



Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy 2025 - 2028



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Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy 2025

Summary

The Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy 2025–2028 sets out how Lancaster City Council will manage car parking to support a growing and evolving Lancaster city centre, while delivering against its broader Climate Emergency commitments and regeneration goals. The Strategy aims to provide a clear and confident message to residents, businesses, and visitors that sufficient parking will be maintained, as the council takes steps to promote both regeneration and more sustainable forms of transport.

The Strategy does not view parking in isolation. It recognises that parking provision must complement efforts to reduce congestion, support the transition to active and low-carbon travel, but also maintain as accessible, attractive, and economically resilient city centre.

The key aim is to ensure the right type of parking is available in the right locations, for the right users. This includes:

- Reducing unnecessary vehicle circulation by improving the placement and visibility of car parks.
- Maintaining evening and leisure-time parking capacity to support Lancaster’s cultural and hospitality sectors.
- Ensuring car parks are safe, well-maintained, and clearly signposted.
- Providing accessible parking for disabled users, meeting the Department for Transport’s 6% provision target for Blue Badge spaces.
- Supporting electric vehicle growth through modern infrastructure and provision for future shared mobility services.
- Ensuring that parking changes align with sustainable transport and development plans, particularly where car park land is earmarked for new housing.

Over the 3-year Strategy period and beyond the city council will seek to maintain its public parking portfolio at around 1,400 to 1,500 off-street spaces, ensuring that at times of high demand - such as during school holidays, festivals, and the Christmas season – a range of parking options are available. This will be balanced with the planned release of some surface car parks for housing, particularly in the Canal Quarter regeneration area, a long-term city priority.

To prepare for the future, the strategy includes improvements in real-time parking information, the rollout of contactless and app-based payment systems, and promoting expanded use of underused facilities like the Park and Ride. The council will also work

closely with Lancashire County Council, which is responsible for highways and on-street parking, to ensure that all traffic and public transport access and movement strategies are aligned.

The Strategy takes a pragmatic view: parking will remain necessary for the foreseeable future, particularly for those without viable public transport alternatives. The way parking is delivered and managed must evolve to help reduce emissions, improve city centre air quality, and create a more welcoming and efficient urban environment. better utilising land in the city centre.

Ultimately, this strategy positions parking as a tool to support a wide range of wider city priorities. Through careful planning and investment, Lancaster aims to create a modern parking system that reflects the changing needs of the city and helps progress towards a sustainable and resilient future.

1. Introduction

The Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy 2025 – 2028 sets out a practical approach to managing parking that supports both immediate needs and long-term goals for sustainable transport, economic vitality, and climate action. It builds on past work and consultation, including the 2024 draft strategy, and aligns with the city’s commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency (declared by the city council in December 2019).

The city centre plays a vital role in Lancaster’s economy, acting as a hub for retail, culture, education, and tourism. Future growth, including affordable housing and heritage-led regeneration in areas like the Canal Quarter and around Lancaster Castle, relies on maintaining good access - of which parking remains a key part.

At the same time, the strategy recognises the urgent need to reduce car dependency by promoting walking, cycling, and public transport. However, the city’s geography, infrastructure limitations, and the current challenging funding landscape mean that a major shift to sustainable modes and availability for all will take time. The city council must therefore strike a balance: retaining sufficient car parking capacity in the short to medium term, while preparing for a future that places greater emphasis on low-carbon transport.

Recent efforts to reshape local transport - such as plans to upgrade Junctions 33 and 34, improve the Park and Ride service, and reform the city’s gyratory network - have been slowed by rising infrastructure costs and the return to the Government of previously agreed national funding (£140 million in Housing Infrastructure Fund grants). Key projects, including the Bailrigg Garden Village, were ceased as a result. The review of the Local Plan now underway is expected to re-explore expectations around the scale and location of growth to meet development needs in south Lancaster.

In practical terms, this Strategy outlines how parking provision will be managed as city centre rejuvenation and regeneration progresses. For example, surface car parks in the Canal Quarter earmarked for housing will be phased out gradually, supported by improvements to existing multi-storey car parks, new permanent and temporary surface parking, and efforts to boost use of assets such as the Junction 34 Park and Ride. Measures will also be taken to reduce unnecessary circulation of vehicles through the city centre by improving signage and provision of digital information about parking availability.

Although this strategy focuses on Lancaster city centre, the council recognises that neighbouring areas - particularly Morecambe - will require their own targeted parking and access plans. The upcoming Eden Project Morecambe is expected to significantly alter travel demand in that area. Some crossover exists, notably through shared infrastructure like the Park and Ride facility.

Effective delivery will require close coordination between Lancaster City Council, which manages off-street parking and city centre land use, and Lancashire County Council, which oversees highways, on-street parking, and broader transport strategy. The development of a new Local Transport Plan, expected in 2025/26, will offer a further opportunity to align objectives across both authorities.

In summary, the Strategy provides a balanced framework: it maintains necessary car parking provision during a period of change, while positioning the city for a long-term transition to cleaner, more efficient modes of travel. It reflects a pragmatic response to current constraints, while still working toward the regeneration of Lancaster.

2. Parking Supply and Use

2.1. Current City Council Parking Provision

Lancaster's city centre parking arrangements have developed incrementally over time, often in response to short-term needs rather than being strategically planned. Many car parks occupy former housing sites cleared in post-war planning and have received limited reinvestment since. This has led to a dispersed network of ageing multi-storey and a range of surface car parks, many of which are not ideally located or equipped for modern use.

The city council currently operates 22 off-street car parks, providing approximately 1,624 spaces. The portfolio includes a significant number of small sites, with 11 car parks under 100 spaces and 7 under 50. Several are permit-only, limiting flexibility.

Due to the temporary closure of the Castle Car Park (287 spaces), a total of 1,329 spaces are currently available for general use.

