

KINGSTON UPON THAMES PARKING STUDY

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. In December 2002 Steer Davies Gleave was commissioned by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames to develop a parking strategy for Kingston town centre. The study aims were to assess current levels of supply and demand and how existing stock is managed. The study also considered how demand may change in the future and the implications of such changes for traffic levels, economic vitality, sustainability and other key Council objectives. Finally, the study considered what changes to the supply and management of parking stock, together with other changes such as the introduction of Park & Ride, could best achieve the Council's transport, economic and wider objectives.
2. The strategy has been developed in a transparent manner. It has emerged through a process of continual liaison and interaction with Council officers from a range of disciplines. Relevant elected Members have also been kept informed of the study's progress via officers and through a number of dedicated briefings. Every effort has been made to involve key stakeholders in the study at appropriate stages. Two stakeholder briefings were held, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study, to gather opinion and report on progress. Ongoing liaison with specific organisations, such as Kingston Town Centre Management and key retailers, has also helped to shape the study and its findings.

Chapter 2: Key issues

Causes of congestion

3. At times, traffic congestion in Kingston town centre delays all road users and seriously detracts from the environmental quality of the area and the visitor experience as well as imposing an economic cost to those who are delayed. Both the Council and local business are naturally keen to ensure the town's vitality continues and is built upon and congestion is seen as an issue which may impede these goals.
4. The debate as to the causes of this congestion has centred on three issues: the level of traffic to the town centre itself; the level of through traffic; and the effects of vehicles queuing to enter car parks on the relief road. Without considerable additional research, it is difficult to be certain to the contribution of each of these issues to overall congestion levels. However, analysis of available data has shown that:
 - at peak times, traffic levels are close to, or exceed, the capacity of some of the main junctions on the relief road (therefore congestion would occur with or without vehicles queuing to enter the car parks);
 - an estimated 14,400 vehicles park in the town centre on a weekday and 18,700 on a Saturday; and
 - through-traffic is thought to account for approximately two-thirds of traffic entering the town centre on weekdays and half on Saturdays.

Current parking supply

5. There are some 8,760 parking spaces in Kingston town centre, including the 700 spaces at Seven Kings car park. Of these, 7,270 are in public car parks or on-street and a further 1,500 spaces are in private car parks which are not available to most shoppers or many other visitors. The majority of car parking spaces are operated by retailers and other private companies.

Current parking demand

6. Surveys were undertaken to inform this study in May 2003. Car park entry and exit counts were undertaken on a Wednesday and Saturday. The survey week was chosen to be typical of average parking demand across the year. Subsequent research showed that in fact the week was 6-7% below average. All figures presented have been adjusted upwards to correct for this. Some 16,900 vehicles parked in the ten surveyed car parks on the Saturday and 11,400 on the Wednesday. Several car parks are clearly more popular – Bentalls, John Lewis, Eden Walk, Cattle Market, Lady Booth Road and Ashdown Road most notably. Taking the combined capacity of the car parks surveyed (over 5,000 spaces) there was no time on either survey day when all spaces were filled. During the time of peak accumulation of vehicles, some 1,490 / 27% (Wednesday) and 860 / 15% (Saturday) spaces remained empty. However, there were times when individually surveyed car parks were full, but there were available spaces elsewhere in the town centre.
7. Despite the number of empty spaces available throughout the survey days, there is a common perception that there is insufficient parking available in Kingston town centre. A questionnaire survey of those visiting Kingston town centre by car indicated that a small, but significant, proportion of people visit Kingston town centre less often due to their perceptions of traffic and parking conditions.

Chapter 3: Parking vision & objectives

8. The policy background relating to parking is complex. In Kingston, proper account must be given to policy at a national, London-wide and local level. Both national and London policy emphasises the role of parking in the management of demand for car travel and the need to carefully consider the implications of changes to parking provision in the wider policy context of sustainable development.
9. A coherent vision and set of objectives have been set which reflect the issues that the parking strategy needs to address and the contribution of parking interventions to the wider transport policy framework. A vision for the Kingston Town Centre Parking Strategy has been devised which relates strongly to the Council's desire to maintain and enhance Kingston's role as a viable metropolitan centre, limiting the negative effects of traffic and making travel more sustainable. The vision is:

“The car will continue to be an important mode of access to all forms of activity within the town centre. Over time as demand for travel to the town centre increases, parking will be managed so as to ensure that car use does not contribute towards worsening environmental conditions or a reduction in economic vitality. At the same time, other more sustainable modes of travel will be developed to make them more attractive for a wider range of journeys.”

10. In addition, a set of ‘planning objectives’ have been agreed which represent the answer to the question “What is parking management supposed to achieve?” It is clearly important for the strategy to be objective-led to ensure that the elements of the strategy combine to deliver a set of agreed outcomes. The agreed set of planning objectives are:
- i. To protect and reinforce Kingston town centre’s role as a sustainable retail, business, education, leisure and residential centre in the context of competition from other centres.
 - ii. To reduce the reliance on car travel, particularly at peak times and hence reduce peak traffic levels and congestion.
 - iii. To assist in improvements to the safety, quality and reliability of other modes of travel including buses, walking and cycling.
 - iv. To encourage modal shift to more sustainable modes and to support the Council’s Park & Ride policy.
 - v. To improve accessibility for those with mobility impairment.
 - vi. To protect and enhance environmental and visual amenity.
 - vii. To maximise the benefits new developments can offer for sustainable transport and minimise any adverse effects.
 - viii. To release temporary surface level car parks for retail or residential development.
 - ix. To support the redevelopment of the town centre to simplify parking arrangements and bus movements, and to enhance walking and cycling routes within KTC.

Chapter 4: Determining the strategy

11. The strategy must support and enhance the vitality of the town centre, but in doing so it must recognise that the potential demand for travel to the town centre by car cannot be accommodated in a way that is economically and environmentally sustainable. Most growth in demand for travel can only be accommodated by providing alternatives to the car; encouraging some demand to shift to other quieter periods (the off-peak) and, potentially, some form of demand restraint at the busiest times.
12. On an average day, peak demand for parking does not out-strip overall supply although certain car parks are under considerably more pressure than others. During the Christmas period, demand for parking is 20% to 30% above this average. Within this context, a key conclusion is that it is difficult to see a case for additional parking supply in Kingston town centre. That conclusion holds good over the 20 year period and means that a ‘policy’ level of 7,000 off-street public spaces needs no upward revision. The strategy must therefore consider how maximum use of existing parking stock can be catered for whilst avoiding the unacceptably high levels of congestion, and the resultant adverse side-effects, which are currently experienced at Christmas and particularly busy Saturdays at other times of year.
13. The parking strategy must also support the Council’s wider aspiration of meeting all additional demand for travel to Kingston by non-car modes. Phased implementation of the parking strategy will support a step change in public transport provision to encourage modal shift in order to provide the necessary capacity for travel to the town centre. This is most easily achievable, and most useful, during peak periods. Operation

of out-of-town Park & Ride sites, catering for regular commuters and for shoppers, will play an important role in providing this capacity. In some cases, demand for travel can be reduced through promotion of Travel Plans, home delivery schemes or tele-working. It is understood that some of the larger retailers are already working with Travel Plans or provide home delivery services and will work further on this as part of the Business Improvement District plans.

14. The strategy concentrates on managing existing stock more effectively, within the town centre's highway network capacity, to provide a more attractive and efficient parking environment. This must be carefully managed to avoid a modal shift in favour of the private car.

Chapter 5: Strategy elements

15. A wide range of interventions has been considered with the intention of supporting achievement of the established planning objectives. Delivery of many of these can begin quickly and many represent ongoing commitments rather than specific deliverables. As such, the benefits of implementing the strategy should begin to emerge in the short term although, by their nature, some benefits will take longer to be realised.
16. Some of the most significant elements of the strategy are:
 - i. To **hold the amount of public parking stock** broadly at current levels (c. 7,300 spaces on Saturdays) but to shift the balance away from long stay (commuter-focussed) towards short stay (retail-focussed). Also, to provide replacement long stay parking capacity through the phasing-in of new permanent Park and Ride sites.
 - ii. **Maximising the efficiency** of use of car parks by concentrating parking into fewer, larger car parks. In part, this will occur naturally as older car parks are replaced by newer ones and temporary car parks such as Ashdown Road are redeveloped.
 - iii. Encourage use of lesser-utilised car parks by providing better **information and marketing** regarding the location of car parks, their facilities and availability. Various forms of media could be adopted including leafleting vehicles in car parks, radio, the Internet and signage (including making better use of variable message signing).
 - iv. Encourage **spreading of peak periods** of demand to make more use of the available parking capacity. Primarily, this will require action by retailers by marketing of the town centre, events and additional late night shopping days but may include consideration of variable parking charges.
 - v. Improved parking facilities for **wheelchair users and the ambulatory disabled** at off-street and on-street locations.
 - vi. Manage car **parking charges** to encourage short stay and discourage long-stay parking and to encourage use of the under-utilised car parks such as the Bittoms

and Drapers. In parallel, consider standardisation of payment mechanisms following pilot at Drapers and Cattle Market car parks. This will require co-operation from retailers. Introduction of evening charges at designated RBK car parks in parallel with complimentary modifications to neighbouring on-street controls.

- vii. Improvements in the overall **quality and ambience** of car parks and walking routes between car parks and ultimate destinations. Ensure that pedestrian improvements are undertaken as part of the Council's walking strategy. Work towards Secure Car Park status for all car parks (several of the largest car parks have already gained accreditation).
- viii. Rationalisation of car park / area **naming conventions** to make locations more understandable using colours and recognisable area names.
- ix. Continued designation of **on-street spaces** for specific users (residents, business, disabled users) based on a hierarchy of need. Also, efficient enforcement of on-street controls must be maintained to ensure the management strategy is effective.
- x. Employ **parking standards** for new developments below maximum levels whenever possible to control number of parking spaces and to further encourage low-car developments such as the Rotunda.
- xi. Review the operation of the **relief road** with a view to simplifying movements to minimise circulating traffic, and encourage use of car parks which are currently unattractive as the access or egress is lengthy (for example, egress towards London from Cattle Market requires circulation of the entire relief road or an exit route via Orchard Road and Fairfield South).

