



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Parking Strategy for Tunbridge Wells 2025-2030

Consultation Response from RTW Town Forum, Transport Working Group

24 January 2025

**Attn: Head of Department for Parking at TWBC
(Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)**

1. The Transport Working Group of the RTW Town Forum objects to the consultation process for his document which asks only two substantive questions and invites only 255 characters for comment on each. This is a totally inappropriate approach to consideration of such a complex and extensive operational area of local government. The consultation document runs to 41 pages and 8049 words. It requires a considered response to complex issues not 'yes' or 'no' answers.
2. This document is called a 'strategy' but it does not fulfil this description. It fails to make recommendations or have clear objectives to fulfil in the plan period. It describes the status quo today and presents no overall vision for a changed future.
3. It offers little in analysis of essential data such as population change, traffic volumes, parking densities, retail habits, working cultures, climate concerns, and more. As a result, it is littered with unfounded assumptions and sweeping statement to justify some of its arguments.
4. It offers few examples of how it is supporting the range of policies and priorities of the TWBC, particularly those for economic development and the climate emergency. Lots of relevant transport data and research was undertaken for the Town Centre Area Plan but it seems not to have been fully utilised to underpin this document. Furthermore, the TCAP itself depends on a robust and comprehensive car parking strategy and cannot be completed without it.
5. WE DO NOT SUPPORT the survey question,
"To what degree do you agree with the Terms of Reference of the Car Parking Strategy – 2025 to 2030?".

6. Furthermore, WE DO NOT FULLY SUPPORT the survey question “To what degree do you agree with the short to medium term plan that will sit beneath it – 2025-2027”.
- Of the six items in this ‘plan’ only 2 appear to result in any planned action – namely the refurbishment of the Great Hall Carpark and more EV provision. All the remaining items involve further ‘reviews’ before recommending action – if any. As we are already in 2025, the prospect of an effective ‘plan’ being achieved let alone fulfilled is likely to be remote.
7. Members of the Transport Working Group have raised the following issues:
- a) Population analysis is cursory and takes little account of our aging demographic many with Blue Badges. A strategy should aim to meet the needs of specific users whose access needs in the town centre are specific – one size does not fit all.
 - b) As TWBC is the owner and operator of most of the MSCPs in the town centre, access to its data of car park occupancy should be at the core of its strategic planning. There is no information provided regarding use and capacity of MSCPs and on street parking in different areas of the town. There is no data on user satisfaction on costs, charges and locations, or why users choose specific locations. Lots of sweeping statements but little proof that parking strategy is linked to other TWBC policies.
 - c) Para 3.6 confirms that Mount Pleasant Avenue car park will close for redevelopment, and a review of parking sites will be undertaken *“to determine capacity requirements post 1 April 2030, which will inform the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan, and may contain a review of certain parking sites to consider their redevelopment during the period of the plan, whilst retaining existing capacity”.*
Yet Great Hall Carpark, once regarded as surplus to requirement and in the way of the Calverley Square project, is now set *“to receive investment for improvements installing energy efficiencies and delivering improvements to the customer experience.”*
Where is the data to justify this turnaround in ‘strategy’?
Should the review not have come first?
 - d) The creation of 000s new households in the town centre and the impact this will have of traffic volumes and residential parking pressures is barely mentioned. Para 3.1 states a commitment to meet parking capacity but it is not backed by a plan to achieve this.
How will this be met? Certainly not by continuing to issue parking permits regardless of parking pressures.
Where is the data to inform decisions for the future?
 - e) Why is there is no mention of the financial income and benefits received from parking fees, or from parking fines which must be used for transport related projects and meet the needs of the ‘Short and medium term’ objectives.

- f) Para 3.10.3 Says that “*the centre of Tunbridge Wells has extensive resident permit parking on-street to support residents to be able to park near their homes*”.

This is inaccurate according to residents' experience. The size of zone C means resident daytime spaces are overused as free spaces for visitors and are in high demand leaving residents questioning what their permits are for.

- g) Para 6.4 makes reference to a long standing issue about use of bus stands on London Road, Linden Park Road and Meadow Road.

There has been a history of grievance and broken agreements with councillors and officers, and the residents near London Road, in particular, since 2012. The school buses that transport secondary school children from across the county use these bus stands as bus depots all day every weekday in term time blocking them for use as temporary respite for scheduled bus services. TWBC needs to urgently regain control over these stands by imposing time limits to encourage their temporary use and thus releasing places for tourist and scheduled services that support economic development in the town centre.

In addition, there is considerable demand for short term parking on adjacent roads to the high schools during school days. There is a clear need for this 'strategy' to link parking to education and environmental policies to achieve different outcomes.

- h) Para 3.11.1 ‘*Car parking charges are an important tool to help regulate and manage car parking spaces and encourage a particular type of use*’. These ‘regulations’ should be set out in this document if they have a strategic purpose.

- i) The conflict between on-road parking and cycle lanes is impeding the future take up of TWBC cycling and walking. Parking and climate change policies are not aligned.

- j) No consideration has been given to the needs of people to move up and down the steep hill of our long linear town centre, or its impact on where people park and manage their access to the different parts of our town's central commercial areas.

- k) Para 6.14 Provision of taxi bays should no longer be needed, and the chaos of the rank at the mainline station is outdated. Uber style services have moved on, become more reliable and subject to better regulation. Their introduction in this plan period should be considered as likely to reduce demand for parking in the town centre, provide better and more affordable connectivity with rural areas, and reduce congestion and overall result in less pollution.

Submitted on behalf of the Transport Working Group of the
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

by Jane Fenwick, Chair of the Transport Working Group, RTW Town Forum.

24 January 2025