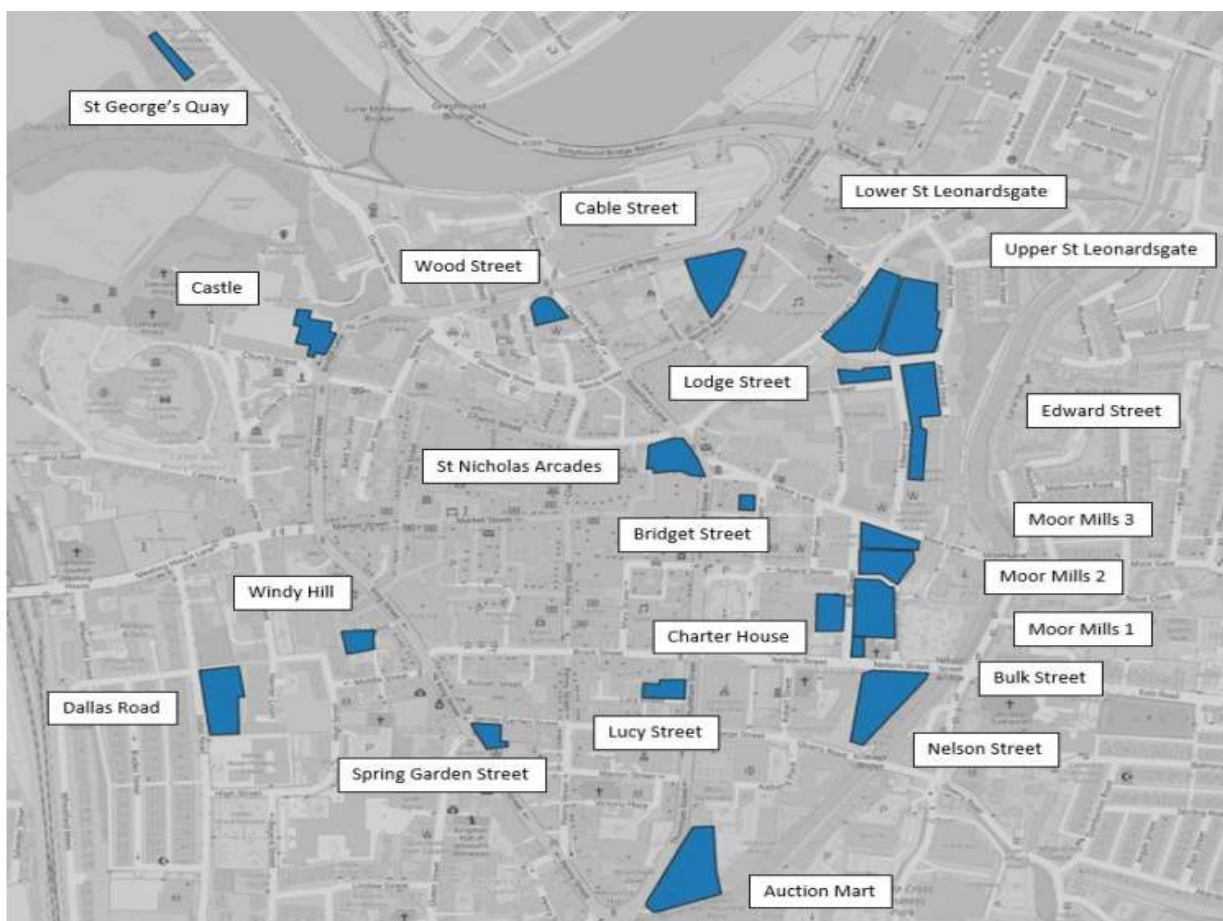


Figure 1 Location of city council operated car parks in Lancaster City Centre

Location	Spaces	Location	Spaces	Location	Spaces
Castle Car Park	287	St Nicholas Arcades	277	Upper St Leonard's Gate	133
Auction Mart	120	Nelson Street	120	Edward Street	89
Dallas Road	88	Cable Street	83	Lower St Leonard's Gate	70
Moor Mills 1	67	St George's Quay	46	Moor Mills 2	43
Charter House	41	Moor Mills 3	39	Lodge Street	34
Spring Garden Street	19	Lucy Street	19	Wood Street	14

Figure 2 Capacity of city council operated car parks in Lancaster City Centre

Car parks east of Dalton Square, particularly in the Canal Quarter regeneration area, offer a poor-quality environment with limited wayfinding and low public realm value. These sites can feel uninviting and disorienting, especially after dark.

The city council offers a variety of parking permits - ranging from weekly to annual passes - for both Lancaster and Morecambe. General permits cover multiple car parks and are available for 5 or 7 day use. However, RingGo sessions and permit coverage are not easily traceable through standard ticket sales data, adding to the monitoring challenge.

Several car parks designated as long stay or permit-only show inconsistent occupancy. Plans are under development to convert some to short-stay use, supporting higher turnover and to better alignment with city centre needs.

7 days	5 days (Monday - Friday)
Lancaster and Morecambe car parks - 7 days	Lancaster and Morecambe car parks - 5 days
Morecambe car parks - 7 days	Morecambe car parks - 5 days
Windy Hill, Bulk Street, Bridget Street car parks - 7 days	Windy Hill, Bulk Street, Bridget Street

Figure 3: General Permit availability

Weekly, 1 month, 3 months, and 12-month session permits are available from RingGo, valid in all Lancaster and Morecambe long stay permit car parks on a seven-day basis. In developing the strategy estimates have been made to include for permit use.

2.2. User Experience and Access

Parking is a key factor in how residents, workers, and visitors perceive Lancaster. Many car parks are difficult to find or navigate, especially for new users and entrants to the city. Signage is basic and typically limited to pricing information. Few sites offer direction to city centre amenities, contributing to poor integration with the wider urban environment.

Strategic directional signage into and around the city centre is also lacking. Drivers unfamiliar with Lancaster often circulate through the gyratory in search of parking, adding to congestion and emissions.

Real-time information on space availability is currently lacking. Machine vandalism has pushed the Council toward app-based and card payment systems, but uptake remains mixed and digital exclusion is a consideration. Accessibility and usability - especially for those with disabilities or limited digital access – must be further addressed.

Sustainable transport options - like secure cycle parking, car clubs, and EV charging - are limited, which undermines the city's ability to support and offer low-carbon travel choices.

2.3. Occupancy Patterns and Monitoring

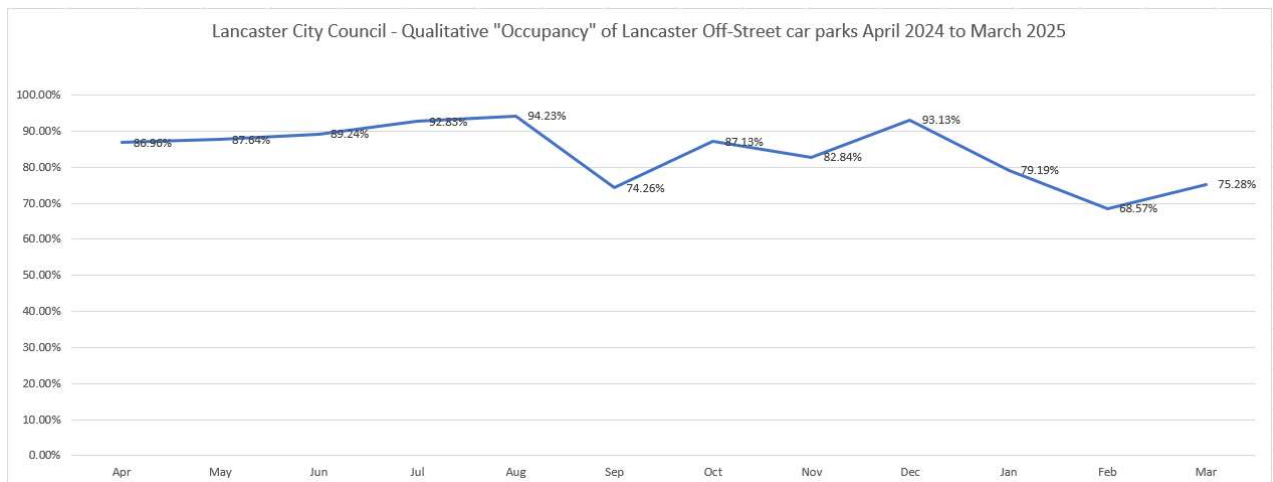
Parking demand in Lancaster fluctuates across seasons, days of the week, and time of day. Higher usage occurs in the summer months, during school holidays, and in the pre-Christmas period. Demand falls to its lowest point in early February.

Based on 2024/25 data, average occupancy ranged from 68% in February to 94% in August. This data is compiled from various imperfect sources: ticket sales (including via pay-and-display machines and the RingGo app), officer observations, and adjustments made for permit sales. However, monitoring remains patchy due to system limitations. Variables such as ticket transfers, machine downtime, or drivers sitting in cars without buying tickets distort the data. The council recognises these weaknesses and plans to introduce ANPR-based occupancy monitoring to improve accuracy.

Despite these limitations, observations suggest there is spare capacity across much of the year, with pressure only emerging during specific times. Even at these times, the system generally functions, although some popular car parks experience over-occupancy.

While spare capacity may seem inefficient, it is necessary in a well-balanced parking system. A city centre network should not exceed 85% average occupancy, to maintain turnover and reduce driver frustration.

Nevertheless, the council acknowledges that some peak-time availability issues are masked by overall averages, especially in high-demand locations.



Month	Capacity	Month	Capacity
Apr	86.96%	Oct	87.13%
May	87.64%	Nov	82.84%
Jun	89.24%	Dec	93.13%
Jul	92.83%	Jan	79.19%
Aug	94.23%	Feb	68.57%
Sep	74.26%	Mar	75.28%

Figure 4: Average Car Parking Use 2024/25

Several respondents to the draft Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy consultation noted that peak parking demand and space availability on average days can be more challenging than basic average demand analysis would suggest. In addition, evening use for cultural venues is important and needs factoring into considerations of strategic numbers of spaces available and their location.

2.4. Budget and Income Considerations

The cost of maintaining ageing stock - particularly multi-storey car parks - is rising. Future options may include consolidation, replacement, or phased redevelopment tied to wider regeneration funding.

The city council's parking operational income contributes to the council's budget. While the strategic aim may be to modernise and rationalise the portfolio, any reduction in available spaces or changes to usage types must be considered carefully in financial terms.

The current strategy assumes that net income can be broadly maintained by improving utilisation and reducing underuse, even if some sites are phased out for housing or redevelopment. Detailed consideration will be required for all capital investment, enforcement, and infrastructure upgrades, particularly for EV readiness and accessibility improvements.

2.5. Wider Parking Landscape

Beyond the city council’s operational portfolio, several privately operated car parks add around 480 spaces to the city’s capacity. These vary in pricing and access, and are outside council control, but play a significant role in the city centre’s overall parking offer.

