

PARKING SERVICES ANNUAL REVIEW AND PROPOSED UPDATES 2026/27

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report outlines a suite of amendments to parking as part of a plan that seeks to balance improvements in service delivery and enhanced customer experience while responding to challenges relating to increasing costs of delivering services alongside the need to maintain levels of income critical to the delivery of key services.
- 1.2. The proposals and changes set out within this report have been developed in alignment to our corporate values: -
- **Democracy** – Because we listen and hear what people want
 - **Responsibility** – Because we care about the impact of our decisions and actions
 - **Fairness** – Because we want to address inequality and inequity in our city
 - **Co-operation** – Because we achieve more together than we would alone
- 1.3. The proposals directly support the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan, notably *providing quality public services* and *spending money wisely*. They also contribute to cleaner, greener streets and transport by ensuring services remain financially sustainable.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. A range of changes came into effect in April 2025 as part of the Parking Modernisation Plan, including fee increases in response to rising service costs, protecting disabled driver provision, and maintaining charges more in line with other cities.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1. Since April 2023, the Council has continued to improve parking standards and customer experience through:
- 3.1.1. Delivering over 400 extra wide bays across city centre car parks making it is easier for visitors and shoppers to park.
 - 3.1.2. Extended EV charging across city car parks greatly increasing access to charging facilities and encouraging the use of more sustainable cars
 - 3.1.3. Committed an investment of £180k to upgrade and replace On Street payment systems, having already expanded payment choice and accessibility

through introducing debit/credit, contactless, Apple and Android payments options On Street within the West End.

- 3.1.4. Supporting shoppers and visitors through extending the time motorists can park On Street from one to three hours across city centre locations and from three to five hours in shopper's car parks.
- 3.1.5. Supporting a safer shopping experience through the delivery of the Public Space Protection Order and enhanced security across city car parks, including the installation of a new and extensive CCTV system throughout the popular Western Approach car park.
- 3.1.6. Supporting businesses in the delivery of goods and services through enabling business permit use within the permitter road of Marks and Spencer's car park.
- 3.1.7. We strengthened road safety around schools by investing in two dedicated school enforcement officers and expanding the use of mobile enforcement cameras, focusing on locations with the greatest need.

Regional and National Context

- 3.2. To better understand current trends and markets, benchmarking was undertaken in September 2025 with twenty-six other councils as part of the 'Key Cities' group in relation to On Street and off-street parking (*Bournemouth, Brighton, Birmingham, Bristol, Blackpool, Cambridge, Canterbury, Cardiff, Cornwall, Coventry, Derby, Doncaster, Exeter, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Poole, Portsmouth, Reading, Southampton, Torbay, Wolverhampton and Worcester*).
- 3.3. Councils were contacted again in January 2026 where some councils indicated that they were undertaking processes to review charges for 2026/27; however, they could not share further details ahead of undertaking the required statutory processes and consultations.
- 3.4. Benchmarking of On Street charges (Appendix A) was undertaken using the average of the highest and lowest fees for an hour stay. Plymouth was shown to be lower than eleven (44%), and greater than fourteen (56%) of Councils (figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 – Summary of Benchmarking for On Street Charge

Councils Higher than Plymouth		Councils Lower than Plymouth		Councils Same as Plymouth	
11	44%	14	56%	0	0%

- 3.5. The structure and charges for Off Street charges often vary greater than those of On Street charges, therefore benchmarking of off-street charges (Appendix B) was

undertaken using the average of the highest and lowest fees for a two hour stay and an above four hours (all day) stay.

Figure 1.2 – Summary of Benchmarking for Off Street Charges

Stay (Hours)	Councils Higher than Plymouth		Councils Lower than Plymouth		Councils not offering this Option	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
2	22	85%	4	15%	0	0%
Over 4	20	77%	5	19%	1	4%

- 3.6. The benchmarking identifies Plymouths parking fees to be lower than most other councils benchmarked and, in the case of Off Street charges, some of the lowest charges of all the councils. Whilst it is understood that increases to fees and charges are not often welcome, the benchmarking highlights a clear gap between Plymouths fees and those of other cities and where other councils are equally undertaking reviews to set fees and charges for 2026/27. This presents an opportunity to review Plymouth parking fees, to better align with other councils and in maintaining our commitment for continuous improvement and enhanced customer experience.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

On Street Parking

- 4.1. There is an opportunity to review On Street charges in response to rising operational costs and to align more closely with other councils. To support motorists there is also scope to raise awareness that unused time purchased at one On Street location can be used at others.

