

York City Council

Healthy Places - Right to Challenge Car Parking Price Consultation

Executive Summary

Reference: Final

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This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.

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1. Purpose and background

Ove Arup and Partners Ltd (Arup) have been commissioned by City of York Council (CYC) to undertake an independent consultation on car parking charges in four areas of the city, namely Bishopthorpe Road, Micklegate, The Groves, and Heworth. Following CYC's decision in April 2025 to increase charges for CYC-owned car parking, traders and residents in Bishopthorpe Road, Micklegate and The Groves have initiated a challenge to parking charges through The Right to Challenge Parking Policies Statutory Guidance under the Traffic Management Act 2004. Separately, traders in Heworth have raised a petition against the increases in car parking charges.

Acting independently, Arup ran a consultation exercise from 17th December 2025 to 31st March 2026 which included both online and in-person engagement. We have reviewed and consolidated feedback and provided CYC with reports which identify common issues and collate the needs and concerns of local residents, traders, and the wider community in each of the study areas.

This Executive Summary has been prepared to summarise the headline findings across the four areas of York, and to provide a set of clear recommendations for CYC as the process moves through to scrutiny and, ultimately, a decision.

2. Headline findings

In total, there were 1,016 responses to the consultation across the four study areas. This included 107 business owners and 909 residents/visitors. The headline findings from these different groups are presented below. Many of the headline findings were common across the four areas, but where any of the areas differed significantly from the average, *these figures have been provided in brackets*.

2.1 Business owners

- 56% of business owners (*67% in Heworth*) reported “fewer customers and lower spend” as a result of the increased parking charges. 15% of respondents (*40% in the Groves*) reported “no change”.
- 43% of business owners (*30% in Bishopthorpe Road, higher at all other locations*) reported that the increase in parking charges has impacted their ability to park at their business or take deliveries
- In response to an open text question asking business owners what action they would like CYC to take in response to the challenge over parking charge increases, the most popular themes were:
 - 69 respondents suggested the provision of cheaper parking;
 - 32 respondents suggested improved public transport;
 - 10 respondents suggested improved active travel infrastructure; and
 - 6 respondents expressed their support for the parking charge increases.

2.2 Residents / visitors

- 81% of respondents (*72% in the Groves*) drive to their selected location.
- Reasons for travelling by car included “no suitable alternative mode” (327 respondents), “it forms part of a multi-purpose journey” (318 respondents), “practicality” (233 respondents), “necessity” (220 respondents), “comfort” (101 respondents) and “safety” (68 respondents).
- When asked how the increase in parking charges has impacted their parking habits, respondents most frequently cited “using car parks less frequently” (444 respondents), “parking in different locations”

(302 respondents), “*changing where they travel to*” (443 respondents) and “*parking for shorter amounts of time*” (147 respondents).

- 78% of respondents (57% in the Groves) stated that their visits to the selected destination have decreased since the parking charges were increased.
- In response to an open text question around actions residents and visitors what action they would like CYC to take in response to the challenge over parking charge increases, the most popular themes were:
 - 584 respondents suggested providing cheaper parking (*the top selection in all four locations*);
 - 217 respondents suggested improving public transport;
 - 55 respondents suggested improving cycling and walking infrastructure; and
 - 57 respondents expressed support for the parking charge increases.
- Of those who suggested the provision of cheaper parking:
 - 58% (40% in Micklegate) were in favour of a blanket reduction in prices;
 - 23% (35% in Micklegate) supported cheap or free parking for short durations; and
 - 12% (37% in the Groves) suggested discounts for residents / business / customers.

3. The policy context

York’s approach to parking pricing sits within a wider policy framework that seeks to bring forward rapid decarbonisation; provide improved and more equitable transport options; and promote a thriving, inclusive economy. Collectively, the city’s strategies position parking management (including charges) as one lever among many to manage scarce road space; reduce congestion and emissions; and support city-centre vitality.