Chapter 6: Conclusions

- 17. Kingston is a popular and successful metropolitan centre with significant retail, leisure, cultural and business functions. Everybody involved in shaping the town centre's future share a common vision of a more prosperous, vibrant and environmentally sustainable Kingston. Through the K+20 initiative, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and its partners are looking to secure this vision.
- 18. To achieve it, some change is required to the way the town centre functions and the way it is marketed. All parties share concerns over the public's perception and experience of Kingston's traffic and parking, a lack of growth in retail expenditure and a degraded environmental condition. The key to achieving the vision is reaching a common understanding of the problems and their causes and working together to develop a set of solutions which are the most effective and are acceptable to all parties.
- 19. Parking issues form an intrinsic part of the K+20 process. The ease with which people can park, the charges they pay and the quality of provision strongly influence decisions about trip-making in general and journeys to Kingston in particular. However, it should be remembered that only 30-40% of visitors to Kingston travel by car. Further reducing visitors' dependence on the car and promoting more sustainable

non-car modes is central to the Council's transport policy and the transport policies of London and national government.

20. This strategy aims to balance the potentially conflicting demands of additional travel and sustainability. As such, it supports enhancement of Kingston's economic, social and cultural roles by recommending ways of improving the overall quality of the parking experience and managing supply better so that, for the majority of people and for the majority of the time, people can find somewhere to park and can do so in an environment which they feel is safe and secure. However, there are and will remain times when the amount of supply simply cannot cater for demand.
21. This study demonstrates that the option of "building oneself out of trouble" may provide short-term gains but would result in the long-term degradation of parking and traffic conditions in Kingston. Instead, ways must be found to retain and increase the quality and availability of travel opportunities to the town centre which will not adversely affect congestion or environmental conditions. Parking management is only one element of the necessary package of measures; whilst the quality of the parking experience must undoubtedly improve, parking must also be regulated in line with the timing of changes in availability of alternatives.
22. Kingston town centre cannot be seen in isolation either in terms of policy or its role in the wider transport network. The Council has real constraints on what it is able to do in that it is dependant on Transport for London for capital funding for major new infrastructure and is answerable to the Greater London Authority for its transport policies and interventions.
23. In addition over the lifetime of this strategy, Kingston will experience many outside influences which will affect both supply and demand for travel and parking. At a high level, these will include national economic conditions whilst at a regional level expansion of Heathrow Airport and the central London congestion charging zone would all have large impacts.
24. In response to this uncertain future, it is impractical to strictly relate the measures and policies described in Chapter 5 to particular dates, milestones or 'trigger events'. In understanding the issues and devising solutions, however, it has become clear that, to a greater or lesser degree, all of the interventions proposed should be pursued now and for the foreseeable future. The Council and its partners should concentrate on what can be achieved today for those travelling to Kingston tomorrow and be proactive in developing longer-term solutions instead of reacting to change as it occurs.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Steer Davies Gleave was commissioned in December 2002 to undertake a study to develop a parking strategy for Kingston town centre. The study responds to a number of objectives as set out in the study brief. During the inception phase, these objectives were amended slightly to reflect better the agreed study approach. The study objectives are to:
- assess the current level of parking supply, including Private Non-Residential (PNR) parking;
 - assess current parking demand and examine how the spaces are used;
 - assess how parking is currently managed (short stay/long stay mix, opening hours, charging, signing) and how it will be managed in the future;
 - examine how parking demand may change over the 20 year period;
 - assess the effects of this change on traffic, economic vitality, sustainability and overarching Council objectives;
 - consider how parking stock, Park & Ride, public transport and land use can be managed to achieve these objectives; and
 - recommend appropriate future levels of parking supply and a management strategy to make best use of that supply.
- 1.2 This Final Report sets out the strategy, its components, rationale and likely outcomes. It also describes the way in which the strategy was developed, including the involvement of a large group of stakeholders. This report is supported by two additional documents prepared during the study, the Interim Report and Report of Surveys, a summary of which are provided in the following chapter.
- 1.3 Throughout the study, references to ‘Kingston town centre’ relate to the area defined as such in the Unitary Development Plan. This area is shown in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 KINGSTON TOWN CENTRE UDP DEFINITION

Strategy development

- 1.4 This document will influence strongly the parking policies of the Royal Borough of Kingston which in turn determine parking conditions in the town centre in the short, medium and long term. It was vital therefore that the way in which the strategy has been developed be robust and transparent. The strategy development process is summarised below with an emphasis on the role of the client organisation and stakeholders.

Client involvement

- 1.5 The strategy has emerged through a process of continual liaison with Council officers across a range of disciplines. Meetings have been held regularly to report on progress and discuss the next stages of the study. Furthermore, a structured “brainstorming” session was held comprising Council officers and study team members during the strategy development stage.
- 1.6 Via Council officers, relevant elected Members have also been kept informed of the study’s progress. There have also been a number of meetings between Members and the consultants. In January, an initial briefing and discussion was held with Members at which their support for the study process was established. Subsequently, several Members attended the stakeholder briefing in February and a second internal briefing on the survey findings in July.
- 1.7 Prior to the finalisation of the report the draft strategy was presented to the same elected Members group in September 2003..

Stakeholder involvement

- 1.8 A key aim of the study has been to ensure meaningful involvement of those who are most able to contribute to shaping the final strategy. To this end, a stakeholder register was established at the beginning of the study containing the names and contact details of those thought to be most pertinent to involve. Throughout the study, the register has been updated to reflect broadening involvement. At the end of the study, the register contained details of 94 individuals representing 53 different organisations including public sector bodies, local retailers and businesses, neighbourhood and interest groups.
- 1.9 The register was used to identify stakeholders who were invited to a briefing / workshop session in February 2003 to help inform the study’s scope and process. During the workshop, stakeholders were asked to consider existing problems, opportunities and constraints as well as possible solutions. A record of the comments made by the attendees was made and was distributed to all those invited to the briefing and those subsequently added to the stakeholder register.
- 1.10 In addition to the stakeholder briefing, meetings were held with businesses and private car park operators to better inform them about the study and to request information. These meetings provided an opportunity for the stakeholders to give their views on parking in Kingston Town Centre and have also assisted in the data collection process.

- 1.11 Steer Davies Gleave was invited to attend the monthly Kingston Town Centre Management Group meeting held on the morning of the 7th February. The key aims, methodology and timescales of the study were presented to the group and a discussion held.
- 1.12 A register has been maintained of any written or verbal consultation received and actions taken to respond to them. For example, eleven written responses were received following distribution of the findings of the stakeholder workshop.
- 1.13 An executive summary of the draft strategy was distributed to stakeholders for written comment before the strategy was finalised, and further views were elicited from a meeting attended by 15 stakeholder groups on the 8th October and a discussion with key retailing interests as part of a wider K+20 event on the 10th October (K+20 is the name of the Council initiative to develop a long term masterplan for Kingston town centre).

Report structure

- 1.14 This document is structured as follows:
- Chapter 2 summarises the **key issues** relating to parking which emerged during the study and which the strategy aims to address;
 - Chapter 3 recommends a **vision** for parking in Kingston town centre and a number of **objectives** for parking intervention;
 - Chapter 4 describes the **rationale** behind the strategy and the overall approach;
 - Chapter 5 provides more detail on the **elements of the strategy** itself; and
 - Chapter 6 discusses the likely **effects of the strategy** and draws together key **conclusions and recommendations**.

2. KEY ISSUES

Introduction

- 2.1 Considerable efforts were made during the early stages of the study to establish all of the key issues relating to parking in Kingston town centre. Understanding these issues was important in order to review the study objectives, ensure all pertinent issues were addressed and to devise the candidate elements for the final strategy.
- 2.2 The issues are drawn from a number of sources the most significant of which were:
- national, regional and local policy;
 - the client group (including previously commissioned studies);
 - stakeholders (through the stakeholder briefing and subsequent consultation);
 - analysis of existing information; and
 - collection and analysis of new data and information.
- 2.3 In the early stages, there was little evidence to support or refute some of the issues raised. Whilst anecdotal evidence is helpful, it becomes much more useful when supported by measurable fact. The collection of primary and secondary data during this study was intended therefore to provide this degree of certainty in order to provide a robust basis for developing the strategy further.
- 2.4 The following sections of this chapter summarise the key issues arising during the study and which the strategy aims to address. More detailed information can be found in two supporting documents prepared in June 2003 namely:
- the **Interim Report** containing a policy and information review and refinement of study objectives; and
 - the **Report of Surveys** containing detailed analysis of car park counts, on-street parking surveys and interview surveys conducted during May 2003.

Transport overview

- 2.5 Kingston town centre is affected by traffic congestion, delaying all road users and seriously detracting from the environmental quality of the area and the visitor experience. Kingston is also an extremely successful metropolitan centre, particularly with regard to retailing and leisure, and the Council and local business are naturally keen to ensure this vitality continues and is built upon.
- 2.6 The debate as to the causes of this congestion has centred on three issues: the level of traffic to the town centre itself; the level of through traffic; and the effects of vehicles queuing to enter car parks. Without considerable additional research, it is difficult to

be absolutely certain as to the contribution of each of these issues. However, an initial analysis of the situation has shown that, during an average week¹,

- at peak times, traffic levels are close to, or exceed, the capacity of some of the main junctions on the relief road (therefore congestion would occur with or without vehicles queuing to enter the car parks);
- an estimated 14,400 vehicles park in the town centre on an average weekday and 18,700 on an average Saturday; and
- through-traffic is thought to account for approximately two-thirds of traffic entering Kingston town centre on weekdays and half on Saturdays.

2.7 As it is generally accepted that it is neither possible nor desirable to increase road capacity, at times there is, and is likely to remain, demand for car travel to and through the town centre in excess of available highway capacity. Therefore the Council has historically pursued a dual transport policy of improving alternative and sustainable modes of travel whilst restraining traffic growth by controlling parking and forgoing major increases to road network capacity.

2.8 It is believed that, at busy times, there is considerable ‘latent demand’ for parking in Kingston town centre which is suppressed by motorists’ perceptions of expected traffic congestion, parking availability or both. This situation certainly applies in the peak pre-Christmas period. This means that provision of additional parking spaces will result in more car journeys to the town centre at already busy times and therefore additional traffic on approach roads to the town. Whilst improvements in access to car parks may reduce disruption to the road network caused by vehicles queuing to enter car parks, the initial analysis above suggests that, at peak times, the extra traffic generated by additional parking spaces would worsen overall town centre congestion.

¹ The figures presented in the bullet points have been adjusted to represent an average week. For more information, see sections 4.5 to 4.12 of this report.

Current parking supply

- 2.9 At the time of writing, there are some 8,760 parking spaces² in Kingston town centre. Of these, 6,956 are in off-street public car parks, supplemented by 314 on-street spaces, and a further 1,490 spaces are in permanent off-street private car parks which are not available to most shoppers or many other visitors. Whilst all these spaces are available for use during the week, closure of some car parks means that not all are available at weekends. The main public car parks in Kingston town centre are shown in Figure 2.1. Table 2.1 summarises the current parking supply.

