026/27 and £304,024 in 2027/28. This loss of income is offset by the CPCA's proposed grant to the Council

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Parking Charges (CPCA)	152,012	304,024	<i>no change</i>
CPCA Grant	(185,000)	(370,000)	<i>no change</i>
Implementation/Reversal	17,500	17,500	
Contingency	+15,488	+48,476	

8.2.6 The value of the grant exceeds the direct parking income losses. This allows grant funds to be allocated to the costs of implementation and provides a contingency that may be used to accommodate any impact of behavioural changes.

8.3 Policy Implications

8.3.1 The proposal is considered to be in alignment with the Councils agreed policy framework.

8.4 Legal & Constitutional Implications

8.4.1 The Council's established Financial Regulations within the Constitution provide powers to budget managers to take advantage of or receive grants, where such arrangements will deliver additional or improved services, consistent with their service plan without creating any current or future commitment to net expenditure they may do so, subject to:

- the relevant Head of Service or Assistant Director being satisfied that the project funding meets with corporate objectives and that the resource required to produce the bidding documents is reasonable.
- the funds being dependent upon a particular project or service being provided but, in the case of S106/CIL agreements, the location or some other aspect is at the Council's discretion.
- informing the RFO of the details.
- consulting the relevant Executive Councillor(s) if the proposal exceeds £30,000 revenue or £50,000 capital in any one year with any capital having been previously agreed with the MTFS or any discretionary element of a S106/CIL agreement.

The proposed grant funding from CPCA is considered to accord with these requirements. As such, no formal authority is required to accept the grant funding in this case.

- 8.4.2** The Council's Interim Corporate Director (Finance and Resources) and Section 151 Officer is aware of and has reviewed the proposals and is in agreement, as is the council's Corporate Director of Place who has overall responsibility for the relevant directorate, and the Head of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Delivery who is responsible for the relevant service area.
- 8.4.3** Given the sensitivity of the matter at hand, the Cabinet is requested to review the grant funding proposal and are asked to endorse the proposal as recommended within the report. This provides assurance of Member oversight of the proposals, and alignment with the ambitions of Council and the Joint Administration as set out in the Corporate Plan, Place Strategy etc.
- 8.4.4** Necessary delegations are however required to enable the efficient and effective implementation of the scheme, including powers to amend, vary, or cease the scheme. Along with powers to reverse the charging situation and implement formal changes through legal processes. These have been clearly set out and are reflective of the principles of Officers being empowered to action the will of Members.
- 8.4.5** The Monitoring Officer and S151 have both been consulted on the decision-making route and the proposals themselves and have no adverse comments to make.
- 8.4.6** Subject to the recommendations in the report, it will be necessary for the Council to enter into a legal contract/grant funding agreement with the CPCA – which we have experience of from other funding schemes – and also take other legal steps in connection with implementation. Where necessary, Officers will take appropriate legal advice, in order to provide overall assurance.
- 8.4.7** The use of the Notice of Variation has been confirmed by the Council's Legal services as a means to amend the Parking Orders with a draft example to make the changes as per the grant having been reviewed.
- 8.4.8** There are therefore no legal or constitutional implications which should prevent this matter from proceeding.

8.5 Community Impact

- 8.5.1** Please see section 7 for information relating to Economic Development.

8.6 Environment & Climate Change Implications

- 8.6.1** There is currently no evidence base to suggest a direct causal link between free parking and increased footfall or local retail spend.
- 8.6.2** The proposed scheme reduces the chargeable hours for the Council's car parks which might change driver behaviour and might see an overall increase in vehicles being used to access our local towns. Those who perceive parking charges as a

barrier, who currently opt to travel further to free out of town retail areas, might increase their local retail spending.

8.6.3 Increased town centre vehicle usage might result in increased air pollution in town centres from the tail pipe emissions of internal combustion engines.

8.6.4 Increased use of private vehicles to visit town centres might reduce public transport usage. This could jeopardise the ability to document demand or the viability of expanding bus and rail services for local people.

8.7 Equality & Diversity Implications

8.7.1 N/A

8.8 Implications on Resources

8.8.1 The scheme directly impacts the parking budget, however, is offset by the external grant funding. The service will monitor the impact and may utilise the delegated authority to revert the scheme if required.

8.8.2 Implementation:

- The delivery of operational elements will be undertaken by the Parking Services Team, including coordination with suppliers.
- Support from the Communications Team will be required as part of the messaging linked to the implementation.
- Support from 3C ICT to make changes to the website to communicate correct information to users.

8.8.3 The works to enable the operation of the scheme will be undertaken by the Parking Service.

8.8.4 Post-Implementation:

- The Economic Development Team will consider undertaking the activities as per section 7.
- Services in the Council (Parking / Economic Development) will be required to support the CPCA with the provision of information so that CPCA officers can review the effectiveness of the scheme. This will use data that is readily available and will not require additional undertakings for the Council. Should additional data be required by the CPCA this will need to be considered, discussed and agreed separately to ensure HDC officer capacity to undertake. It would also need to be funded by the CPCA where this exceeds our current planned scope.

8.9 Health & Wellbeing Implications

- 8.9.1** Supports access to town centres by reducing cost to visit which may be a barrier to some members of the community.

8.10 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

- 8.10.1** If pursued, the scheme would end prior to the commencement of the new authority. The recommendations support the reversal of the scheme prior to the new authority.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1** The costing of the options considers the direct costs of the scheme with the grant providing additional revenue that might accommodate the behavioural changes that may occur.
- 9.2** The recommendations allow the Council to reinstate the previous chargeable hours should the scheme result in unintended or unforeseen detrimental impacts.
- 9.3** Whilst enforcement will be mostly unchanged, should the scheme be approved and implemented, the Parking Service will monitor feedback and concerns. This is necessary because operation of the scheme may lead to prolonged dwell in short stay locations impacting turnover of spaces and reducing access to these locations. Enforcement officers may be utilised to undertake periodic checks to alleviate these issues.
- 9.4** The Council was clear in discussion with the CPCA that implementation would take up to 12 weeks from the Council's decision. The CPCA wish is that the scheme starts in October 2026, which may not allow sufficient time for all reprogramming to take place. The Council can advise car park users of the requirement to 'not pay' after 4pm utilising on site signage as has been done during previous scheme operation. This will enable the scheme to commence in October 2026.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS– LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

- 10.1** N/A