Relevant policies are:

- **Local climate change ambition:** The *York Climate Change Strategy 2022–2032* sets the city’s net zero direction. It identifies transport as a major source of emissions and requires sustained reductions through both cleaner vehicles and reduced car dependency.
- **Transport provision and mode shift:** The *York Local Transport Strategy (LTS) 2024–2040* is explicitly framed as an enabler of the Climate Change Strategy, with a stated need to achieve a 71% reduction in transport carbon emissions by 2030 delivered through a shift to more sustainable transport modes. This strategy sets a vision for an accessible, affordable, sustainable and resilient transport network that improves health and supports a thriving economy, prioritising walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, while maintaining access for essential car journeys. Its *Implementation Plan 2024–2026* commits to a parking strategy that makes best use of limited highway space and encourages use of Park & Ride, alongside bus priority and safer active-travel routes. The *Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022–2032* reinforces this direction through its focus on prevention and creating environments that enable physical activity and reduce health inequalities.
- **Economic ambition and city-centre vitality:** The *Council Plan 2023–2027* and *York Economic Strategy 2022–2032* emphasise inclusive, sustainable growth – raising productivity and earnings while supporting net zero ambitions. The *Our City Centre Vision* highlights how footfall and vibrancy are central to a successful centre (supporting businesses, services and jobs), while also setting expectations for a city centre that is welcoming, accessible and sustainable. Within this framing, parking policy is part of a broader ‘access offer’ that must work alongside high-quality public transport and attractive public realm.

In this context, increases in parking charges are a demand-management tool to help achieve wider policy outcomes, helping to reduce congestion and emissions, help fund and encourage the use of sustainable transport, and helping create a city centre that remains accessible and economically resilient during the transition to net zero.

4. The challenge around competing priorities

York is not unique in facing challenges around car parking. The city must manage a high, and growing, demand for convenient access to local centres; physical limitations on road width and kerb space; and an expectation from residents that towns and cities should be healthier, cleaner and more people friendly. Nearly all cities in the UK are implementing a mixed strategy to address these challenges combining financial measures (e.g. congestion charging, parking charges, workplace parking charges) with physical measures (e.g. reorganising road space and prioritisation of signals to promote sustainable and active travel).

The consultation feedback shows that changes to parking are felt quickly and acutely by residents and traders, but it also underlines that there are no easy solutions that satisfy the needs of all users.

In practice, decisions on parking charges sit within wider trade-offs about how the city manages movement, place and access in line with its prevailing policy. The strategic direction of travel for York, as with many other cities, is to enable more trips by walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, with car use being focused on journeys where there is no realistic alternative. Delivering this, implies reallocating limited road space and kerbside space; prioritising bus reliability, cycle routes and safer crossings; and defining loading and Blue Badge access, whilst recognising that such measures will reduce general parking supply and/or convenience.

Parking charges are one lever for managing a scarce resource. They can encourage greater turnover/usage of car parking spaces and help manage demand. However, parking charges cannot deliver policy outcomes on their own. Any pricing approach needs to be aligned with complementary measures, namely good public transport, safe and convenient active travel routes, clear information and proportionate enforcement, so that people have credible alternatives.

CYC must therefore balance competing priorities, for example:

- **Access vs. climate and congestion:** supporting access for shoppers, visitors and some workers while reducing traffic, emissions and delay.
- **Residents vs. visitors:** residents need reliable access to park near home (including permits, visitor bays, and space for carers/trades), and protection from overspill and displacement; visitors need convenient, legible short-stay parking close to shops and services.
- **Parking turnover vs. convenience vs. wider policy objectives:** balancing short-stay parking to support access to shops and services, while avoiding displacement into surrounding streets and recognising the Council's wider objectives to reduce car use and encourage sustainable travel. For example, low-cost short-stay parking may improve convenience but could conflict with congestion and climate goals, requiring clear trade-offs to be acknowledged.
- **Space for parking vs. space for sustainable modes:** choosing where highly constrained space is best used for bus priority, cycling, wider footways, loading and accessibility as an alternative to on-street car parking.

Overall, there is no single “right answer” on parking and solutions are very location specific. While the general trend across cities in the UK is for car parking charges to continue to increase, any change can have uneven impacts and may result in unintended consequences such as shifting demand elsewhere. The challenge is to apply the policy direction consistently, while being transparent about trade-offs and using a balanced package of measures which provide realistic transport options. In implementing change, it is important that councils remain responsive, communicate clearly and adjust and refine their approach over time in response to evidence.

5. Recommendations

This section sets out a series of recommendations that could be considered by CYC following its review of the consultation responses. These recommendations draw from suggestions made by respondents, supplemented with Arup's professional expertise and experience from working with cities across the UK and considering alignment with current local policy. No detailed recommendation is made where parking charges should be set – this must be a decision for CYC – but we do observe that the current parking charges are broadly similar to charges seen in other UK cities with similar social and economic profiles.