TABLE 2.1 CURRENT PARKING SUPPLY (JULY 2003) - SPACES

Type	Mon – Fri	Saturday	Sunday
Council car parks	2,963	2,963	2,150
On-street bays	314	314	314
Privately operated car parks	982	982	982
Retail car parks (e.g. Bentalls)	3,011	3,011	3,011
Publicly-available spaces	7,270	7,270	6,457
Private car parks	1,490	1,288	1,291
Total spaces	8,760	8,558	7,748

Note: Private car parks figure includes some estimated values.

- 2.10 In the near future, a number of events will affect the amount of parking available:
- the closure and reconstruction of Bentalls B car park for rebuilding (approximately 600 spaces);
 - the reduction in size of Thameside car park due to riverside environmental improvements;
 - the likely pedestrianisation of Castle Street; and
 - the possible use of old London Road for a street market.

² This figure includes the 703 spaces in Seven Kings car park.

FIGURE 2.1 PUBLIC CAR PARKS

Current parking demand

- 2.11 The following paragraphs draw on surveys undertaken to inform this study. The survey programme was designed to make best use of the available resources by “filling in the gaps” in existing knowledge. Surveys were undertaken across a three week period in May and June 2003. The exact nature of the surveys were defined by posing a set of questions which the surveys were then designed to answer.
- 2.12 Car park entry / exit counts were performed to collect data regarding the usage of, and maximum accumulation within, twelve public and private off-street town centre car parks. The number of vehicles in each car park at the beginning and end of the survey was also recorded. Data was collected for Saturday 10th May and Wednesday, 14th May 2003 from 7:00am and 9:00pm. If a car park’s opening hours were shorter, survey times were adjusted accordingly.
- 2.13 Ticket sales at Council car parks show that demand for parking varies across the year with the quietest times during the school summer holiday and the busiest times around Christmas and New Year. Analysis of usage of Council-owned car parks across 2001 and 2002 shows that demand peaks in the week before Christmas at 30% above the average for the year as a whole. The two days surveyed were chosen as they were believed to fall in a period of the year with average levels of demand for the Council’s car parks. In fact, following comparison with previous data the level of parking activity on the survey days has been judged to fall slightly below average overall demand. The results presented here have, where stated, been adjusted accordingly. For more information, refer to sections 4.5 to 4.12 of this report.
- 2.14 A questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding the parking behaviour and attitudes of visitors to Kingston town centre. Analysis of the survey data also allowed cross tabulation between parking behaviour and attitudes, thereby giving an insight into the decision-making process of those visiting Kingston. Up to three survey staff at a time undertook on-street interviews at several points across the town centre between the 14th and 24th May 2003 on both weekdays and Saturdays. In an effort to intercept workers, shoppers and other visitors, the survey staff were located in key public areas of the town centre. Approximately 70% of surveys were completed on Clarence Street, Church Street and Market Place and a further 15% in the Bentall Centre. For those respondents who had not travelled to Kingston by car, the interview was immediately terminated. In total, some 1,111 questionnaires were successfully completed.
- 2.15 In total, some 16,900 vehicles used the main car parks on the Saturday and about 11,400 on the Wednesday of the survey (May 2003 adjusted). On Saturdays, Bentalls car park catered for most cars, followed by John Lewis, Eden Walk and Cattle Market (surface and basement). On weekdays, slightly more cars used John Lewis than Bentalls car park, followed by Eden Walk and the Cattle Market.

- 2.16 A number of car parks became full at some point on the days surveyed³. On the Saturday, Bentalls and John Lewis retail car parks and the temporary car parks at Ashdown Road and Lady Booth Road all became full. Eden Walk car park also became full but only for a short period. On the Wednesday, Ashdown Road and John Lewis car parks became full at some point. No other car parks exceeded 95% capacity on either survey day.
- 2.17 Taking the combined capacity of the car parks surveyed (over 5,000 spaces) there was no time on either survey day when all spaces were filled. During the time of peak accumulation of vehicles, some 1,490 / 27% (Wednesday adjusted) and 860 / 15% (Saturday) spaces remained empty. These figures do not take into account the additional 703 spaces in the new Seven Kings car park opened after the survey dates. On weekdays, approximately 760 spaces in the surveyed car parks are reserved for specific users with season tickets / permits. (Whilst other permit and season ticket holders exist, they do not have specific spaces reserved for them). Some of the empty spaces would have been reserved and so not available for public use. Even assuming that all the vehicles observed entering the car parks parked in public rather than reserved spaces, there would remain over 700 spare “public” spaces during the weekday representing 15% of total stock.
- 2.18 In reality, 100% of spaces will never be occupied and 95% usage is a reasonable figure for maximum operational capacity. Certain car parks were found to be at operational capacity for some periods of the day, however there is clearly scope for additional demand to be met within existing car parks as a whole.
- 2.19 Despite the number of empty spaces available throughout the survey days, there is a common perception that there is insufficient parking available in Kingston town centre across the year. This is expressed by retailers who are concerned about competition from other centres, such as Bluewater, with ample free parking. However, one of the key findings of the Kingston Retail Study was that the current level of car parking spaces is “perfectly adequate” for a centre the size of Kingston with some 230,000 sm² of floorspace⁴.
- 2.20 A questionnaire survey of those visiting Kingston town centre by car was undertaken for this study. It indicated that a small, but significant, proportion of people visit Kingston town centre less often due to their perceptions of traffic and parking conditions (see section 2.29). It is quite possible that there is a further group of potential visitors who do not visit Kingston at all due to the perception of traffic and/or parking issues, though the evidence is somewhat anecdotal.
- 2.21 Retailers, and business in general, are also concerned over their ability to recruit and retain some staff who are finding it difficult or expensive to park close to their places of employment. Public transport alternatives are thought to be poor.

³ For the purposes of this analysis, a car park is assumed to be full if the number of cars in the car park is more than 95% of the number of spaces.

⁴ Roger Tym & Partners (2002) §7.19

Car park choice factors

- 2.22 Two factors stand out above others as being most important in determining where people park. Two-thirds of respondents to the questionnaire survey chose their parking location to be close to their ultimate destination and one-third simply out of habit. Price and knowledge of where there are spaces or no queues are also important factors. An analysis of shops visited shows that, whilst people do park close to their destination for convenience shopping, they are much less likely to do so for comparison shopping.
- 2.23 Although not stated specifically in the questionnaire survey, an analysis of arrival corridor and parking location shows a strong correlation between these two variables. Clearly, this represents an element of convenience where drivers wish to minimise their journey length and time by parking at the first car park they pass which is convenient to their ultimate destination. Furthermore, it is possible that a proportion of drivers determine their arrival corridor depending on the car park at which they intend to park.
- 2.24 This inter-dependency is particularly important as it is the Bentalls and John Lewis car parks which are under most pressure and over one in three vehicles parking in the town centre arrive via Kingston Bridge. The survey shows that nearly 80% of those crossing Kingston Bridge to park in the town centre use either Bentalls or John Lewis car parks.
- 2.25 Many lesser factors also influence where people park. Sometimes, specific car parks have something which attracts certain users. Many users avoid Fairfield NCP car park, for example, as it is expensive; and some users of The Bittoms and St. James's Road NCP car parks prefer them because they normally have spaces available.

Duration of stay

- 2.26 On average, those who responded to the questionnaire survey in the town centre spent 2 hours 45 minutes in Kingston. Shoppers stay less than this (2½ hours on average) and workers more. Duration varies considerably by parking location due to the type of visitor or the dominant category of car park user. For example, those staying at St. James's Road NCP car park (predominantly used by those working at Lever Brothers) stay on average 340 minutes, whilst those at John Lewis car park stay less than 150 minutes.

Perceptions of parking and traffic

- 2.27 Over 40% of people interviewed find it easy to park in Kingston and only 17% find it difficult. Only 10% of people spent more than five minutes searching for a parking space and/or queuing to get into a car park although the average search and/or queue time on a Saturday is just over five minutes.
- 2.28 Almost half of respondents believe traffic congestion is 'average' in Kingston compared to elsewhere. However, 42% consider it 'heavy' and only 7% believe it to be 'light' by comparison to other areas. There is little variation in opinion depending on which way people drive into Kingston.

- 2.29 More than half of respondents modify their behaviour as a result of parking conditions in Kingston. The most common ways in which people do this is to avoid Saturdays or weekends completely or to re-time their journeys to avoid busy periods. Approximately one person in 14 visits Kingston less as a result of parking conditions.
- 2.30 More than half of respondents also modify their behaviour due to traffic conditions. Again, the most common ways in which they do this is to avoid peak hours, weekends or to visit earlier in the day.

Management of parking stock

- 2.31 The overall amount of parking stock is clearly not the only issue – the way in which the stock is managed is crucial in ensuring its most efficient usage. The parking stock must be managed to overcome congestion at the most popular car parks by encouraging use of others and displacing demand to quieter periods. This must be achieved whilst protecting the town centre’s retail activity. Many issues emerged about the management and operation of car parking, especially car parks. The key issues raised are discussed below.
- 2.32 The Council currently attempts to control the usage of car parks primarily through signage and price. Evidence from the questionnaire survey however indicates that these methods seem ineffective – both these factors appear insignificant in the decision-making process when compared to habit, convenience and proximity to destination.
- 2.33 Whilst the use of signage can be improved, much more care needs to be given to the use of pricing mechanisms. The current Council policy of maximising its revenue stream means that charges at Council car parks are above those of the retail car parks (which are not run so as to maximise parking revenue) and approximately the same as those at private car parks such as NCP (which are geared more towards weekday permit operation). Generally, Council car park charges in Kingston range from £1 to £1.80 per hour.
- 2.34 Price not only influences choice of parking location, but also the choice of destination and ultimately the decision to travel at all. Parking charges in Kingston town centre must therefore be considered against those in competing locations such as Richmond, Guildford, Croydon and Bluewater. At present, Kingston’s charges are generally higher than those in all these locations with the biggest differences being to Guildford (typical charge of 60 pence per hour) and Bluewater (where parking is free).

Retailing issues

- 2.35 To support the development of its policies towards retail provision the Council has had undertaken a study of likely future retail demand in the town centre. The following observations are primarily drawn from this work, the Kingston Retail Study⁵.