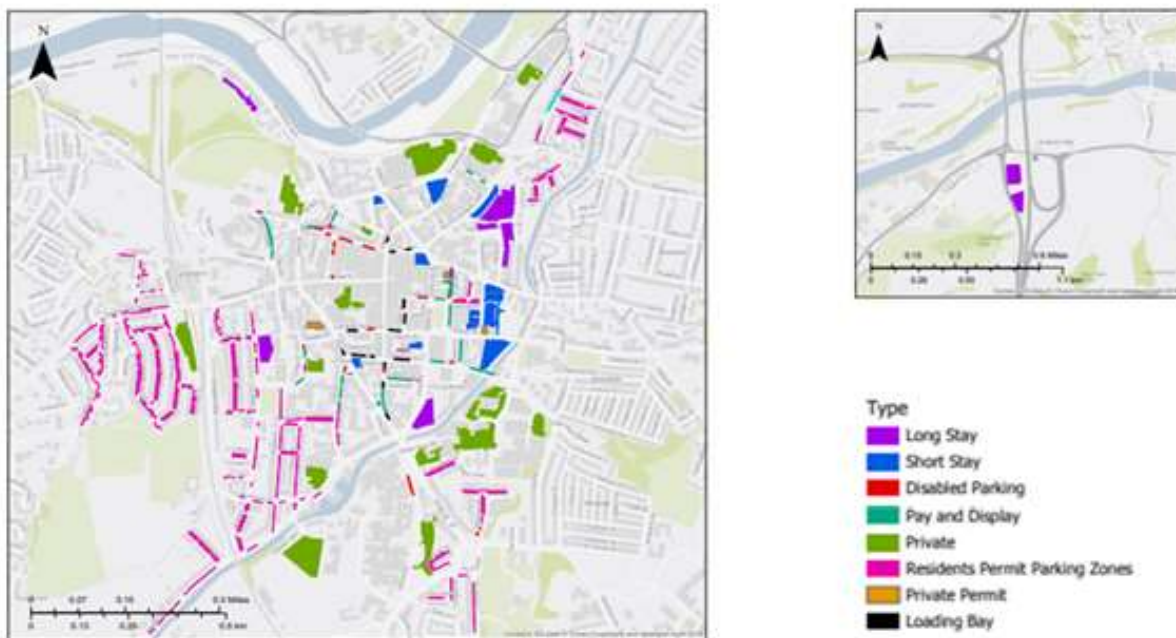


Figure 5: Map of Public and Private Car Parking Provision in Lancaster City Centre

Location	Spaces	Details
Sainsbury’s Cable Street	270	Free, customers only, maximum stay two hours
Lancaster Railway Station	165	Free up to 20 minutes, daily:£12.00, Saturday: £4.00, Sunday: £4.00, monthly £166.00, quarterly: £374.00, annual: £1,200.00
Marketgate Shopping Centre	127	Mon – Sat: 08.00-18:00, Sun 10.00-17:00. 0-1hr £2, 1-2 hrs £3, 2-3 hrs £4, 3-4 hrs £5, 4-6 hrs £10, 6-24 hrs £20
Kingsway Retail Park	91	Free, customers only

Aldi, Aldcliffe Road	80	Free, customers only, maximum stay 90 minutes. Mon – Sat 08:00-22:00, Sun 10:00-16:00. No restrictions outside these hours
Kings Yard	47	Up to 1 hr: £1.75, up to 3 hrs £3, up to 5 hrs £4.50, up to 10 hrs £6.50, up to 24hrs, £11. Maximum stay 24 hrs
Damside Street	22	1 hr £1, 2 hrs £2, 3 hrs £2.50, 12 hrs £6

Figure 6: Major Private Sector Off Street Provision

The Junction 34 Park and Ride - managed by Lancashire County Council - provides 650 spaces and a low-cost bus service into the city. Parking is free of charge with bus fares priced at:

Adult day return	£2.00
Child day return	£1.00
Adult weekly unlimited	£8.00
Family group day return	£5.00
Up to 5 adults travelling together in the same vehicle	
Concessions	Free after
Before 9:30am on Monday-Friday full adult fare applies.	9.30am
Disabled	Free after
Disabled pass holders are subject to a £1.00 fare before 9.30am on Monday – Friday	9.30am

In terms of the total off-street parking supply for Lancaster city centre (including both sites within the city centre and the Junction 34 Park and Ride site) 73% is in the city and 27% is at the Park and Ride site. This proportion of the city centre parking supply provided by Park and Ride is only slightly lower than in comparator historic cities which have successfully introduced Park and Ride.

It is accepted that the Park and Ride is currently under-utilised both in terms of use of the bus services and use of the car park. Anecdotal evidence suggests the site is mainly used as a “park and share” or meeting point for groups travelling onwards to various destinations via the M6 motorway. Lack of integration with city parking information, amongst other issues, must be addressed if the site is to meaningfully support modal shift or help absorb high demand.

The planning permission for Eden Project Morecambe planning permission incorporates potential use of P&R spaces but arrangements for use and turnover/relationship to non-Eden users to be confirmed.

Period	Passenger Numbers (per period)	Average Passenger Numbers (per day)	Notes
30/05/21 - 26/06/21	3,409	213	Service runs 1hr later from 07/06/21
27/06/21 - 24/07/21	3,783	158	
25/07/21 - 21/08/21	3,915	163	
22/08/21 - 18/09/21	4,476	187	
19/09/21 - 16/10/21	4,439	185	
17/10/21 - 13/11/21	4,244	177	
14/11/21 - 11/12/21	4,302	179	
12/12/21 - 08/01/22	2,789	147	
09/01/22 - 05/02/22	4,224	176	
06/02/22 - 05/03/22	4,088	170	
06/03/22 - 02/04/22	4,397	183	
03/04/22 - 30/04/22	4,173	190	Easter holidays
01/05/22 - 28/05/22	5,002	217	Early May bank holiday
29/05/22 - 25/06/22	4888	222	Queen's Jubilee bank holidays
26/06/22 - 23/07/22	5208	217	
24/07/22 - 20/08/22	5,889	245	
21/08/22 - 17/09/22	5,988	280	
18/09/22 - 15/10/22	6,247	272	
16/10/22 - 12/11/22	6,121	255	
13/11/22 - 10/12/22	5,944	248	
11/12/22 - 07/01/23	4,472	213	Christmas and New Year
08/01/23 - 04/02/23	5,200	217	
05/02/23 - 04/03/23	5,474	228	
05/03/23 - 31/03/23	5,570	232	
01/04/23 - 28/04/23	5,250	239	Easter holidays
29/04/23 - 26/05/23	5,392	245	Early May and King's Coronation bank holidays
27/05/23 - 23/06/23	5,347	232	Spring bank holiday
24/06/23 - 21/07/23	5,772	241	
22/07/23 - 18/08/23	6,030	251	
19/08/23 - 15/09/23	5,565	242	
16/09/23 - 13/10/23	5,864	244	
14/10/23 - 11/11/23	5,656	238	
TOTAL (from contract start date 09/12/201)	253,472		

Figure 7: Park & Ride Use Profile 2021-2023

On-street parking is managed by Lancashire County Council. Many bays are shared with residents via local area/street permit schemes. Temporary street works or urban improvements can reduce capacity from time to time.

- 
- Castle Hill;
 - Church Street;
 - Dalton Square;
 - Friar Street;
 - George Street;
 - Quarry Road;
 - Queen Street;
- High Street;
 - Marton Street;
 - New Road;
 - Penny Street;
 - Phoenix Street;
 - Robert Street; and
 - St Mary's Parade.

Figure 8: List of available On-Street Parking

2.6. Specialist Users / Use

Specialist parking needs are an integral part of the council's portfolio:

- **Disabled Users:** Free, unrestricted access to car parks is available for Blue Badge holders. The city council is committed to achieving 6% provision in line with national guidance and locating these bays in areas with good pedestrian access and safety.
- **Motorcyclists:** Motorcycle and moped parking is currently free and unrestricted within council-run off-street car parks. While this supports active travel, dedicated, secure bays are limited and could be expanded or better promoted.
- **Coach Operators:** Six formal coach bays are located at Upper St Leonardsgate. Operators often use informal layover areas across the city, reflecting the limited provision of secure, well-serviced facilities. As the visitor economy grows - particularly in the heritage tourism sector - more structured coach access and waiting areas will be needed. A key request from Lancaster Business Improvement District is for an increase in coach access and coach parking provision into Lancaster which the city council will facilitate.
- **Residents and Permit Holders:** Some edge-of-centre car parks are subject to ad-hoc use by commuters, impacting residential amenity. Concerns have been raised about displacement from any net loss of central city spaces. Residential parking zones and permits are managed by Lancashire County Council, and coordination is needed to address localised impacts and outcomes from wider parking strategy changes.
- **Taxis:** A formal taxi rank exists adjacent to the city's main bus station. No changes are proposed in this strategy, but integration with broader transport and access planning needs to be kept under review.