Our recommendations are grouped into themed subsets which reflect consultation feedback and local policy ambitions.

5.1 Recommendations subset 1: Fairness and equity

One of the key recurring themes from the consultation was around fairness and equity. The following recommendations could be implemented to ensure these principles are baked into CYC's strategy around parking charges and any future decisions.

- **Apply charges fairly and consistently** across locations and user groups, building on the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) already undertaken and the clear intent to deliver consistency through previous changes. Consultation feedback consistently highlighted a perceived lack of consistency between locations and confusion about how charges, concessions and controls fit together as an overall approach. It should be noted that much of this feedback was highlighting the disparity between Council-managed car parks and large 'out-of-town' retail parks with free parking such as Monks Cross. CYC have very limited influence over these locations and so any parking strategy needs to be clear on this distinction and that it applies to Council-managed car parks only. Where targeted concessions are permitted to reflect local circumstances (see recommendations subset 2), these should be applied within clear legal and policy parameters and communicated transparently, so users understand the rationale and scope of any differences to avoid perceived unequal treatment.
- **Continue to embed accessibility and equity considerations into tariff decisions**, informed by the completed EqIA, and by engagement feedback from groups such as disabled people older residents and families. Where concerns relate to aspects of the national Blue Badge scheme that fall outside CYC's direct control, the Council should support local accessibility groups in identifying evidence-based issues and, where appropriate, lobby central government for improvements. Any future more localised options to mitigate adverse impacts should be evidence-led, proportionate and practicable, recognising the legal, operational and enforcement constraints associated with tailoring tariffs to specific user groups.
- **Avoid digital exclusion** by consolidating and enhancing the existing policy approach, which has already been strengthened through the retention of non-digital payment options and the completed EqIA. Consultation feedback indicates that challenges persist, so further realistic improvements could focus on optimising what is already in place, for example clearer and more consistent signage, better communication of available non-digital options, and operational adjustments that support users who may struggle with digital systems. Additional engagement with groups representing those most at risk of digital exclusion would help ensure any future decisions remain proportionate, evidence-led and practicable.
- **Address displacement and permit/non-permit imbalance** to minimise the risk that any future changes to parking charges shift additional pressure onto residential streets or disproportionately affect particular neighbourhoods. This is a particular issue in Heworth where '1 hour no return' parking does create this kind of pressure. This should build on existing approaches such as controlled parking zones (e.g. ResPark), while explicitly recognising the trade-offs involved, including potential impacts on residents where new controls are introduced (see Recommendations subset 2 for further detail around ResPark). Ongoing monitoring and engagement with affected communities would help ensure that measures manage displacement effectively without creating unintended consequences.
- **Demonstrate a fair deal for communities** by strengthening transparency and communication around how any retained or increased parking revenue is reinvested into transport and environmental

improvements, including but not limited to accessibility-related measures (e.g. buses, park-and-ride, active travel). This should clearly articulate the rationale for reinvestment decisions, the outcomes sought, and progress against them, building on existing statutory requirements and supporting public understanding and confidence in the wider vision (see recommendations subset 3).

- **Run any future consultations proactively and fairly** by being transparent about the evidence base and decision criteria, monitoring and publishing key impacts (e.g. footfall, dwell time, displacement and equality impacts), and clearly demonstrating how feedback has informed proposals. As part of this, changes to parking charges and supporting policies should form a much more prominent and structured component of the Council’s existing annual budget consultation process, rather than the current light-touch approach. This will require CYC officers to prepare an annual parking evidence report that proactively compiles relevant data, articulates the rationale for any proposed changes, and sets out how they align with wider policy objectives. This updated process should include specific and targeted engagement with interested parties such as trader and resident groups, and be presented in a format that is easy for stakeholders to understand. The scope, timing and frequency of any additional consultation activity outside of this annual window should be proportionate, recognising that there is no statutory requirement to consult on parking charges and that more extensive consultation can have resource implications and delay decision-making.
- **Advocate for wider fairness levers outside parking charges** by clarifying the Council’s role as an enabler and partner, for example by providing evidence, coordination and formal representations to national government, while supporting local trader and business groups to lead and shape lobbying and campaigning activity on issues such as business rates and high-street viability (e.g. “Save Our High Street” style campaigns). This should also recognise the increasingly prominent role of the Mayor and the Mayoral Combined Authority as key political and strategic actors for York and North Yorkshire, with whom the Council can collaborate to amplify local priorities and strengthen the collective voice on issues affecting economic fairness and high-street resilience.