⁵ Kingston Retail Study Final & Supplementary Reports (2002) Roger Tym & Partners

- 2.36 Based on an assessment of growth in comparison goods expenditure, there is a need for an additional 14,500-20,000 m² (net) of floorspace by 2006 and 35-48,000 m² by 2011. However, there is little expenditure growth to support new food store provision. This extra capacity would be provided primarily through intensification of existing space (12,000 m²) and redevelopment of the Eden Quarter (19,000 m²)
- 2.37 Kingston town centre's catchment area for non-bulky comparison goods is very extensive. To retain Kingston's market share, when sales are increasing, retailers will need to increase sales densities (£/m²) and/or provide additional floorspace.
- 2.38 The Customer Care Survey undertaken by Kingston Town Centre Management suggests that 30-40%⁶ of visitors travel to the town centre by car, roughly 40% by bus, 6% by train, and approximately 20% by bicycle or on foot. Overall, Kingston appears to have a higher proportion of car-borne trips compared with Croydon, Sutton or Hounslow. Kingston's greater retail significance in relation to these other locations may explain why a higher proportion of Kingston's visitors are "cash rich and time hungry" and therefore more inclined to use the car.
- 2.39 Additionally, research by LPAC suggests that, whilst public transport users and those walking and cycling to town centres may spend less per trip and make less frequent trips, the fact that car users are more mobile means that they are less loyal to one centre and make less frequent trips to a wider variety of locations⁷.
- 2.40 The quality of the shopping provision in Kingston town centre is of over-riding importance in attracting shoppers to the town. Shoppers are less concerned with aspects such as proximity and ease of access, suggesting that distance and traffic congestion are not barriers that discourage shoppers from visiting Kingston town centre. Further research for LPAC and the Department for Transport has indicated that "there is no evidence that a relaxed attitude to parking [and hence greater provision] improves economic performance [of town centres in London]."
- 2.41 After a decade of steady growth Kingston may be starting to lose market share. Maintaining market share is critical to the continued profitability of businesses and the town centre as a whole⁸. Whilst trading conditions may be good for many of the retailers (54% of those responding to the Retail Study survey said turnover had increased over the previous year), trading conditions are less rosy for the main anchor stores – some of which have experienced static trading conditions over the past 18 months to two years. The main anchor retailers consider that the primary issues contributing to the difficult trading conditions relate to poor accessibility to the town centre, road traffic congestion and a shortfall in the availability of car parking. The price of parking in Kingston has also been cited.

⁶ The actual mode share recorded in 2001 was 40% and in 2002 30%

⁷ 1997 Parking Advice, London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC)

⁸ Kingston Retail Study Final Report (2002) section 7.3

Potential for modal shift

- 2.42 As stated above, a key Council aim is the improvement of sustainable alternatives to car use, particularly public transport, walking and cycling. Within the context of a parking strategy, greater use of alternatives to the private car offer the possibility of either reducing the amount of parking required or reducing demand from certain users to provide additional capacity for other users.
- 2.43 The existing public transport network provides variable levels of accessibility from Kingston's hinterland. By comparing the home locations of all visitors to Kingston town centre to those who drive, it is clear that disproportionately high numbers of car users travel from more distant areas or those areas with the poorest public transport connections. The challenge therefore is to provide realistic, affordable, travel alternatives to those areas without them at present. This therefore requires co-ordinated planning across local authority boundaries.

3. PARKING VISION, OBJECTIVES & POLICY

Vision

- 3.1 A coherent vision and set of objectives have been established which reflect the issues that parking policy needs to address and the contribution of parking interventions to the wider transport policy framework. The vision for the Kingston Town Centre Parking Strategy relates strongly to the Council's desire to maintain and enhance Kingston's role as a metropolitan centre, limiting the negative effects of traffic and making travel more sustainable.
- 3.2 The vision for parking in Kingston town centre is as follows:

"The car will continue to be an important mode of access to all forms of activity within the town centre. Over time as demand for travel to the town centre increases, parking will be managed so as to ensure that car use does not contribute towards worsening environmental conditions or a reduction in economic vitality. At the same time, other more sustainable modes of travel will be developed to make them more attractive for a wider range of journeys."

Planning objectives

- 3.3 It is clearly important for the strategy to be objective-led to ensure that the elements of the strategy combine to deliver a set of agreed outcomes. A set of planning objectives has been agreed. They are:
- i. To protect and reinforce Kingston town centre's role as a sustainable retail, business, education, leisure and residential centre in the context of competition from other centres.
 - ii. To reduce the reliance on car travel, particularly at peak times and hence reduce peak traffic levels and congestion.
 - iii. To assist in improvements to the safety, quality and reliability of other modes of travel including buses, walking and cycling.
 - iv. To encourage modal shift to more sustainable modes and to complement the Council's Park & Ride policy.
 - v. To improve accessibility for those with mobility impairment.
 - vi. To protect and enhance environmental and visual amenity.
 - vii. To maximise the benefits new developments can offer for sustainable transport and minimise any adverse effects.
 - viii. To release temporary surface level car parks for retail or residential development.
 - ix. To support the redevelopment of the town centre to simplify parking arrangements and bus movements, and to enhance walking and cycling routes within KTC.

Transport policy review

- 3.4 The policy background relating to parking is complex. In Kingston, proper account must be given to policy at a national, London-wide and local level. Within London, the Mayor's Transport Strategy (2001) acts as the transport planning framework for all 33 London Boroughs. The strategy emphasises the role of parking in the management of demand for car travel, maintaining network capacity for essential users through enforcement, and parking provision for specific users such as the disabled, and service vehicles. The strategy highlights the need to set parking provision, particularly off street, within the wider context of a transport strategy. The strategy requests that all Boroughs should develop a parking and enforcement strategy.
- 3.5 The Mayor's Transport Strategy notes that *"London's transport crisis harms business efficiency, threatens to undermine the city's competitive position in the world, and worsens the quality of life of Londoners. Traffic congestion is such that roads in central London and some London town centres are now approaching gridlock – polluting the city's air and causing misery to motorists, bus passengers and pedestrians alike."*
- 3.6 The Interim Transport Plan (ITP) 2001-2002 for Kingston upon Thames sets out the Council's transport policy for the Borough. The vision for the plan is *"To provide a quality transport system which offers choice and achieves the community aspirations for the environment and economic well being"*. The ITP sets out eight strategic goals for transport which match closely those established by the Department for Transport:
- to reduce car dependency and promote more sustainable transport choice;
 - to improve the overall efficiency of the transport system;
 - to improve environmental quality and health;
 - to improve personal safety and security;
 - to ensure the provision of an equitable transport system;
 - to maintain the existing infrastructure;
 - to maintain economic activity, vitality and viability; and
 - developing partnerships to promote and improve transport provision.
- 3.7 The ITP recognises the current move towards more stringent standards for parking as set out in PPG13 and the draft London Plan. More generous parking standards in Kingston's traditional Surrey catchment area and an increasing desire by local residents for expansion of residents parking schemes have highlighted the need to review parking standards in the UDP revision process. The ITP also recognises the role of parking policies in other areas of transport policy and provision such as improving public transport and travel choices and improving the sustainability of travel.

Planning policy review

- 3.8 Planning Policy Guidance 13 - Transport (PPG13) contains national policies relating to provision of parking at new developments. It seeks to encourage integration of land use and planning issues to reduce the growth and length of motorised trips by encouraging use of alternative means. PPG13 encourages Local Authorities to limit parking, both off and on street, to reduce reliance on car journeys to work and for other purposes.
- 3.9 The revised PPG13 (2001) requires local authorities, for the first time, to set *maximum*, rather than minimum parking standards for most developments to encourage less private parking within developments unless the parking is publicly accessible. PPG13 also requires consideration to be given to the effects of new developments on parking in surrounding roads.
- 3.10 Parking policies, PPG13 states, should be used *“alongside other planning and transport measures to promote sustainable transport choices and reduce reliance on the car for work and other journeys.”* This point is expanded on later in the document: *“The availability of car parking has a major influence on the means of transport people choose for their journeys. Some studies suggest that levels of parking can be more significant than levels of public transport provision in determining means of travel (particularly for the journey to work) even for locations very well served by public transport. Car parking also takes up a large amount of space in development, is costly to business and reduces densities. Reducing the amount of parking in new development (and in the expansion and change of use in existing development) is essential, as part of a package of planning and transport measures, to promote sustainable travel choices.”*
- 3.11 Regional Planning Guidance 9 (South East) provides *“a regional framework for the preparation of local authority development plans”* thereby providing a framework for local strategies and programmes including the Mayor’s Transport Strategy, Interim Transport Plans and UDPs. RPG9 encourages the location of new development in locations which are, or have the potential to be, highly accessible, by non-car modes. Furthermore, RPG9 advocates the use of supply and pricing of car parking to encourage the use of public transport; and the adoption of a consistent policy for maximum parking standards across the region as outlined in PPG13.
- 3.12 The Draft London Plan sits within this policy context. However, the maximum residential parking standards set within it are generally more restrictive than those in PPG13 (parking standards for employment uses are as proposed in RPG9). Annex 4 of the draft Plan deals in great detail with parking standards and how they should be applied through the planning process. In addition, the annex discusses the importance of the role of parking policies at a strategic level to assist in broader aims such as reduced reliance on the car and enhancing town centre vitality. The annex calls on all boroughs to prepare Parking & Enforcement Plans to demonstrate how they intend to manage parking in a holistic manner.
- 3.13 The Royal Borough of Kingston Unitary Development Plan 1998 First Proposed Alteration (2002) sets out the strategic and local planning framework for guiding future developments in the Borough. Kingston town centre, as the largest commercial centre in the Borough, is seen as vital for sustaining vitality and growth in the

Borough as a whole. Relevant policies relating to Kingston town centre and parking are discussed in detail in the UDP.

- 3.14 Whilst the UDP sets maximum parking standards for Kingston the Mayor has the authority to request changes to these standards where they are deemed to be divergent from the draft London Plan. At the time of writing, the Mayor has requested a number of alterations to the standards proposed in the First Proposed Alteration (2002).
- 3.15 The relevance of further guidance, including PPG 3 (Housing) and PPG 6 (Town Centre and Retail Development), is considered in the Interim Report.