2.7. Summary

Lancaster's parking supply is adequate for most of the year, but the portfolio remains fragmented, inefficient, and outdated in several respects. Specialist user needs - especially disabled access, motorcycles, and coach operations - require clearer focus and infrastructure support.

Demand fluctuates, with over-occupancy observed at key locations during peak periods. Improved monitoring, via ANPR and digital systems, is essential to better manage demand and inform policy. Financial sustainability is a key consideration, particularly as future proposals may affect the council's existing revenue stream. The council will prioritise modernisation over expansion, aiming for a smaller, higher-quality, better-located parking offer that balances convenience with climate, equity, and regeneration goals. A phased, evidence-based approach will ensure that parking continues to support a vibrant and accessible city centre while enabling long-term modal shift.

3. Travel & Transport Policy and Car Parking

3.1. Strategic Transport Policy Context

Transport policy at national and county levels is typically focussed on reducing car dependency through better public transport, walking, and improved cycling infrastructure. Car parking is rarely addressed directly, despite its strong influence on travel behaviour, congestion, and emissions.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), most recently updated in February 2025, addresses car parking in city centres primarily under the theme of “Promoting Sustainable Transport”.

Local authorities are encouraged to manage parking provision to support the vitality of town centres. This includes ensuring that parking policies do not discourage visitors or undermine economic activity in central areas.

The NPPF promotes a balanced approach: while encouraging sustainable transport (walking, cycling, public transport), it recognises that some car use is necessary, especially in areas with limited alternatives.

The framework advises against excessive provision of car parking, particularly in areas well-served by public transport, to avoid encouraging car dependency. Parking should be well-integrated into the urban environment, accessible, and safe. Design standards should ensure that parking does not dominate the streetscape or reduce walkability.

Lancashire County Council’s Local Transport Plan (LTP) is the core policy framework. LTP3 expired in 2021, and work is underway on LTP4, led by consultants Atkins. Under the devolution deal, the Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA) will take over future LTP development, with a draft expected in 2025/26.

The county council’s current Highways and Transport Strategy (2023–2025) outlines broad priorities but lacks specific detail at district level. The Lancaster District Highways and Transport Masterplan (2016) still shapes overall local strategic assumptions, although many of its proposals have stalled or been overtaken by new developments and/or funding setbacks.

3.2. Key Proposals and Delivery Challenges

The 2016 Masterplan proposed a range of transformational schemes, including:

- Redefining Caton Road as a key northern gateway.
- Reconfiguring M6 Junction 33 to unlock South Lancaster growth.
- Developing a bus rapid transit corridor, integrating Park and Ride with Lancaster, Morecambe, the university, and Heysham.

- Enhancing Morecambe’s gateways and waterfront access.
- Improving active travel links across the Bay and rural areas.

However, the withdrawal of £140 million in Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) support significantly impacted delivery. Projects like the Lancaster South Area Action Plan and the ‘Lancaster Reach’ corridor were cancelled or delayed. The Local Plan review now in progress is an opportunity to re-examine deliverable schemes and reflect new economic, planning and funding realities.

3.3. Lancaster Movement and Public Realm Strategy

The one-way gyratory causes two main issues relevant here.

- It detracts from people making sustainable travel choices because of lack of bus priority and lack of provision for vulnerable road users such as cyclists.
- It complicates the ability to use car parks in that making choices at peak times can be made more complicated, as it can be difficult to move between car parks.

The Lancaster City Centre Movement and Public Realm Strategy (2020) aimed to reshape the city’s gyratory system and balance vehicle and pedestrian use. Three options were considered, including:

- A split system favouring sustainable modes on the eastern route.
- Restricting through-traffic and expanding pedestrian zones.
- Creating a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) with a congestion charge.

Despite strong alignment with sustainable goals, none were implemented due to limited resources, operational complexity, and stakeholder concerns. Lancashire County Council is awaiting the Local Plan outcome before launching a replacement strategy.

Further work is being undertaken on potential smaller scale interventions, and it is likely that in the immediate future more practical improvements for cycling/pedestrian/bus priority user experience will be designed and implemented rather than wholesale changes in the gyratory route priorities.

3.4. Public Transport, Active Travel, and Modal Shift

Improving bus reliability and speed - especially through the gyratory - is critical. Without dedicated bus priority measures, bus services remain vulnerable to congestion and delay. This makes them less attractive than car travel, especially during peak times.

The County’s Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) provides the main route to Department for Transport funding. It prioritises cheaper fares, integrated ticketing, improved frequencies, and infrastructure upgrades. However, BSIP delivery is uneven and remains dependent on central government funding allocation cycles.

Lancaster’s Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) identifies key routes and interventions to enhance connectivity, but funding for delivery is not yet secured. Progress has been limited, though the LCWIP remains an important reference for future active travel investment.

3.5. Car Parking in Policy

Car parking is not fully embedded in strategic transport or climate policy, despite its role in shaping travel choices. In practice, parking supply, pricing, and location strongly influence whether people choose to drive, take public transport, cycle, or walk.

Lancaster’s [Local Plan Partial Review](#) (adopted 2025) begins to address this gap. It calls for:

- Managing parking supply to avoid encouraging unnecessary car use.
- Supporting access to key destinations without increasing congestion.
- Requiring major developments to include travel plans and reduce reliance on private vehicles.
- Better alignment between parking and public transport routes.

The [Sustainable Travel SPD](#) (2022) reinforces this by promoting compact, accessible development, EV infrastructure, and better walking/cycling links as part of planning approvals.

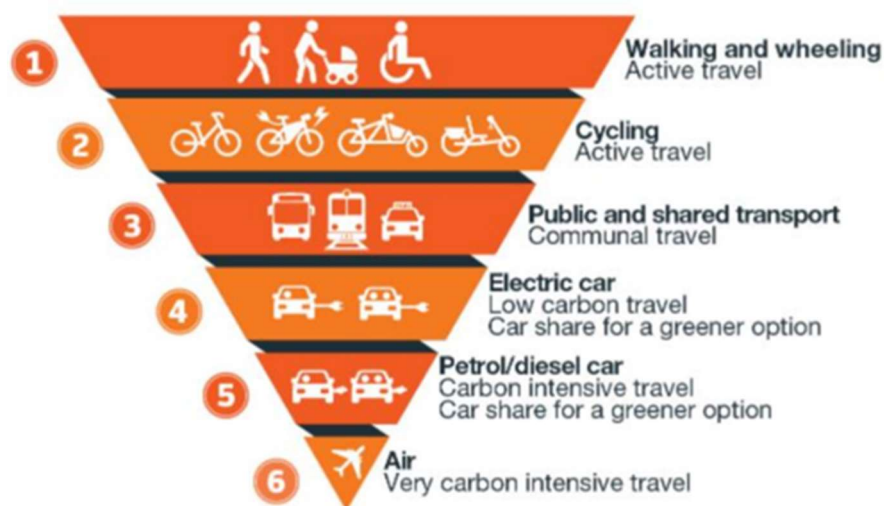


Figure 9 Lancaster City Council Sustainable Travel SPD (June 2022)

Lancaster City Council’s Outline Sustainable Transport Strategy sets a vision-led framework to embed sustainable mobility in future planning. It prioritises walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicle infrastructure as integral to the district’s development strategy. Using accessibility and EV charging models, it evaluates growth locations, testing interventions that encourage modal shift and reduce car dependence.

It proposes urban infill, corridor concentration, and higher densities to enable more connected, low-carbon communities. The strategy recommends aligning transport investment with land use planning, and stresses the need for design-led, equitable, and data-informed decision-making in the Local Plan process. While it does not directly relate to activities in the city centre nor car parking issue, it re-emphasises the expectations around growing the sustainable travel network via new development in the emerging Local Plan.

3.6. Stakeholder Collaboration

Progress will depend on coordinated action across public and private stakeholders. The city council controls off-street parking and land use policy. Lancashire County Council leads on highways, on-street parking, and public transport. The new Combined County Authority will play a growing role in funding and strategy.

In addition, collaboration with developers, local businesses, bus operators, and community groups will be critical to shaping transport plans that reflect real needs and constraints. Regular review cycles and shared data platforms could enhance transparency and responsiveness.