Off Street Car Parking

- 4.2. There is an opportunity to review Off Street charges to reflect increased delivery costs, align with other councils, and promote the use of remaining parking time across eligible sites. As an example, motorists visiting the city centre Theatre Royal car park can use any remaining parking time to visit the waterfront parking within the Elphinstone car park.
- 4.3. Motorbikes are free to use car parks and in doing so occupy spaces otherwise available to four-wheel vehicles. Whilst not exempt from charges within Plymouths traffic orders, motorbikes have historically not paid due to previous impracticalities of placing pay and display tickets on bikes. With modern ticketless technology, there is an opportunity to require all motor vehicles to pay when occupying pay and display parking bays.

Coastal Car Parks

- 4.4. The Council operates several parking locations that support leisure activities, including Jennycliff, Mountbatten and Strand Street. While defined as car parks, sites such as Jennycliff and Mountbatten are not traditional, tarmac surfaced car parks but informal parking areas similar to those found at other coastal locations. All are currently free to use; however, many comparable coastal car parks not owned by the Council apply charges (Appendix C). There is an opportunity to explore introducing charges for these facilities, generating revenue to help support the continued delivery of key services.

Parking Permits

- 4.5. Permits were last subject to increases in April 2025 recognising the cost of delivering these services has increased. The Council is not permitted to use permit fees to drive net income; however, permit fees are set to meet the costs associated with administering and managing the city's permit schemes; therefore, there is an opportunity to review permit fees and charges.
- 4.6. Over the years, rises in car ownership has created increasing pressures within residential permit areas, where it is simply not possible to build new roads or provide additional On Street parking to accommodate the growing number of vehicles. While the Council does not limit the number of permits a household may obtain, the existing policy aims to reduce parking pressures by preventing non permit holders, such as commuters, from using residents' streets. There is now an opportunity to consider options that would help disincentivise multiple car ownership, supporting the Council's commitments to environmental sustainability and helping to ease parking pressures in situations where multiple vehicles are registered to a single address and to promote the use of sustainable travel options.

Blue Badge Parking

- 4.7. The Council provides a range of services to support persons with disabilities, these include dedicated disabled parking On Street and in car parks, and residential disabled persons parking spaces to support persons with disabilities access their homes.
- 4.8. The Council previously introduced dedicated Blue Badge holder parking on the Hoe Promenade to provide additional support for people with disabilities. This provision has been extremely popular and was expanded to increase capacity. Maintaining this dedicated facility costs the Council £35k per year, due to the need to restrict access to Blue Badge holders only. In all other city centre car parks, Blue Badge use is regulated through traffic orders, and charges apply in line with standard arrangements. The Council has also received reports that vehicles

are parking for extended periods consistent with commuter use, which is not the intended purpose of this dedicated facility.

Payment for Parking

- 4.9. The Council currently has an inconsistent approach to how people can pay for their parking, particularly between On Street and Off Street locations, where car parks have operated cashless since 2020:
- In car parks customers have the choice of debit/credit, contactless, Apple pay, Android pay, RingGo (mobile app, website or phone call). Cash is not an option.
 - On Street customers have the choice of cash payment or RingGo (mobile app, website or via a phone call)
- 4.10. The Council has committed to invest £180k to upgrade and replacing ageing On Street payment systems through an approved capital programme. The new machines will provide a much broader and more inclusive range of payment options, debit, and credit card, contactless, Apple Pay, Android Pay and RingGo (web, app and phone), ensuring consistency between On Street and Off Street payment methods. There is an opportunity to ensure complete consistency in parking payments by removing cash as an option following the upgrades.
- 4.11. In 2024/25, cash payments for parking services accounted for only 3% of all parking transactions (£300k compared with total income of £9.8m). Over 84% of customers paying to park On Street chose to do so via RingGo. While cashless payments offer convenience, the use of cash for On Street parking has also become less practical as parking costs have increased, due to the number of coins required.

5. PROPOSALS

On Street Parking

- 5.1. It is proposed to revise On Street parking charges to bring Plymouth's fees more in line with those of other councils and to respond to increasing service delivery costs, ensuring income levels remain sufficient to support the provision of key services.
- 5.2. It is proposed to (Appendix D) increase the hourly rate of parking to **£2.80 per hour** and promote the ability for motorists to use any remaining parking time in other On Street locations. This approach provides a balanced response between the need to maintain income critical to supporting the delivery of key services, while also supporting motorists who wish to visit more than one location during the same parking session.