4. DETERMINING THE STRATEGY

Understanding the current position

- 4.1 Overleaf Figure 4.1 shows the issues facing supply, or otherwise, of peak parking capacity. There is a known level of observed demand for parking, and an unknown level of latent demand (demand which would manifest itself if parking space and road capacity increased). Additionally, a proportion of the known off-peak demand can be considered to be latent as it is demand which has been offset from the peak periods. Total potential demand (observed plus latent) is determined by the economy, catchment population, the centre's retail appeal and so on. For the vast majority of the year, the observed level of car parking demand in Kingston is lower than the available capacity.
- 4.2 The strategy must aim to avoid a situation whereby the vitality of the town centre is compromised because the potential demand for travel to the town centre by all modes cannot be accommodated. In the future scenario (right hand chart), the overall demand for car-borne travel is shown to have increased. In part, this may only be accommodated by making modifications to the highway network as it is clear from the Christmas period in Kingston that traffic conditions are untenable when all available parking stock is utilised, and motorists are hunting for spaces or queuing.
- 4.3 Further demand for travel to Kingston town centre, as shown in yellow, is shown to be met by providing alternatives to the car; encouraging some demand to shift to other periods (the off-peak) and potentially utilising some form of demand restraint. It is assumed that the maximum possible amount of demand has been catered for in this way. The remaining latent (unmet) demand is problematic as it is the revenue from this demand which is lost to the town centre's economy. However, the level of unmet demand in the future scenario may well be smaller than at present.
- 4.4 Once all attempts have been made to accommodate demand through the above methods, and should unmet demand remain, a policy decision needs to be made to either accept this position or to cater for this unmet demand through additional parking capacity (and associated highway improvements). If the result of this decision is the creation of additional parking capacity, at least this decision will have been made in the full knowledge of the likely implications for the highways, traffic and other spin-off effects. It should be noted, however, that if additional highway works are required then an economic case will have to be made where all of their positive and negative impacts (i.e. not just the impacts on the local retail economy) are off-set against the cost of the works

Validity of May 2003 survey results

- 4.5 The selection of May 2003 for the car park, on-street and questionnaire surveys was intended to provide a snapshot of behaviour during an 'average' week of the year. Analysis of ticket sales at eight Council car parks during 2001-2003 (accounting for about 17,000 users per week) shows that the week chosen for the surveys was 5% below the average week in 2001 and 4% above in 2002. Figure 3.2 of the Interim Report shows this visually.

- 4.6 The data also show a decrease in the number of transactions between 2000 and 2002 at most times. This decrease affected pay & display parking (as compared to contract and permit parking which remained steady), and is believed to be in part a result of the relative price of Council-owned and other car parks. Further data available after the surveys shows that this trend continued into 2003. However, whilst demand at Council car parks during the week in question in 2003 was 4% below that in 2002, the average reduction in demand across the previous 12 months was 10% below the previous year. Until data is available for the entire year, it is not possible to say whether the May survey week was above or below the average for 2003. However, if demand across 2003 is more than 4% below that in 2002, the May week would remain at, or above, average.
- 4.7 There is some concern from retailers that the survey week was unrepresentatively quiet and could call into question the conclusions to be drawn from the data. In assessing this issue however, it should be remembered this study is primarily concerned with the amount of spare capacity available. Information provided regarding a retailer-controlled car park shows that it is full during peak times and therefore offers no spare capacity. This concurs with our survey results which show that a number of the Kingston town centre car parks are more popular than others and therefore are expected to fill at a faster rate. This study's calculations of spare capacity take account of the fact that some car parks tend to fill more quickly than others and were full for periods on the survey days.
- 4.8 Furthermore, the data used to identify an average week relates to eight car parks which account for about one third of total public spaces in the town centre and therefore are a more reliable indicator of trends than returns from a single retail car park. However, it is recognised that some combination of influences on parking during May led to occupancy across the board in the town centre being below expected levels (by in the region of 9% in Council car parks).

Adjustment to 2003 survey results

- 4.9 Given that, during the survey week, demand was modestly below anticipated levels, it is prudent to adjust the survey results to properly represent an 'average week'. This adjustment will then be applied in determining the principles of the strategy described in the remainder of this chapter.
- 4.10 Analysis of the Council car park data shows that demand during survey week in 2003 uplifted by 7% would give a weekly demand higher than half the previous 52 weeks, and lower than the other half. Given that the overall usage of car parks during 2003 is likely to be less than in 2002, this is thought to be an over-generous factor to apply. Therefore, an adjustment factor of +6% has been adopted.
- 4.11 This adjustment in no way invalidates any of the draft strategy conclusions presented to Members and stakeholders as part of the study's consultation process. In fact, should the survey week indeed fall 6-7% below average, it accentuates the need to make more efficient use of the current stock and reduce congestion by encouraging a more balanced use of all available car parks

Deciding on a strategy

- 4.12 In Figure 4.2 a flow chart is presented which summarises the key decisions necessary in order to decide upon a broad strategic approach to parking. The outcome of these decisions may, additionally, vary over time meaning that the most suitable policy intervention may also vary over time. The key decision areas are:
- i. Does peak demand for parking out-strip supply? If so, does this only occur very infrequently (for example over the Christmas period)?
 - ii. What level of demand should be catered for (normal levels, peaks or seasonal / exceptional peaks)?
 - iii. What impacts do / may full usage of the actual / planned level of parking supply have on the road network and environment? Are these acceptable?
 - iv. If planned levels of parking would have unacceptable effects, is it preferable to mitigate against these effects (e.g. provide more road capacity) or reduce the planned level of supply?
 - v. Is it possible / practical to redistribute some demand into quieter periods?
- 4.13 Each of these decision areas is considered in turn below.
- Does peak demand for parking out-strip supply? If so, how often does this occur (for example over the Christmas period)?***
- 4.14 It is clear from the adjusted May surveys that, during an average week, peak demand did not out-strip overall supply. However, the fact that certain car parks are under considerably more pressure than others is not in question. Survey work for the Park & Ride study undertaken for the Council suggests a very different picture during the Christmas and New Year period when it is said that the level of supply is below demand⁹. Analysis of ticket sales at Council-operated car parks shows that demand is indeed highest in the two weeks prior to Christmas when the number of parking events rises to approximately 30% above May levels. Similar analysis of Bentalls car park transactions shows demand in December 2003 to be about 23% above the May 2003 level.
- 4.15 As some car parks reach capacity at the busiest periods of a day in an average month, it is inevitable that a pre-Christmas increase in demand for parking of up to 30% will lead to demand outstripping supply for some periods across the town centre as a whole unless existing demand patterns can be altered.
- 4.16 It is worth remembering that, for several hours each weekday and limited periods on Saturdays, even the busiest car parks have spare capacity during all but the busiest periods of the year.
- 4.17 It is likely that demand for retail activity in Kingston town centre will continue to rise as a result of increases in population and employment levels. It is less clear however whether the expected growth in retail need and expenditure (see chapter 2) will be

⁹ Colin Buchanan & Partners for RBK (2002)

manifested in additional trips to and from the town centre or whether most or all will be accommodated through greater spend per trip.

- 4.18 Whilst this strategy must consider how demand for parking may change in the future, it is equally true that the interventions emerging from this study, and other Council interventions, will influence this demand. Current forecasts for increases in traffic to and from the Borough take little account of local policy interventions and should be treated cautiously. In reality demand for travel to the town centre, and the modal share of this demand, will be influenced by the Council, other local interests and wider factors such as economic conditions. The Council should therefore seek to manage this demand to best meet its wider policy objectives.
- 4.19 Vehicles passing through the town centre (without parking) have a considerable effect on road conditions. It is estimated that such traffic accounts for between half and two-thirds of all vehicles entering the town centre although this calculation assumes a particularly 'tight' definition for the town centre (in line with the UDP). In reality, the Council has very little direct influence over the level or modal share of this traffic as much of it has origin, destination, or both, outside the Borough and measures that may influence mode choice and routeing are largely in the remit of other bodies.

What level of demand should be catered for (normal levels, peaks or seasonal / exceptional peaks)?

- 4.20 At present, the overall level of parking supply in the town centre should be adequate to cope with normal levels of demand and those occurring during normal peak periods for the majority of the year. Other than at the busiest periods like Christmas, it can also accommodate growth. However, the popularity of a small proportion of the overall supply causes problems. By comparison, it is thought that there is significant latent demand during the Christmas seasonal peak and that supply does not currently cater for these exceptional peaks.
- 4.21 It is worth noting that existing Council policy mitigates against increasing current levels of off-street parking supply as follows.
- i. A long-standing preferred level of 7,000 off-street weekday public car parking spaces in the town centre¹⁰. This level has been reached with the opening of the Seven Kings car park in July 2003.
 - ii. At its meeting of the 27th February 2001 the Council Cabinet agreed that further off-street public parking could be considered unnecessary, other than the new Seven Kings car park.
- 4.22 It is extremely unusual for any type of transport infrastructure to be designed to cater for the greatest level of demand which may reasonably be placed on it. In terms of transport, roads and railways are designed to cope with an anticipated 'average' level of use. Within this context, it is difficult to see a case to reverse this ethos for parking supply in Kingston town centre. For much of the year, current parking stock, if

¹⁰ See Borough Parking Plan 1993 paragraphs 12 to 14

properly managed, appears capable of coping both with current normal demand and normal peaks which could be expected throughout the week. Furthermore, current parking stock is capable of dealing with the vast majority of demand during the exceptional Christmas peak.

What impacts do / may full usage of the actual / planned level of parking supply have on the road network and environment? Are these acceptable?

- 4.23 The use of Kingston town centre's 8,760 parking spaces has a significant effect on local traffic and environmental conditions. During the May survey days, the 5,500 spaces surveyed were used by approximately 10-15,000 vehicles (adjusted figures for Wednesday and Saturday respectively). As many of the un-surveyed spaces are private non-residential in nature, and so are likely to be used at least once per day, it can reasonably be assumed that, on an average day some 14,400 to 18,700 vehicles park in Kingston town centre (adjusted figures for Wednesday and Saturday respectively).
- 4.24 It is understood that the figure of 7,000 publicly available weekday off-street parking spaces was derived based on an analysis of the capacity of the town centre road network, specifically the one-way system. This level of parking and its effect on the road system was tested in 1996 using a CONTRAM traffic model and was found to be acceptable. At times of peak parking demand, the levels of congestion experienced on the relief road would suggest that either the effects were underestimated or that the amount of through traffic in Kingston town centre is higher than anticipated.
- 4.25 It is worth noting that motorists surveyed at Christmas 2002 spent an average of 20 minutes searching and queuing for a space but only 20% felt that they had experienced a problem finding somewhere to park. This suggests that those parking in Kingston town centre had modified their expectations during the Christmas period and were willing to spend some time obtaining a space¹¹.
- 4.26 Given that congestion is a much more significant deterrent to travelling to Kingston than parking, the provision of more parking spaces could be counterproductive as it would worsen the congestion problem. As noted in section 4.1, for the vast majority of the year, the observed level of demand is lower than the available capacity. Therefore, adding more capacity would also lead to a lower average utilisation of spaces over the course of the year, meaning that both land and capital assets would not be used to their full potential.

¹¹ Further information can be found in section 4.14 of the Interim Report.

If planned levels of parking would have unacceptable effects, is it preferable to mitigate against these effects or reduce the planned level of supply?