3.7. Development Dependencies and Future Planning

Several developments will shape future travel and parking demand:

- **Canal Quarter:** Long-term phased regeneration will reduce current areas of surface parking, requiring careful consideration of reallocation or replacement elsewhere.
- **Eden Project Morecambe:** Anticipated to increase sub-regional traffic volumes and impact on Junction 34 Park and Ride. A Visitor Access and Parking Strategy (VAPS) is required.
- **South Lancaster/Galgate:** Any future growth will be explored through the Local Plan Review process, but significant infrastructure investment is required for future development options to be fully considered.
- **New Hospital and RLI Redevelopment:** While subject to some delay the new hospital may shift patterns of access and will need careful consideration over the next decade.
- **Norh and East Lancaster Strategic Sites:** New homes, schools, and infrastructure could ease traffic pressure in the centre if well-integrated with active and public transport options and create new routes to accessing the motorway, avoiding the need to access the Lancaster city centre gyratory system.

These projects highlight the importance of treating parking not as an isolated operational issue, but as part of a long-term, integrated mobility and city movement strategy.

3.8. Summary

Lancaster's transport policy aims are ambitious, but delivery is constrained by funding uncertainty and outdated frameworks. Car parking strategy has traditionally been overlooked in transport planning but is increasingly recognised as a key lever for managing travel demand and supporting sustainability.

Short-term progress will rely on modest, targeted interventions: improving bus reliability, upgrading walking, and cycling routes, modernising car parks, and using pricing and digital tools to influence behaviour. Long-term success depends on embedding parking policy within wider planning and transport frameworks, supported by cross-agency collaboration and sustained investment. However, much of the highway, footpath, and lighting interventions fall within the remit (and core funding) of Lancashire County Council as the area's Highway Authority.

Parking policy must move from the margins of strategy to its core - supporting equitable, low-carbon access to Lancaster's growing city centre and regional attractions. Demand management measures such as variable pricing, short-stay restrictions, and enforcement technology (e.g. ANPR) are tools that could further support policy goals.

4. Drivers of Parking Demand

4.1. National and Local Trends

Parking demand is shaped by a range of evolving technological, behavioural, economic, and policy-driven forces. As of 2023, the UK had 35.7 million vehicles on the road.

Forecasts for 2050 vary widely:

- Without major intervention, car numbers could rise to 44.5 million.
- Moderate policy action may stabilise this at 37 million.
- Under strong decarbonisation pathways (e.g. National Grid’s “Two Degrees”), vehicle numbers could fall to 25 million, driven by automation, car sharing, and remote working.

In Lancaster district, car ownership is broadly in line with national norms—about 0.51 vehicles per person—with 23% of households reporting having no access to a private car in 2021.

Local travel patterns may be changing as home working has eased weekday peaks, while leisure, student, and cultural trips increasingly shape evening and weekend demand. As a result, different parking locations face different pressures—short-stay car parks near cultural venues are often busiest when long-stay commuter sites are underused.

4.2. Electric Vehicles and Infrastructure Implications

Electric vehicle (EV) uptake is accelerating. National policy will see a ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035, and EVs could represent over 60% of the fleet by 2050. While this supports climate targets, EVs do not reduce congestion or spatial demand for parking.

For Lancaster, a priority is also ensuring equitable access to EV charging. Many homes, particularly in dense terrace neighbourhoods, lack private driveways. Public EV infrastructure, particularly in off-street council-run car parks, needs to be scaled up and targeted where home charging is not feasible or difficult.

This reinforces a key theme: electrifying vehicles is not enough - reducing total dependency on private cars remains a key strategic goal across all current national, regional, and local policy.

4.3. Behavioural and Social Shifts

Broader social changes are affecting demand:

- Remote working: Lowers demand during weekday peaks but increases flexibility and off-peak travel.

- E-commerce: Reduces short visits to shops but raises traffic from logistics and deliveries.
- Leisure and culture: Create growing evening and weekend demand for central, short-stay parking.
- Demographics: Younger adults and city dwellers are more likely to delay car ownership or choose alternatives, but only where those alternatives are convenient, safe, and affordable.

These patterns challenge legacy assumptions that peak-hour demand should drive supply (the “predict and provide” model). Lancaster’s parking strategy takes a different stance: not simply expanding capacity to meet short-term pressures but using parking policy to help move towards a long-term sustainable future.

4.4. Commuting Patterns and Public Transport

Lancaster remains a largely self-contained labour market—80% of working residents are employed within the district. Yet commuting by car remains dominant, especially from semi-rural areas like LA1, LA2 and South Lakeland, where public transport is sparse or unreliable.

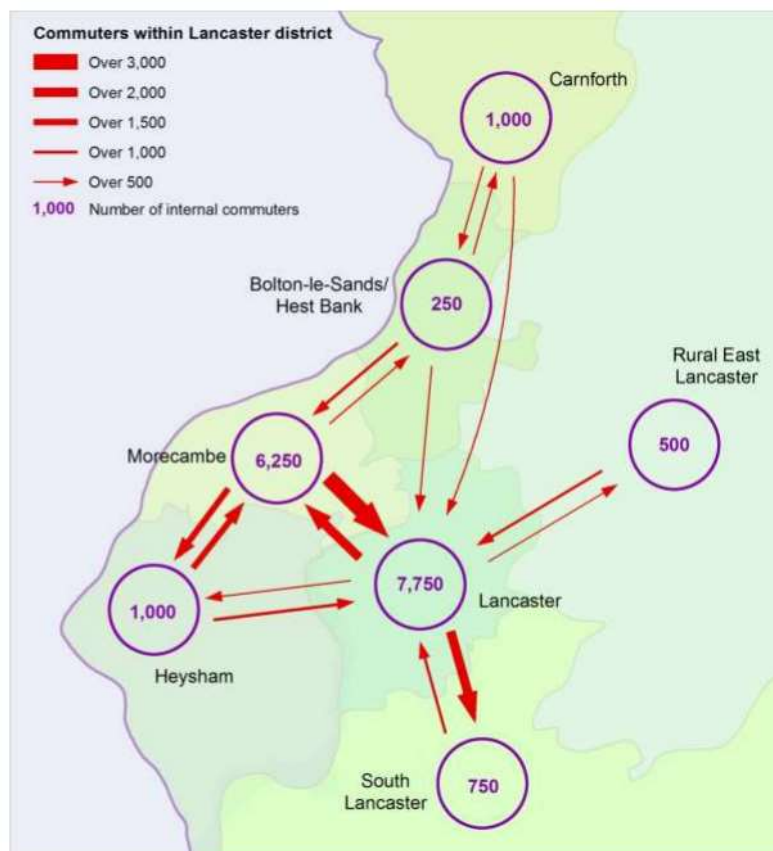


Figure 10 Commuting in Lancaster District (Lancaster District Highways Masterplan (2016))

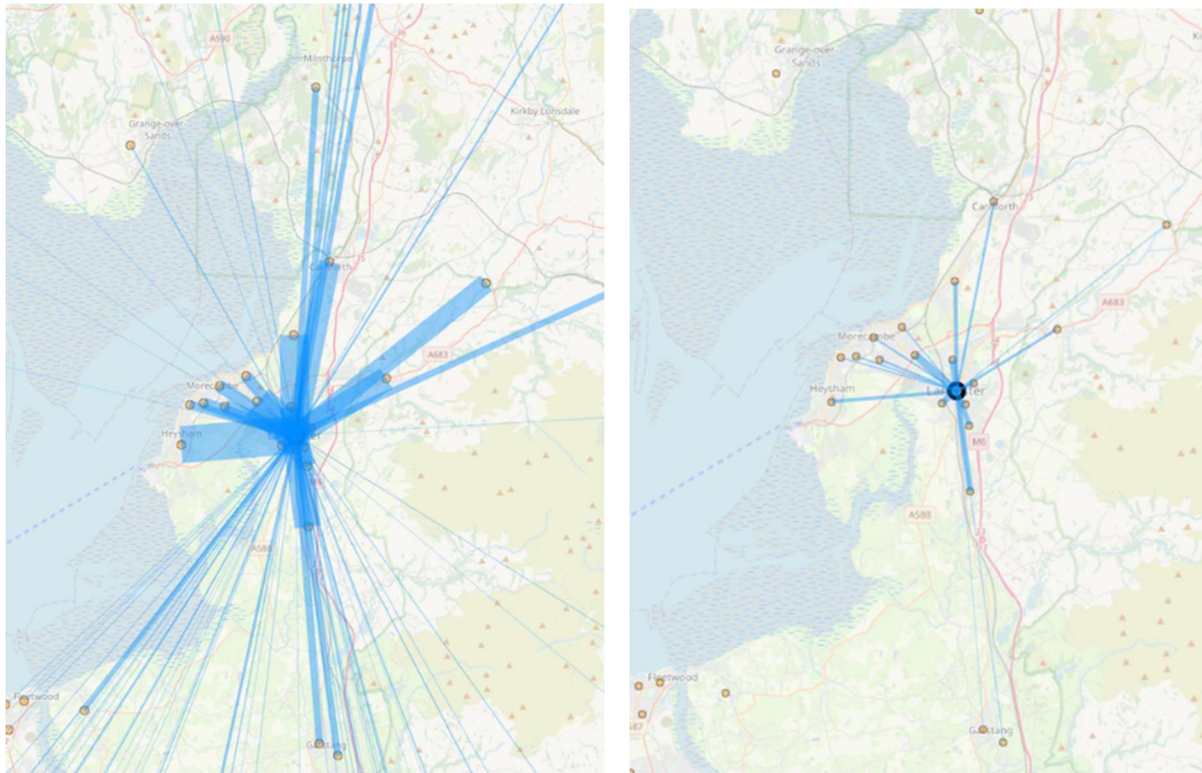


Figure 11 Car journeys to Lancaster City Centre (from home) as Driver (left) / as Passenger (right) (Lancaster District Highways Masterplan (2016))