5.2 Recommendations subset 2: Striking the right balance

As described in Section 4 above, parking charges will always be contentious and striking the right balance is critical in driving ambitious policy outcomes while considering the needs of all users. The following set of recommendations are related to increasing flexibility in response to local circumstances.

- **Explore the potential for targeted charging measures that support local trade.** Examples could include (but not be limited to):
 - Providing a limited period of free parking (for example, around 30 minutes) to facilitate quick ‘drop-in’ trips for nearby residents and shoppers. Any such offer would need to be carefully calibrated so that it is long enough to benefit local businesses but not so long that it enables access to more distant parts of the city centre.
 - First hour pricing adjustments, potentially just in ‘community parking locations’ such as those forming the basis of this review. This would support short-stay visits to local businesses but discourage use for commuting or longer trips that should be in scope for park and ride services.
 - More granular charging within the first hour (e.g. 15- or 30-minute increments) to enhance perceived fairness and better support short visits. Consideration would need to be given to increased complexity and operational and enforcement challenges.
 - Introduce a flat or reduced rate for the first hour across all Council-managed car parks and on-street bays to support local businesses and short visits.

Consideration of these approaches should assess operational practicality and equity impacts, and give due consideration to the striking the right balance between promoting economic vibrancy in local centres and wider policy goals included in the Local Transport Strategy, including promoting sustainable travel.

- **Monitor and refine existing resident and permit-holder mitigation measures, alongside time-specific parking flexibilities** to ensure they continue to incentivise the right behaviours, reflect localised impacts and minimise unintended consequences. Existing provision includes:

- The York Minster Badge gives York residents discounts on parking in council car parks and on-street parking bays. It currently costs £45 for 2 years.
- The York Residents’ Parking (ResPark) scheme is a permit system that prioritises on-street parking for eligible residents and their visitors within designated zones.

The Minster Badge and ResPark schemes should be considered together to ensure they operate consistently across the city and support wider policy goals. The Minster Badge (offering free evening parking until 2021 but now charged at £2) sits alongside other local arrangements such as free after-6pm parking on Bishopthorpe Road and in Heworth, and free Sunday parking on Micklegate, creating inconsistencies that can unintentionally displace visitor parking into nearby ResPark streets. A coordinated review should therefore examine how these schemes interact, including the pricing and discount structure of the Minster Badge to ensure it provides sufficient incentive for eligible residents while still supporting sustainable travel for short trips, and the geographical coverage of ResPark schemes. Options for the Minster Badge could include an overall price reduction, an increased discount and targeted enhancements in community parking locations. This should also include consideration of how Sundays operate, particularly in relation to religious services (see the following recommendation for more detail), as part of a wider strategy for equitable and consistent time-based concessions. Alongside this, ResPark arrangements should continue to be monitored and refined to ensure they reflect localised impacts, avoid displacement pressures, and remain simple and fair for residents. Any adjustments across either scheme should be evidence-led, proportionate, legally compliant and clearly communicated so that residents understand how the different elements fit together and why changes are being made.

- **Support access to religious services** following a set of core principles around consistency, fairness and avoiding unintended displacement, building on the previous recommendation. This includes addressing current inconsistencies, such as free Sunday morning parking on Micklegate, and recognising situations where places of worship benefit from informal flexibilities, for example the area around York Mosque where parking is currently free but on the waiting list to be converted to a ResPark. A clearer city-wide approach should apply needs-based flexibilities that align with service times (including major festivals and peak observance periods) through clear, published criteria and a consistent consultation and application process. Any such flexibilities should build on existing permit frameworks where possible, with defined eligibility, time limits and locations to ensure they can be implemented and enforced fairly and consistently across different faiths and areas of the city. Clear communication of how and when these arrangements apply would be essential to maintain transparency and confidence.
- **Monitor and iterate** the recommendations identified through this report using proportionate and deliverable monitoring approaches to track outcomes such as turnover, displacement and accessibility impacts. Given that data collection (particularly parking surveys) can be resource-intensive, monitoring should draw where possible on existing data sources, lighter-touch methods and time-limited evaluations. Measures should then be refined based on the evidence available and stakeholder feedback. Reporting this data, and any related decisions around parking policy should be done annually as part of the Council’s existing budget consultation process (see Recommendations subset 1 for more detail).