- 4.27 Under current car parking access and traffic management arrangements, full use of Kingston's car parks contributes greatly to heavy traffic congestion in the town centre. However, many of the large businesses operating in the town centre would in principle like to see more capacity and would maintain that, at the very least, in order to protect Kingston's position as a retail, leisure and employment centre, it is desirable to retain much, if not all, of the current permanent parking stock.
- 4.28 The strategy must therefore consider how maximum use of existing parking stock can be catered for whilst avoiding the unacceptably high levels of congestion, and the resultant side-effects, which are currently experienced at Christmas and particularly busy Saturdays at other times of year. If these problems cannot be resolved, it may be necessary to consider reductions in levels of parking supply in the future.

Is it possible / practical to redistribute some demand into quieter periods?

- 4.29 Temporal redistribution of demand is a sustainable and cost-effective way of overcoming the occasional periods when demand out-strips supply. Indeed the questionnaire survey undertaken for this study suggests that this phenomenon already occurs naturally with some shoppers retiming journeys to avoid busy periods. Redistribution of journeys to quieter periods is possible therefore although it is preferable if this occurs through shoppers being encouraged to visit Kingston outside peak periods rather than being discouraged from visiting during the peaks due to problems relating to congestion and demand at key car parks.
- 4.30 The degree to which this is practical, and therefore the degree to which it may assist in reducing peak demand, will largely be determined by changes to Kingston's retail and leisure economy and the way in which this, and the availability of parking, is promoted. Kingston Town Centre Management has recently undertaken to look into ways of encouraging shops to open and shoppers to visit at quieter times such as Saturday evenings.

The preferred strategy

- 4.31 Figure 4.2 shows that, depending on the response to the questions raised above, the strategy could include a number of strands:
- managing the existing stock more effectively;
 - providing more parking stock;
 - encouraging redistribution of demand to quieter periods; and/or
 - catering for more demand by alternative modes.
- 4.32 The provision of additional parking stock has been shown to be an unattractive option in this case, particularly as the resultant increases in traffic levels are neither desirable nor able to be realistically accommodated. However, as part of an overall strategy for access to the town centre it is not felt desirable to significantly reduce the current level of parking supply. The other three strands remain valid options.

- 4.33 The strategy is built on all three of these strands. It must also be able to support the Council's wider transport strategy which aspires to meet all additional demand for travel to Kingston by non-car modes - an approach entirely consistent with national and regional planning guidance, and with the Mayor's Transport Strategy. This approach is also consistent with the recognition that the options for car-centred growth are very limited given existing traffic levels and the lack of scope, or desire, for increasing physical road capacity.
- 4.34 The Council must plan for a town centre where modes other than the car are increasingly prioritised and, by becoming an attractive and logical choice for most people, they cater for the majority of access needs. This will support the Council's target to reduce traffic levels in the Borough by 10% between 1996 and 2010.
- 4.35 The elements comprising the strategy and the strategy programme are discussed in the following chapter but can broadly be summarised as follows:
- to reduce the amount of long stay (all-day) parking stock and hold short stay capacity at broadly current levels;
 - to provide replacement long stay parking capacity through new permanent Park and Ride sites;
 - to provide sufficient capacity for travel to Kingston town centre through parking and sustainable modes;
 - to improve the quality and security of all forms of parking stock;
 - to use charges, information and marketing to influence choice of parking location to make best use of available capacity and minimise circulating traffic.

FIGURE 4.1 – DETERMINING PARKING STOCK

FIGURE 4.2 DECIDING ON A STRATEGY

5. STRATEGY ELEMENTS

Introduction

- 5.1 A wide range of different types of interventions have been considered to form part of the overall strategy. The specific measures have been devised across the study period with the intention of supporting achievement of the established planning objectives. Each of these types of measure and their contribution to the strategy's objectives, is described below. Measures are not described in great detail, reflecting the strategic nature of this study. However, wherever possible, additional detail is given, particularly for the shorter-term projects.

Number of parking spaces

- 5.2 The strategy is based on capping the amount of public off-street parking at the current level of around 7,000 weekday spaces. Within this policy however is a desire to reduce the amount of spaces available for all-day parking and increase the amount available for shorter stays. The main reasons for not increasing off-street parking supply are:
- i. The impact of additional supply on the, already congested, road network at peak times and a rejection of suggestions that provision of additional off-street parking will relieve town centre congestion, even with well-designed access. However, existing congestion could be reduced by reducing the length of time currently required to enter a car park.
 - ii. Additional parking spaces will inevitably attract more traffic. Within an already congested road network, small increases in traffic levels can have a disproportionately larger impact on congestion. At present visitors perceive parking to be a lesser problem than traffic but attempts to solve the parking problem by increasing supply will only make traffic conditions worse.
 - iii. Replacement long-stay parking capacity can be provided through new permanent Park and Ride sites (see below).
- 5.3 Table 5.1 compares the amount of parking in Kingston to other competing retail centres. It should be noted that Guildford is served by a number of Park & Ride sites and Croydon by the Tramlink system.

TABLE 5.1 RETAIL FLOORSPACE IN KINGSTON AND COMPETING CENTRES

Centre	Retail floorspace (gross)	Public parking spaces	Floorspace per parking space
Bluewater	154,000 m ²	13,000	12 m ²
Guildford	91,334 m ²	4,594	20 m ²
Sutton	145,275 m ²	c. 5,000	c. 29 m ²
Kingston	229,097 m ²	7,324	31 m ²
Bromley	183,374 m ²	c. 6,000	c. 31 m ²
Croydon ¹²	290,477 m ²	8,515	34 m ²

Source: Roger Tym & Partners (2002) and local authority websites

- 5.4 Research suggests that through-traffic represents the majority of traffic in the town centre. Given the congestion in Kingston town centre, it is tempting to speculate as to the benefits of removing this through traffic: better environmental condition, less traffic delays and the possibility of additional parking for cash-rich car-borne visitors to the town centre. Prioritising space for those actually travelling *to* Kingston, be they residents, shoppers or other visitors, is clearly desirable as is making Kingston a less attractive route for through traffic travelling beyond the Borough. However, in practice, achieving either would be extremely difficult, not least because of the impact on the limited alternative routes. The Council must refer any significant changes to the Borough Priority Route Network (of which the relief road is a part) to Transport for London for approval. It is anticipated that any attempt to reduce significantly capacity for through traffic in the Kingston area is likely to meet with strong opposition from Transport for London and the Greater London Authority. Similarly, even if a technological solution can be devised allowing the introduction of a local congestion charging scheme for through traffic, it is thought that such a scheme would not receive support from the relevant London-wide bodies.

Season ticket and permit holders

- 5.5 At the heart of the replacement of all-day parking with shorter stay provision is a reconsideration of the availability of commuter parking. On weekdays, approximately 1,000 spaces in public car parks are reserved for contracted users and a further 1,450 spaces are available in private car parks. In general, spaces are not physically reserved for those with season tickets or contracts and in fact, each season ticket is used less than once per day.
- 5.6 At the time of writing, 334 season tickets were valid for Council owned car parks. Of these however, 80 are unallocated and 78 are term-time only passes for Kingston College. Most season tickets are for Monday to Friday only. A further 340 season tickets have been provided to Council staff for use at Drapers, Bittoms or Cattle Market. The Council is directly in control therefore of approximately 675 season tickets which are most likely to be used by commuters for all-day parking. Most of

¹² Excludes anticipated additional 70,000 m² following opening of Centrale and either Park Place or extension of the Whitgift Centre.

these season tickets are not associated with reserved spaces. The exception is 200 spaces at the Drapers car park which are reserved for season ticket holders on weekdays. However, any member of the public may purchase a season ticket. In the short-term, these season ticket holders do not have a significant impact on the amount of available parking at peak periods, especially weekends. However it may be appropriate to consider how the spaces occupied by season ticket holders could be best utilised during the Christmas period (see below).

- 5.7 The majority of reserved parking in public car parks is the 500 spaces in Bittoms car park reserved for employees at Surrey County Hall on weekdays (Surrey County Council are the car park's freeholders). The Royal Borough of Kingston has made enquiries as to the possibility of purchasing some space on the reserved floors. However, Surrey County Council is considering the future use of accommodation and options for County Hall, of which The Bittoms forms a part. The site is obviously of greater value with the inclusion of the car park. Therefore, the Royal Borough of Kingston should continue to make every effort to secure as much as possible of the reserved parking in Bittoms for short-stay public use.

The Christmas period

- 5.8 Demand for parking during the Christmas period is 20% to 30% above the average for the year as a whole. During this period, parking demand outstrips supply and the town centre road network becomes extremely congested. However, Kingston is not alone in this respect and most, if not all, major shopping centres exhibit similar problems during the Christmas period.
- 5.9 In the short to medium term, there is no 'quick fix' which will resolve these problems - even if additional car parking were thought to be the solution, it would take several years to plan and construct suitable car parks. Rather, a range of measures must be employed over time to accommodate as much demand for travel to Kingston as is possible across all modes. In the short-term, every effort must be made during the Christmas period to maximise the benefits of the measures described in this chapter. The measures which can make the most significant contribution to reducing car park and traffic congestion over the Christmas period are:
- marketing of public transport alternatives and enhancement of seasonal Park & Ride;
 - provision of better information to drivers to maximise efficiency of car park usage and minimise circulating traffic; and
 - encouragement of trips in off-peak periods through retail marketing and promotions;
- 5.10 In addition, further discussions should be held with occupiers of reserved parking in public car parks with a view to making some of these spaces available during the busiest periods.
- 5.11 In the longer-term extraordinary levels of demand at Christmas must be accommodated by non-car modes as will also be the case during the busiest periods during the rest of the year. Ways in which this may be achieved are considered below.

Number of car parks

- 5.12 There are currently 22 public car parks with 30 or more spaces. Four of these car parks are temporary and only ten are operated by the Council. The size of car park varies significantly from a minimum of 32 spaces to a maximum of 1,185 spaces. Only 10 of the car parks have more than 300 spaces.
- 5.13 The efficiency of a car park is determined, in part, by its size. Given sufficient entry and exit capacity larger car parks can operate closer to capacity than smaller ones offering the same number of spaces. Efficiency benefits can therefore be gained from consolidating existing parking into fewer, larger car parks. Further spin-off benefits such as simplifying access arrangements and information provision would also occur.
- 5.14 Consolidation of car parks is unlikely to occur naturally, particularly as suitable locations for large car parks is limited. However, the Council should remain alert in the medium term to opportunities to reduce the overall number of car parks while maintaining the total number of spaces as part of any large-scale redevelopment of the town centre. In addition, it may be possible to enhance the overall quality of off-street parking stock by allowing construction of new car parks, where appropriate, on the proviso that some existing stock is removed.