While the above data points are old they are unlikely to have altered to any great extent in terms of composition, although the most current information on the national picture points to reduced commuting overall post-Covid pandemic, although trending back towards pre-Covid levels. However, the proportion of active and public personal transport trips remain consistently lower than private vehicle use, which is highly significant, especially for travel to outlying rural areas.

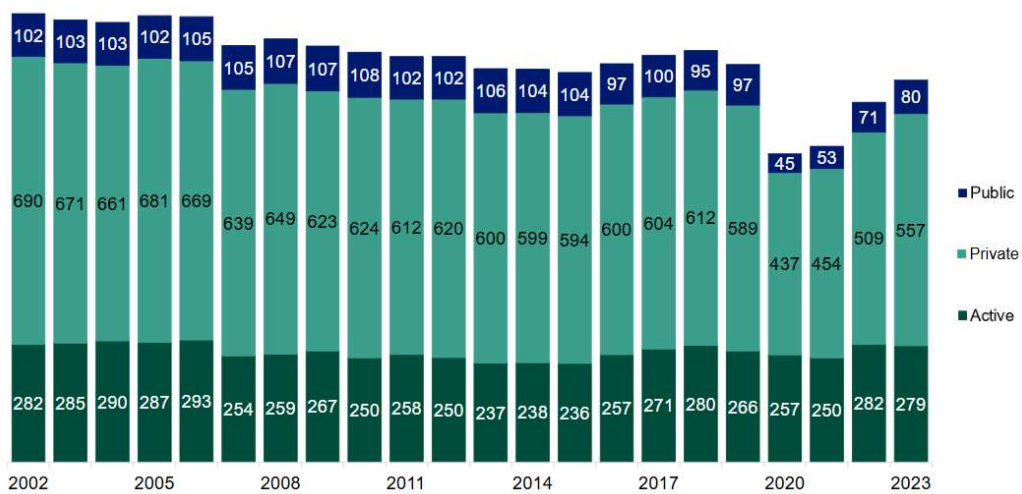


Figure 12 Graph showing average number of active, private, and public transport trips (trips per person per year (England 2002 to 2023 (Source: DfT Transport Statistics Great Britain 2024))

If public transport is slow or infrequent, even worsening congestion will not encourage people out of their cars. Instead, they continue to drive, reinforcing the congestion and emissions problems that transport policy seeks to solve.

The Downs–Thomson paradox in transport planning refers to a counterintuitive outcome where improving road infrastructure does not reduce traffic congestion and may even worsen it. It states that the equilibrium speed of car traffic is determined by the quality of public transport. If public transport is slow or inconvenient, more people drive, increasing congestion. Conversely, if public transport is fast and reliable, fewer people drive, easing road traffic. Therefore, investing in roads without improving public transport can lead to more congestion due to induced demand. The paradox highlights the importance of balanced investment in both road and public transport systems to achieve sustainable urban mobility.

In other words, without better alternatives, such as reliable, affordable, and frequent bus services, car use will remain the default. Lancaster’s long-term strategy must therefore focus on raising the quality of alternatives, so modal shift becomes more attractive and practical. In doing so this can make those necessary car journeys more efficient.

Free parking at out-of-town shopping centres has a significant and multifaceted impact on city and town centres. National Planning Policy Framework in theory promotes a “town centre first” policy for retail and other main town centre uses. Local authorities are required to apply a sequential test: developments should be located first in town centres, then edge-of-centre, and only out-of-centre if no suitable sites are available.

For large out-of-town retail proposals (typically over 2,500 sqm), developers must provide an impact assessment to evaluate the effect on town centre vitality and viability. However, the Government could do more to “level the playing field” between competing retail centres by making it easier to introduce parking levies or business rate adjustment for out-of-town retail parks to reflect their impact on town centres.

4.5. Demand Management, Pricing, and Technology

Parking pricing is an important lever for shaping behaviour. Lancaster’s Strategy proposes reviewing tariffs to:

- Encourage turnover in high-demand zones.
- Make edge-of-centre parking more attractive for long-stay users.
- Support local business through smart short-stay pricing.

In the future, more dynamic approaches, such as emissions-based pricing, peak-time surcharges, vehicle weight / size or demand-responsive tariffs, could be introduced. These measures could help moderate spikes in demand while supporting environmental and economic goals.

Technology will play a key role. ANPR, mobile payments, and digital signage can improve user experience, enable real-time monitoring, and allow more responsive management across the transport network and parking portfolio.

4.6. Positioning the Parking Strategy

Historically, the city council's approach to parking was focused on maintenance, enforcement, and income generation. Today, the Strategy is being repositioned as a broader policy tool - one that influences transport behaviour, air quality, urban form, and social equity.

This marks a shift:

- From reacting to demand to shaping demand.
- From static provision to active integration with public transport, cycling, walking, and land use planning.
- From a standalone operational function to a core pillar of place-making and sustainability.

This repositioning also recognises parking's political visibility and financial impact. It must balance short-term accessibility with long-term transformation, helping the city stay functional today while transitioning toward a healthier, low-carbon future.

4.7. Summary

Parking demand is changing and hard to predict. New technologies, work habits, housing patterns, and mobility preferences are reshaping how people travel and when. Lancaster must accommodate these shifts while continuing to serve key user groups - commuters, disabled drivers, visitors, and those without viable alternatives. Car parking remains important in this transition, particularly to ensure access for those who need it and to help the city compete with out-of-town destinations. But continuing to meet all projected demand risks reinforcing car dependency and undermining goals to reduce emissions and support active and public transport.

Over time, the goal is to reduce reliance on private cars - not simply to accommodate all growth in potential demand. This will require new infrastructure, smarter management, coordinated planning, and a firm departure from the predict-and-provide approach, which is not currently reflected in the practical outcomes of national planning policy and balancing mechanisms which are still impacting on city centre vitality in favour of out-of-town retail and leisure destinations.

In this context, the parking strategy is a statement of direction. It helps Lancaster manage present realities while building the foundations for a cleaner, more connected, and equitable transport future.

5. Lancaster City Centre Parking Vision and Strategic Aims

5.1. Vision

To create a well-managed, efficient, and sustainable parking system that supports residents, businesses, and visitors while enabling a long-term shift toward public and active transport, reduced congestion, and better use of city centre land.

5.2. Strategic Aims

To achieve this vision, Lancaster City Council will:

- *Ensure the right provision in the right places:* Reduce unnecessary circulation and central congestion by aligning parking location and capacity with actual demand patterns.
- *Support the evening and cultural economy:* Maintain sufficient, accessible parking in areas that serve hospitality, tourism, and event-based travel.
- *Improve quality, safety, and accessibility:* Modernise car parks to be clean, safe, and welcoming—with a minimum 6% Blue Badge provision in line with Department for Transport standards.
- *Align parking with wider public goals, particularly the Local Development Plan:* Use parking strategy to actively support regeneration, land use planning, and county and national transport policy.
- *Manage demand through smarter tools:* Promote modal alternatives and flexible pricing to spread demand and reduce city centre pressure at peak times.
- *Future-proof infrastructure:* Ensure car parks are ready for electric vehicles, car clubs, secure cycling, and changing mobility habits.
- *Inform planning and investment decisions:* Provide clear evidence and policy guidance on parking capacity, usage, and redevelopment options.