Off Street Car Parking

5.3. It is proposed to revise off-street charges to:

- Bring Plymouth's parking fees in line with those of other councils and maintain levels of income critical to the delivery of key services.
- Maintain the current strategy to incentivise longer stays in the city centre by offering greater value through longer stay tariffs.
- Maintain Western Approach tariffs as a value parking proposition supporting shoppers, visitors, and employees in the city centre
- Support shoppers and visitors by promoting the ability to use remaining parking time in other locations.
- Adopt a consistent approach to charges

5.4. To achieve this, it is proposed to amend the schedule of charges as set out within the schedule of Off-Street charges to this report (Appendix E) and that these charges apply to all motor vehicles.

Coastal Car Parks

5.5. It is proposed to retain one hour's free parking at the Jennycliff, Mountbatten and Strand Street car parks, with a £2 charge applied for stays over one hour. This approach provides a fair balance by continuing to support short visits while introducing a modest charge for longer stays that remains lower than comparable coastal locations (Appendix C).

Blue badge Parking

5.6. To continue supporting persons with disabilities, it is proposed to protect the long-term provision of this dedicated parking by removing the current subsidy and ensuring consistency with other car parks. This would be achieved by classifying the Hoe Promenade Blue Badge car park as a Band B car park (Appendix D), regulating its use through a traffic order, and applying charges consistent with other Band B car parks. As with other pay and display car parks, Blue Badge holders will be permitted an additional hour beyond their paid period as a reasonable adjustment, in line with existing Off Street arrangements.

Payment for Parking

5.7. It is proposed that, as payment systems are upgraded and the range of payment options is expanded to match those available in the Council's cashless car parks, the

option of cash payment is withdrawn. Moving to cashless payments supports the Council's environmental sustainability commitments, as the collection and banking of cash currently generates 8,000kg of CO₂ emissions.

Parking Permits and Services

- 5.8. It is proposed to revise the charges for parking permits to reflect the increased costs associated with delivering these services (Appendix F) including the ongoing costs of maintaining the roads and streets within the controlled parking zones.
- 5.9. It is not proposed to consider limiting the number of permits a household may obtain; however, in seeking to discourage multiple car ownership and support the Council's environmental and sustainability ambitions, it is proposed to take a more balanced approach by introducing an escalating charge whereby each subsequent permit increases by 50%.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Funding available to local government has been reducing steadily in recent years despite rising demand for services. As a council we have undergone huge changes to maintain good local services with fewer resources. The fees proposed within this report are at the level considered appropriate in light of this where the proposals seek to strike a balance between maintaining the Council's commitment to continuing to deliver service improvements and raise customer experience, alongside the need to meet increasing costs and generate income critical to the delivery of key services.
- 6.2. All net income from parking is reinvested back into service delivery, delivery of key services which includes highways and transport.
- 6.3. The savings and income are broken down as follows:

Proposal		Net Benefit 2026/27
Permits	Increase Permit Fees	£225k
	Apply Escalating Residents Permit Fee	£113k
On Street Parking	Increase On Street parking	£440k
	Upgrade payment systems	£18k
Off Street Parking	Increase Off Street parking	£513k
	Charges to apply to all motor vehicles	£19k
	Charges on Hoe Promenade	£30k
Coastal Car Parks	One hour parking charge	£85k
Total		£1.443M

6.4. There are revenue costs of £40k to implement these proposals associated with procurement of new payment systems, advertising, signage and reconfiguring systems. There is an approved capital project within the Councils capital programme for the replacement of the On Street parking payment systems.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1. To agree to the following:

7.1.1. To apply parking charges to all motor vehicles in Council car parks, as set out within section 5.4, ensuring a consistent approach across all chargeable parking bays.

7.1.2. To remove cash payments once the On Street payment system upgrades are complete, as set out in section 5.7, improving customer experience through greater payment choice, ensuring consistency across all parking locations, and reducing CO₂ emissions linked to cash collection and processing.

7.2. To agree to implement the following changes not less than 21 days following publication of these changes through a Notice of Variation:

7.2.1. Increase On Street parking charges, as set out in section 5.2 and Appendix D, to align more closely with other councils and meet rising service delivery costs.

7.2.2. Increase Off Street parking fees, as set out in section 5.4 and Appendix E, to ensure charges remain comparable with other councils and support rising service costs.

7.2.3. Increase parking permit fees, as set out in sections 5.8, 5.9 and Appendix F, to meet the rising costs of maintaining schemes and encourage more sustainable travel choices in line with the Council's Net Zero Action Plan.

7.3. To agree to undertake statutory consultation on the following proposals:

7.3.1. Introduce coastal car park charges at Jennycliff, Mountbatten and Strand Street, as set out within section 5.5 and Appendix C, to ensure a more consistent approach while maintaining support for short stay visitors.

7.3.2. Introduce charges for Blue Badge holders on the Hoe Promenade, as set out within section 5.6 and Appendix E, to ensure a fair and consistent charging approach across all car parks.