5.3 Recommendations subset 3: Securing buy-in for a long-term vision

The third subset of recommendations is focussed on setting a clear long-term vision for transport in the city and securing buy-in from stakeholders and local communities. A key theme through the consultation responses was a lack of transparency around why parking charges need to be increased, and what CYC’s plans are around investing in alternative sustainable modes. The existing Local Transport Strategy and associated Implementation Plans set out a clear direction of travel for transport investment in the city, but more clearly communicating how parking charges will contribute to these ambitions should be a priority.

- **Be more proactive around communicating the clear long-term transport vision** that sets out the intended direction for the city in line with the various key policy documents including the existing Local Transport Strategy (e.g. more walking, cycling and public transport for everyday trips), the outcomes sought (access, safety, air quality, economic vitality), and how different policies connect to that vision. All future consultation and decisions around parking charges should be framed in this wider policy context. This narrative should also be included as part of the annual budget and reporting process (see

Recommendations subset 1 for more detail), including high-level reporting of how transport-related revenues and budgets are being used to fund transport and environmental improvements in York.

- **Be transparent about the “why” and the “what next”** – explain the problems being addressed (e.g. congestion, limited space, maintenance, climate/air quality goals), what evidence is being used, and what success will look like (with measurable indicators and review points).
- **Set out a visible investment plan for sustainable alternatives**, including what will be delivered, when, where, and who benefits.
- **Optimise and enhance York’s sustainable transport offer** by strengthening the park-and-ride network as the city’s key radial spine for intercepting visitor and strategic trips, supported by reliable local bus services and high-quality active travel links. Significant progress has already been made, including the recent increase in frequency of the Number 11 bus from hourly to half-hourly, improving connections between Bishopthorpe Road, the city centre and Heworth, and this momentum should continue. Working closely with the Mayoral Combined Authority and public transport operators, the Council should pursue further incremental improvements to route coverage, service frequency, integration quality, reliability wayfinding and passenger information, ensuring that enhancements are deliverable within funding constraints and reinforce sustainable travel as an attractive, convenient choice for residents and visitors.
- **Integrate ticketing and journey planning across modes** – work with the Combined Authority to build on the success of the York Ticket and other initiatives to make it simpler to combine park and ride with buses, walking and cycling (through the LCWIP); improve real-time information and consistency of messaging across platforms and on-street signage.
- **Develop a stakeholder buy-in and engagement approach** – identify key groups (e.g. resident associations, businesses, disability groups, faith groups, universities/colleges, visitor economy), agree clear engagement principles, and use regular, existing forums (rather than one-off consultations) to help shape proposals, test emerging ideas and monitor impacts over time. Include clear feedback loops to demonstrate how stakeholder views have been considered and influenced decisions.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the independent consultation demonstrates that the perception of residents, visitors and businesses is that parking charge increases have had a significant impact. Participants in the consultation have raised strong concerns about affordability, access and the effect on local centres. The challenge for York is to balance these perceived impacts against wider policy objectives around congestion, emissions, public realm and the long-term shift towards more sustainable travel. While setting a clear recommendation for the pricing in each of the four locations in the City was not within this study’s remit, our review of the York Local Transport Strategy, and our consideration of comparable UK towns and cities that face similar parking provision challenges, suggests that the increased prices in York are broadly in line with actions taken in other comparable parts of the UK.

However, while due process was technically followed throughout by the Council, the manner and scale of the increases, including the absence of consultation at the time, and increases of charges of up to 500% in some locations, did not represent best practice. Feedback from participants in the consultation tells us that this contributed to local concerns and the subsequent challenges which have led to this independent review.

It is our strong recommendation that any future increases should be implemented more transparently and gradually, potentially through a phased approach and in consultation with the local communities impacted to obtain support, incorporate wider views on both constraints and potential concessions. The final decision on pricing strategy rests with the Council and elected members. Regardless of the final decision they reach, the current situation could be mitigated through the implementation of some of the recommendations set out in Section 5 of this report. These should now be given due consideration by the Council as part of the next steps of this process.

A common thread through many of the recommendations is for any future changes to parking charges to form a much more prominent component of the Council's existing annual budget consultation process. This should be accompanied by clear data-led reporting around the rationale and evidence for any proposed changes, a robust link through to wider policy objectives, and a reinvestment plan for any additional revenue generated by the changes. This annual reporting will improve transparency in decision-making and help to restore trust in the process.