5.3. Short - to Medium-Term Focus (by 2028)

- Maintain a portfolio of 1,400–1,500 publicly operated off-street spaces, sufficient to meet identified demand peaks.
- Protect the Council's net parking income to support the General Fund, while reviewing tariffs as required.
- Enable phased redevelopment of selected surface car parks for housing, while maintaining local access and neighbourhood amenity.
- Restore the Castle Car Park to service by 2026 and upgrade existing Multi-Storey Car Parks (MSCPs).

- Introduce ANPR and digital tools to monitor usage, improve enforcement, and inform users in real-time.
- Designate small central car parks as short-stay (2-hour max) to increase turnover and reduce congestion.
- Enhance Park & Ride usage through improved promotion, signage, and bus service alignment.
- Roll out contactless/mobile payment systems and introduce location-based variable pricing.
- Expand coach parking provision to support the visitor and events economy.

5.4. Long-Term Focus (Post-2028)

- Develop a strategic framework for car park location, type, and capacity as part of the city's wider transport and movement vision.
- Explore potential sites and financing options for edge-of-centre MSCP-based transport hubs.
- Ensure integration with the Eden Project Morecambe Visitor Access and Parking Strategy.
- Clarify the role of the Canal Quarter in city centre parking—whether retaining capacity or relocating it.
- Strengthen ongoing usage monitoring and data-sharing to inform decisions and respond to changing patterns.
- Assess the wider economic and accessibility impacts of reduced parking capacity and implement mitigation if required.

6. Implementation and Action Plan

6.1. Immediate and Committed Changes

Lancaster City Council has committed to changes that will directly affect the parking portfolio over the short to medium term. These changes align with broader regeneration, housing, and climate priorities:

- Castle Car Park
Closed since June 2023 for safety and structural reasons. Occupancy prior to closure was relatively low. It remains an essential part of the council’s future offer and work is ongoing to ensure it is brought back into use.
- Nelson Street Car Park
The site has been released for affordable housing development in line with the council’s housing delivery programme.
- Upper & Lower St Leonardsgate
This large surface site (including six coach bays) is earmarked for phased release—potentially for social or affordable housing. Enabling works could be expected to begin in 2027/28, with options developed as part of this strategy to maintain strategic and locational capacity during transition.

6.2. Mitigating Actions and Capacity Planning

To offset the loss of parking capacity from redevelopment sites, the following mitigation measures will be implemented:

Action	Who	Outcome/When	Priority
1. Castle car park owners to repair and reopen as soon as possible	Landlords / city council	During 2026	High
2. Implement ANPR occupancy system and link with in app/online availability information.	City council Parking Services	Detailed specification and tendered price received for approval.	High
3. Design, develop and implement permanent additional car and coach parking on the Kingsway site expansion (parking to be at low tariff).	City council Parking Services	By 2026 deliver circa additional 70 spaces on council land	High

4. Work with county council and Combined County Authority on P&R improvements/ strategy (linked to wider strategy for bus priority)	City & County officers	By 2027	Med
5. Ongoing tariff reviews reflect wider strategy	City council officers	Annually	Medium
7. Car club expansion/vehicle share	City council officers	By late 2024/early 2025	Medium
8. City council parking permits review	City council officers	By late 2025/early 2026	Medium
9. Develop a joint City & County Electric Vehicle charging strategy	Joint officer group & County Council	Within 3 years	High
10. Coordinate with city and county officers over the cycling & walking strategy as it relates to car parking locations.	Joint officer group	Improve routes within 3 years	Medium
11. Convert agreed permit only car parks to short-stay	Joint officer group	Ongoing	Medium
12. Amend opening / utility time of St Nicholas Arcades car parking for late evening opening.	City council Parking Services	During 2025	High
13. Design, develop and implement additional and improved provision on Edward Street car park in 3 phases. Phase 1. Former LDHAS site temporary improvements Phase 2. Edward Street Expansion. Phase 3. Edward Street addition / improvement under proposed Heron Works (Canal Quarter regeneration)	City council Parking Services and Regeneration Team	Over 3 years.	High

14. Implementation of “Moor Mills 4” – opening current office leased parking to general use	City council Parking Services	2026	High
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Figure 13: Planned Mitigation Measures – over the period of the Strategy

Through targeted site changes, modernisation of key facilities, and smarter tools for pricing, monitoring, and information, the city will maintain a reliable core of parking while reducing reliance on older, low-value surface lots.

A phased approach, combined with active monitoring and public engagement, will ensure the strategy remains responsive and delivers both accessibility and sustainability benefits.

The detailed phasing of the changes and resulting total number of strategic spaces is shown below:

Interventions	Space Numbers for General Use (By end of 2028 strategy period)			
	By end of 2025	2026	2027	2028
Car park				
Kingsway	16	116	116	116
Edward Street Phase 1 extension – includes former LDHAS site	112	112	112	112
Castle car park reopening - subject to landlord legals	0	287*	287	287
Nelson Street	120	0*	0	0
Edward Street Phase 2 extension – expansion of the site to the north east	0	0	60	60
Moor Mills 4 - Evening, Weekends & Bank holidays only	100	100	100	100
Bulk St conversion to short stay	0	8	8	8
Upper & Lower St Leonard’s Gate.	203	203	0*	0
Spaces following defined interventions.	551	826	683	683

Base capacity as of May 2025 = 1329 General Use				
Overall Parking Numbers	1,452	1,727	1,584	1,584
Capacity Aim Lower ambition - 1,400 spaces	1,400	1,400	1,400	1,400
Difference	52	327	184	184
Capacity Aim Upper ambition - 1,500 spaces	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
Difference	-48	227	84	84

Figure 14: Space Numbers for General Use throughout the Strategy Period

**Assumes loss of Nelson Street – April 2026; Castle return to use by August 2026 and loss of Upper and Lower St Leonard’s Gate by April 2027*