Information and marketing

- 5.15 The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the behaviour of those parking in Kingston town centre is based on a complex set of decision criteria – arrival corridor, price, habit, security, proximity to destination and so on. It is also clear that habit and lack of knowledge of the alternatives means that the majority of short-stay parkers wish to use a limited number of popular car parks whilst other car parks remain under-utilised.
- 5.16 Clearly, best use needs to be made of all available parking supply during periods of maximum demand and provision of information and marketing of facilities is the most effective way of achieving this. However some of the causes of reluctance to use certain parking locations are not driven by lack of knowledge, some drivers dislike driving on relief road for example, and these issues must be tackled in parallel to providing more information.
- 5.17 Various methods should be considered for providing information about parking in the town centre. These will vary in terms of the point in the journey at which information is received by the visitor. They are:
- i. Accurate information on car parking locations (including on-street bays and non-Council operated car parks), opening hours, charges and access. This information is of most use if available before the journey being made. The most appropriate media therefore is the Internet, perhaps via an enhanced Kingston Town Centre Management (KTCM) web page with links from the Council's own web site. An ongoing commitment to manage the site is required.
 - ii. Similar information could be provided through leaflets although inevitably the information they contain risks being less up-to-date. Leafleting vehicles in car parks, particularly those which are under most pressure, is the most attractive and

cost effective option as distributing leaflets across Kingston's catchment would be prohibitively expensive. Leaflets placed on cars could also emphasise the particular advantages of the less well-used car parking locations.

- iii. Real-time information relating to car park occupancy and road traffic conditions: real time information can be used to influence travel behaviour through the Internet (before the journey begins) or with variable message signing (once on route). Due to accuracy issues, the existing variable message sign (VMS) information system has fallen into disrepute. Without doubt, setting aside local issues, in general VMS is a very powerful tool for directing drivers away from the busiest car parks and roads. VMS placed further away from town centres can also be used to inform drivers about town centre conditions before they reach Park & Ride alternatives. York City Council's approach to using this technology has been particularly commended (see box below).
- iv. Static signage can also play an important role in encouraging vehicles to use the first available car park (and hence reduce circulating traffic). Indeed, high quality static signage may reduce the requirements for a VMS system. The existing directional signs, as shown in Figure 5.1, should be reviewed as the existing signs do not cover all car parks and there is considerable variation in the locations from which each car park is signed.

York Traffic Congestion Management System

In York, the first phase of a £1.5 million system to reduce congestion and pollution began operation in the summer of 2003. The TCMS system, the first of its kind in Europe, gathers real-time information on traffic conditions, the available capacity at the city's car parks, bus locations using GPS and ambient air condition.

The system is used to manage traffic most effectively through the use of variable message signs. In the future routing information for drivers, including possible use of Park & Ride facilities, will be determined based on existing traffic and car park condition and local pollution levels.

- 5.18 Marketing must also play a key role in the promotion of shopping at less busy periods. Kingston's key retailers could benefit from recognising that additional revenue can come from greater spend per trip, off-peak sales and revenue from non-car users. In partnership with the Council and KTCM, retailers must market the town centre's retail activity as well as other town centre event and leisure activities and off-peak shopping. KTCM is currently developing plans for increased marketing of the town centre under the banner of "Kingston First" and it is anticipated that this initiative will take these issues onboard.

Naming conventions

- 5.19 For new or infrequent visitors to Kingston town centre, the names used to describe car parking locations are very important if they are to make an informed decision about where to park. Traditionally signs have used a mixture of area names, such as Horsefair, and car park names, such as Bittoms. More recently, recognition of the fact that these names mean little to visitors, references to Horsefair have been replaced with Bentalls and John Lewis.

- 5.20 It is felt that more could be done to reduce the ambiguity of references to parking locations and to make clear the location and main purpose of car parks. In some centres, car parks have names such as “Shoppers car park north”. This is not thought to be appropriate for Kingston due to the number of car parks and their varied use. Instead, it is recommended that areas of the town centre are defined and colour-coded whilst existing car park names are retained.
- 5.21 Figure 5.2 shows how the areas may be defined. Note that the area designation would relate both to car parks and on-street parking. Once agreed, the colour-coding system could be used on car park directional signs, on-street signs, car park entry signs and pedestrian routes. Care must be taken to avoid confusion between town centre parking zones and existing CPZs around the town centre.

Parking for people with disabilities

- 5.22 Whilst the provision of parking for disabled people is acceptable, there is a broad need for better facilities for wheelchair users and the ambulatory disabled. Reducing traffic in the town centre must be married up with the paucity of on-street and surface car parking in the town centre for disabled people and the need to address this.
- 5.23 A central car park for disabled people only could be of benefit to the town centre. If this was surface car parking, it would also allow for those requiring a lot of headroom to deal with a wheelchair on top of their car. An alternative option is a general increase in the number of disabled spaces in the existing surface level car parks namely Bittoms, Lady Booth Road, Ashdown Road, Canbury Place and Cattle Market. Whilst this is more deliverable, it should be remembered that three of these car parks are only temporary and are likely to be lost in the future.
- 5.24 The mooted pedestrianisation of Castle Street and possible removal of parking from one side of Fife Road will lead to a reduction in the number of Blue Badge Holder bays and other bays available to the disabled (Pay & Display). Should this occur, careful consideration must be given to replacing provision within close proximity of that which is removed.

Parking charges

- 5.25 The evidence gathered during this study suggests that price is influential in the decision of if and where to travel, but less so in the decision as to the specific parking location chosen. Use of parking charges as a means to influence behaviour must therefore be sensitive to Kingston's competitiveness with other centres when trying to influence local behaviour. Parking charges in Kingston vary significantly between car parks within a range of 80 pence to £1.80 per hour. This is relatively expensive compared to other centres such as Guildford (60 pence); Croydon (50p to £1); Richmond (80p to £1) and Bluewater (free).

Public car parks

- 5.26 The Council has a long-term transport policy of increasing the real cost of car travel relative to public transport whilst at the same time maintaining the town centre's existing mix of retail, leisure and business activity. The Council also wishes to constrain all-day parking to support its Park & Ride policy. Additionally, there is increasing pressure on the revenue raised through car parking across Council departments. As a result, there is a growing imbalance between higher charges at Council car parks and lower charges at other public car parks.
- 5.27 Further consideration should be given to vary public car park charges, within the constraints defined above, to:
- retain the affordability of short-stay (up to 4 hours) parking for shopping and leisure; and discourage all-day parking for commuters through higher charges;
 - encourage use of under-utilised car parks by reducing charges or holding them when others are increased;
 - make off-peak parking more attractive by varying charges by time of day and day of week (this is possible for all car parks with Pay on Foot machines including Drapers and the Cattle Market);
 - redress the imbalance between the lower costs of the retail car parks, where pressure is greatest, and other car parks; and
 - offer discounts for those season ticket which are not valid over the Christmas period - over the full strategy period, it may prove appropriate to phase out Council season tickets altogether.

Payment mechanisms

- 5.28 Various mechanisms for payment currently exist at off-street car parks, the most common being Pay & Display, Pay on Foot and Pay on Exit. Each have advantages and disadvantages although the Pay & Display mechanism, employed at many Council car parks, is less popular as users must estimate their duration of stay. Overestimation results in an unnecessarily high charge and underestimation results in a possible fine. As a result, shoppers may spend less time shopping than they would otherwise like to as they need to return to their vehicle.
- 5.29 An assessment of the effects of conversion from Pay & Display to Pay on Foot at Drapers and Cattle Market car parks is underway. Should the results prove

encouraging, further investigation should be made of standardising mechanisms across Council car parks and preferably all manned car parks in the town centre.

- 5.30 At worst, conversion to Pay on Foot should have a neutral effect on revenues if charges from motorists making longer stays outweigh potential losses from people paying for exactly their duration of stay. If longer stays predominate, there will also be positive effects on retailing.

Car park opening hours

- 5.31 Car park opening hours vary from car park to car park, as do the hours within these periods that users must pay to park. Furthermore, opening and charging hours vary by day of week reflecting retail and leisure activity in the town centre. The current situation is somewhat confusing and tends to result in parkers ‘hedging their bets’ and using car parks they know will definitely be open for the duration of their visit rather than a car park which may be more attractive. A review of opening hours across all car parks could assist in a rationalisation of opening and charging hours to simplify matters. In addition, better signage is required to properly differentiate between opening and charging hours.
- 5.32 Consideration has also been given to the use of opening hours to control the use of car parks. For example, opening a car park after 09:00 may deter commuters. However, experience from previous trials of such an approach were unsatisfactory and it is felt that punitive charges to discourage all-day parking, as adopted in most car parks, is the best approach.

Evening and parking

- 5.33 Kingston’s economy is active across more of the day than the traditional 09:00 to 17:30 period. Whilst the evening economy is still developing, it already comprises leisure activities such as those at the Rotunda, pubs, bars, nightclubs and restaurants, and cultural events such as evening concerts in churches.
- 5.34 In 2001, a report to Kingston Town Neighbourhood Committee identified a drop in the availability of parking supply after 18:30 despite over 400 spaces becoming available as the controlled hours of yellow line restrictions expire. The paper also identified the phenomenon that despite the availability of ample, generally free and supervised, off-street parking in the evening, most people prefer to park on-street in order to be as close as possible to their final destination. However, although there is a reasonable amount of on-street parking available, it is not always close to where people wish to park.
- 5.35 Off-street car parks are further disliked due to, normally, unjustified perceptions of poor security, especially multi-storey car parks. Despite the fact that free parking is provided in the Cattle Market and Bentalls car parks for example, they are poorly used. By contrast, the surface car parks on Sopwith Way, Lady Booth Road and Ashdown Road are extremely popular in the evenings due to their proximity to the town centre and greater perceptions of security.

- 5.36 As the evening economy grows, and most parking is banned in the Market Place, there will be additional need for car parking supply. This will assist the retention of current evening activities and encourage new ones, including late retail opening. As on-street parking close to evening destinations is limited and surface car parks are commonly full, multi-storey car parks must be made more attractive for evening visitors. When the temporary surface car parks mentioned above are redeveloped, the problem will become even more acute.
- 5.37 Opening of additional multi-storey car parks in the evenings will result in additional running costs. However, it has been shown that charging acts as a major deterrent for evening off-street parking and applying charges may make the trip to Kingston less attractive. Clearly, there is a need to balance the provision of safe parking, its running costs whilst avoiding levels of charging which may simply drive visitors to the town centre onto surrounding residential streets outside CPZ hours.
- 5.38 A balanced strategy may be a phased approach in which opening hours and charges alter in line with changes in availability and demand and any necessary changes in Controlled Parking Zone or yellow line hours of operation. To avoid visitors simply not travelling to Kingston, supply must be made available close to major attractions and be suitably safe to be acceptable to evening users (see below for more information on car park security). It is also important to note that resources devoted to on-street parking enforcement in the evening should vary in line with these phases and with the need to keep traffic flowing during the hours when some road space is being legally used for parking.

Car park security and ambience

- 5.39 Perception of personal security is commonly quoted as an important factor in determining travel behaviour, particularly for those most vulnerable members of society and particularly at night and in locations with poor natural surveillance. Furthermore vehicle security is an important consideration. People using all forms of transport generally wish to see improvements in the quality and ambience of their surroundings, be this a waiting area, public vehicle or car park.
- 5.40 Having said this, the questionnaire survey did not highlight personal and vehicle security as a key factor in determining parking location. Anecdotal evidence suggests however that, where possible, people prefer to park on-street or in those car parks which are perceived to be safer (those which are staffed, are at surface, are busy, and are brightly lit and well appointed being most attractive).
- 5.41 Making improvements in the security and ambience of all car parks across the town centre is a sensible and popular policy. Already, several of the larger car parks have gained Secure Car Park status. Both the Council and Kingston Town Centre Management would ultimately wish to see all car parks accredited. It is recommended that the focus is placed on the most popular car parks; those which are most likely to be used during the evening (Drapers car park in particular) so as to encourage greater use of the town centre attractions in the evenings. Any new privately operated parking provided through Section 106 agreements should meet the requisite standards.

- 5.42 The security and quality of pedestrian routes between car parking locations and town centre destinations is another important consideration. Walking routes to and from several existing car parks pass through areas which are unattractive, quiet and potentially threatening and there is a requirement to audit all routes for ease of use, safety and security using relevant guidelines and other resources¹³. These changes must be properly integrated with the other measures identified in the parking strategy and also a wider walking strategy for the town centre.

On-street controls

- 5.43 There is a very limited number of on-street parking bays within the town centre itself. During controlled hours there are 314 bays of which 216 are Free, Pay & Display or Metered bays which are available to all users. Outside controlled hours, kerb space equivalent to a further 420 spaces becomes available on single yellow lines.
- 5.44 The Council operates a policy of managing the limited amount of on-street parking to provide for those most in need and to ensure a reasonable level of turnover. As such, certain spaces are reserved for disabled people or residents and most other bays are subject to maximum durations of stay and charging to ensure turnover. Broadly, these policies should be continued but some modifications may be appropriate as follows:
- i. Charges should be reviewed in line with off-street spaces. Generally, on-street bays are charged at a premium to reflect their greater convenience and shorter supply.
 - ii. A clear hierarchy of need is required to identify which users are most important. This may be particularly important in situations where bays are removed and some re-designation may be required.
 - iii. Ensure suitable supply for disabled people. On-street parking is generally most attractive to people with disabilities. As most disabled people need to park close to their destination, it is generally necessary to oversupply disabled parking to ensure suitable capacity across the town centre. Supply does not necessarily have to be provided through Blue Badge holder bays but through dispensations to park in other bays and on single yellow lines.
 - iv. Ensuring that on-street parking controls are properly enforced in order to protect revenue and ensure that the management strategy is effective. There is some evidence, from the on-street continuous observation survey, to suggest that, at present, gaps in enforcement allow significantly longer durations of stay than controls allow¹⁴.

¹³ Such as: IHT (2000) Providing for Journeys on Foot or TRL's Pedestrian Environment Review Software (PERS)

¹⁴ Steer Davies Gleave (2003) Kingston Town Centre Parking Strategy: Report of Surveys §4.15

Traffic management

- 5.45 The existing town centre relief road and one-way system was built in the 1990s with the objective of pedestrianising Clarence Street and taking through-traffic out of the Market Place. In addition, the road system must cater both for local traffic to the town centre and the large amounts of traffic passing north-south and east-west through the Borough, particularly across Kingston Bridge.
- 5.46 Since modifications to the junction of Clarence Street and Richmond Road, where right-turns are now banned, the layout of the relief road means that some quite circuitous journeys are required to travel relatively short distances. At busy times, such journeys can take longer than expected. The operation of the relief road has a significant effect on parking choice:
- i. Some drivers are unwilling to travel to alternative, less busy, car parks as they are unsure of how to get there or are concerned over delays on the relief road.
 - ii. The operation of the relief road means that, whilst a car park may be convenient to get to from a particular corridor, returning to that corridor may require a lengthy journey around the network.
- 5.47 The amount of traffic using the town centre's roads and a number of physical constraints on the relief road (such as under the railway overbridge by Kingston station) and other approach roads (such as Richmond Road) means that major modifications to the operation of the one way system are unlikely. Furthermore, the Council must now consider how any changes on the Borough Priority Route Network, of which the relief road is a component, may impact on the strategic Transport for London Road Network.
- 5.48 However, the construction of a new link road associated with new developments to the north of Kingsgate Road could offer opportunities for a more thorough review of the operation of the entire system.

Use of alternative modes

- 5.49 It is an overarching policy of Central government to encourage modal shift in favour of non-car modes in order to reduce the negative effects of car use. A modal shift in favour of public transport, walking and cycling would assist in reducing the pressure for parking and traffic levels in Kingston town centre. It is envisaged that demand for travel to the town centre will continue to grow. Given the capacity constraints identified both in terms of parking supply and road space, this additional demand must be catered for by non-car modes, at least during peak periods.

Public transport and Park & Ride

- 5.50 Improvements to public transport services will form the basis for additional capacity for travel to Kingston. The Council is currently considering step-change improvements both in capacity and quality of public transport through the provision of permanent Park & Ride sites to the south and west of the Borough. These would provide for all journeys to Kingston town centre, including regular commuters and

shoppers. Other step-changes are also being considered by the Council, particularly in rail and bus-based systems.

- 5.51 Providing extra capacity for travel by non-car modes is an essential requirement of this strategy. Without it, demand to travel by car at peak times will continue to outstrip supply.

Cycle parking

- 5.52 It is important to recognise the need to provide adequate safe, secure parking facilities for cycles in the town centre to improve facilities for existing cyclists and also to help to encourage the use of alternative modes. The Council should carry out audits of all current cycle parking provision with a view to identifying gaps; and identify problems and possible improvements to the quality and quantity of cycle parking across the town centre. The bulk of provision should be in the form of Sheffield Stands in safe, secure and preferably sheltered locations¹⁵.
- 5.53 Cycle parking should also be catered for as part of measures to encourage travel plan type behaviour change across all businesses in the town centre.
- 5.54 The Council should investigate the possibility of introducing secure cycle lockers in certain areas as a supplement to traditional Sheffield Stand cycle parking facilities. The introduction of a central cycle centre or bike park, along the lines of other successful UK schemes such as the Leicester Bike Park, with secure parking, shower and changing facilities and repair services should also be investigated.

Reducing the need to travel

- 5.55 Throughout this study, emphasis has been placed on accommodating the likely growth in demand for travel to Kingston town centre. Whilst not the focus of this study, opportunities exist to contribute towards the overarching aims of the Council by reducing the need to travel or reducing journey lengths. These include:
- promotion of Travel Plans and encouragement of more flexible working and tele-working arrangements;
 - greater use of home delivery and Internet shopping; and
 - pilot shopping collection schemes to minimise the need to park close to specific stores.
- 5.56 It is understood that a number of initiatives of this type are already being considered as part of Kingston's Business Improvement District plans.

¹⁵ See 'IHT/CTC (1996) 'Cycle Friendly Infrastructure: Guidelines for Planning and Design' and 'Making the Connection A Cycle Challenge Report' (October 1998) for further information

FIGURE 5.1 EXSITING CAR PARK DIRECTIONAL SIGNING (*PRIOR TO OPENING OF SEVEN KINGS CAR PARK*)

FIGURE 5.2 SUGGESTED PARKING ZONES

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Kingston is a popular and successful metropolitan centre with significant retail, leisure, cultural and business functions. Everybody involved in shaping the town centre's future share a common vision of a more prosperous, vibrant and environmentally sustainable Kingston. Through the K+20 initiative, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and its partners are looking to secure this vision.
- 6.2 To achieve it, some change is required to the way the town centre functions and the way it is marketed. All parties share concerns over the public's perception and experience of Kingston's traffic and parking, a lack of growth in retail expenditure and a degraded environmental condition. The key to achieving the vision is reaching a common understanding of the problems and their causes and working together to develop a set of solutions which are the most effective and are acceptable to all parties.
- 6.3 Parking issues form an intrinsic part of the K+20 process. The ease with which people can park, the charges they pay and the quality of provision strongly influence decisions about trip-making in general and journeys to Kingston in particular. However, it should be remembered that only 30-40% of visitors to Kingston travel by car. Further reducing visitors' dependence on the car and promoting more sustainable non-car modes is central to the Council's transport policy and the transport policies of London and national government.
- 6.4 This strategy aims to balance the potentially conflicting demands of additional travel and sustainability. As such, it supports enhancement of Kingston's economic, social and cultural roles by recommending ways of improving the overall quality of the parking experience and managing supply better so that, for the majority of people and for the majority of the time, people can find somewhere to park and can do so in an environment which they feel is safe and secure. However, there are and will remain times when the amount of supply simply cannot cater for demand.
- 6.5 This study demonstrates that the option of "building oneself out of trouble" may provide short-term gains but would result in the long-term degradation of parking and traffic conditions in Kingston. Instead, ways must be found to retain and increase the quality and availability of travel opportunities to the town centre which will not adversely affect congestion or environmental conditions. Parking management is only one element of the necessary 'kit of parts' – whilst the quality of the parking experience must undoubtedly improve, parking must also be regulated in line with the timing of changes in availability of alternatives.
- 6.6 Kingston town centre cannot be seen in isolation either in terms of policy or its role in the wider transport network. The Council has real constraints on what it is able to do in that it is dependant on Transport for London for capital funding for major new infrastructure and is answerable to the Greater London Authority for its transport policies and interventions.
- 6.7 In addition over the lifetime of this strategy, Kingston will experience many outside influences which will affect both supply and demand for travel and parking. At a high

level, these will include national economic conditions whilst at a regional level expansion of Heathrow Airport, the central London congestion charging zone and Crossrail would all have large impacts.

- 6.8 In response to this uncertain future, it is impractical to strictly relate the measures and policies described in the previous chapter to particular dates, milestones or ‘trigger events’. In understanding the issues and devising solutions, however, it has become clear that, to a greater or lesser degree, all of the interventions proposed should be pursued now and for the foreseeable future. The Council and its partners should concentrate on what can be achieved today for those travelling to Kingston tomorrow and be proactive in developing longer-term solutions instead of reacting to change as it occurs.

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