Map of Existing City Council Provision

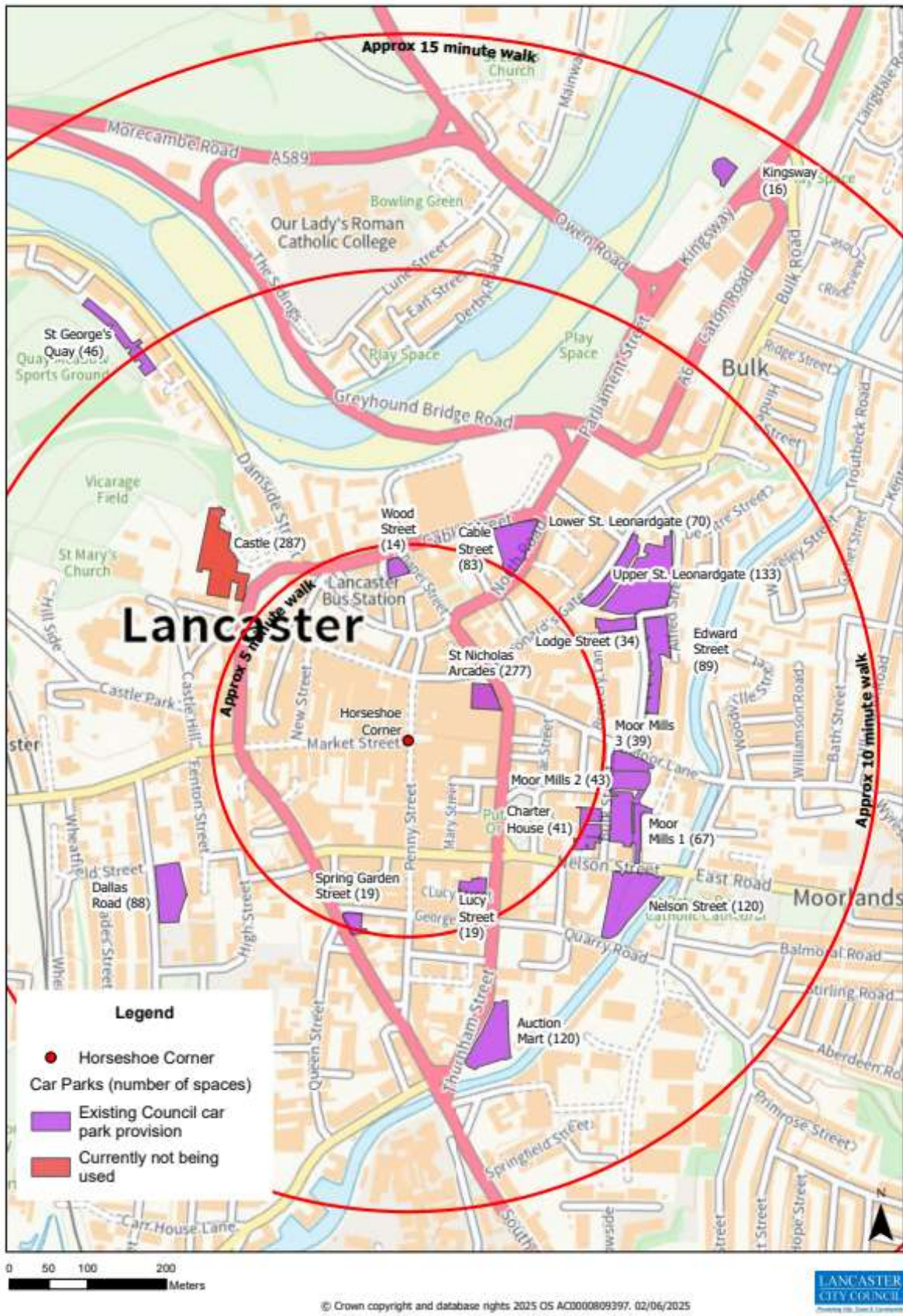


Figure 15: Map of Existing City Centre Provision

Map of Planned End of Strategy Period Provision

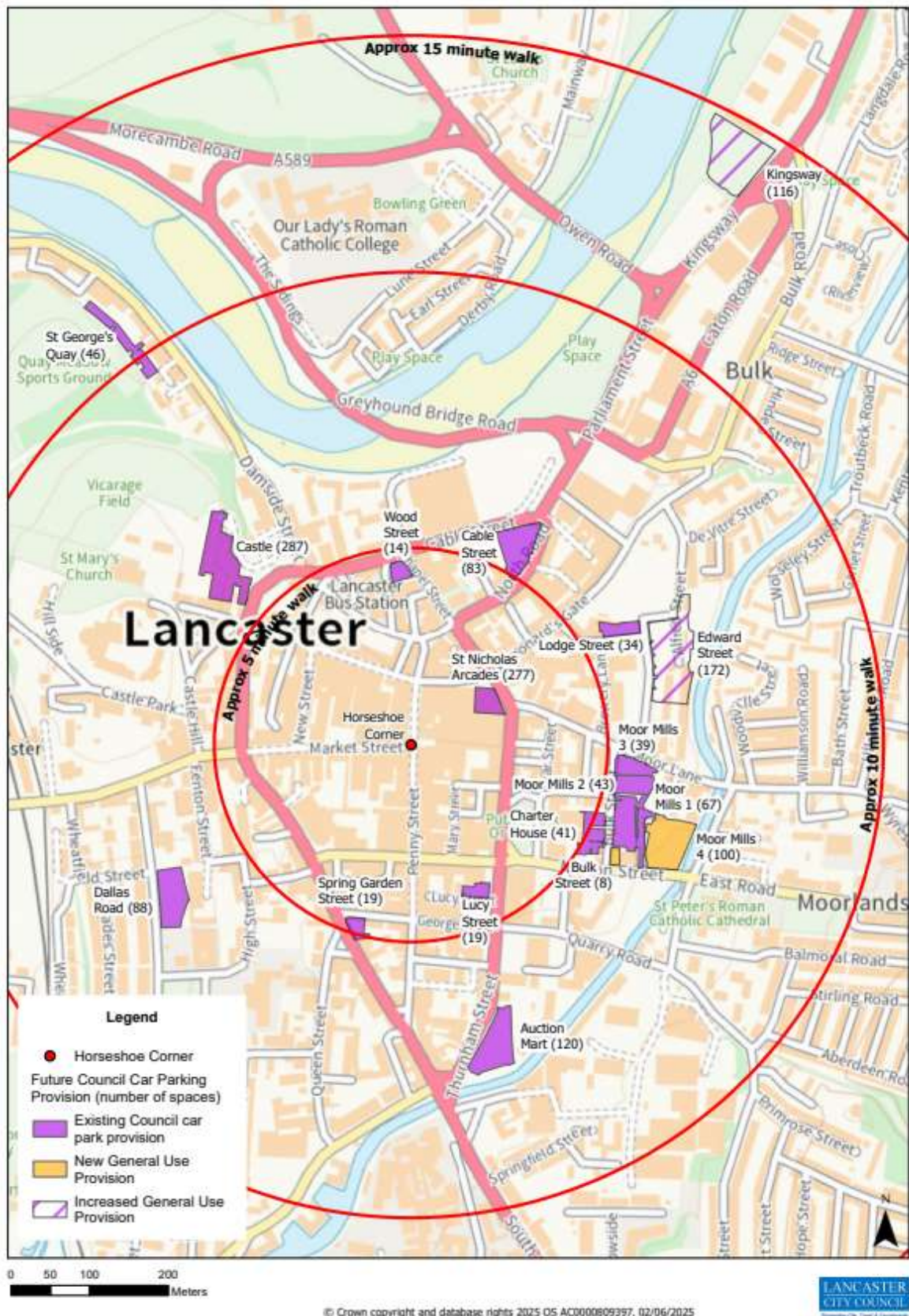


Figure 16: Map Showing Planned End of Strategy Provision

To consider further changes to the city council’s parking portfolio for the Long Term the following will be required:

Action	Who	Outcome/When	Priority
1. Strategically plan for two new transport hubs – North & South of the City	Lancaster City Council	To review locations and delivery options, including financing and business cases.	High
2. Introduce ANPR enforcement when allowed by DfT	DfT	As legislation approves the use of ANPR to undertake penalty ticket enforcement.	Medium
3. Implement strategic approach to Lancaster movement strategy agreed in partnership with county council, Combined County Authority, and emerging transport improvements	Parking Services & County Council	On-going	High
4. Strategic signage - review locations and links to ANPR information provision.	Parking Services & County Council	Within 10 years	Medium
5. Monitoring and Review	Parking Services	3-year refresh of Parking Strategy and review of outcomes	

Figure 17: Planned Mitigation Measures over the Long Term

6.3. Summary

The Implementation and Action Plan outlines how Lancaster City Council will adapt its parking network to serve a modern, evolving city. The strategy is not just about capacity - it is about making the system smarter, more accessible, and more aligned with the city’s long-term climate and development goals.

Through targeted site changes, modernisation of key facilities, and smarter tools for pricing, monitoring, and information, the city will maintain a reliable core of parking while reducing reliance on older, low-value surface lots.

A phased approach, combined with active monitoring and public engagement, will ensure the strategy remains responsive and delivers both accessibility and sustainability benefits.

Effective delivery requires collaboration. The city council will:

- Work closely with Lancashire County Council, especially regarding on-street capacity, sustainable transport integration, and the Local Transport Plan.
- Coordinate with planning and regeneration teams to align parking decisions with housing, development, and transport investment.
- Engage with businesses, tourism operators, residents, and disability access groups to ensure delivery remains inclusive and responsive.
- Collaborate with developers and landowners in areas such as the Canal Quarter and East Lancaster to ensure parking strategy supports long-term city centre vitality.

A formal strategy review is scheduled for 2027/28 to assess:

- Supply and demand trends.
- Revenue impacts and General Fund implications.
- Public and stakeholder feedback.
- Technology adoption and user satisfaction.
- Revisions to future Strategy iterations.

Conclusion

Lancaster City Council recognises that accessible, well-managed parking is a critical part of supporting the city centre economy, enabling inclusion, and maintaining travel choice. At the same time, the Council also accepts that the way we manage car parking must evolve to meet the challenges of climate change, housing delivery, sustainable transport, and efficient land use.

This strategy acknowledges the importance of providing an optimal and resilient level of car parking, especially for those with limited mobility and for locations underserved by public transport. It also reflects the urgent need to modernise infrastructure, improve quality, reduce congestion, and integrate parking more effectively with broader transport and land use goals.

The city council's off-street parking portfolio is only one part of the city's overall access system. But it is a part the Council directly controls—and can use strategically. By repositioning parking as a core element of planning and transport policy, rather than simply an operational service, Lancaster is creating the conditions for a cleaner, more efficient, and inclusive city centre.

The Parking Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a pragmatic, data-driven approach. It balances:

- Maintaining sufficient spaces to support economic vitality.
- Enabling the phased redevelopment of outdated surface car parks.
- Supporting modal shift through investment in walking, cycling, and public transport.
- Preparing for the long-term shift to electric vehicles and shared mobility.

While there is currently good availability across the network, managing demand intelligently—rather than simply increasing supply—will be central to long-term success. This means aligning parking provision with:

- The declared Climate Emergency.
- The Lancaster District Highways and Transport Masterplan.
- The Local Transport Plan.
- The Canal Quarter Masterplan, Eden Project access needs, and other regeneration priorities.

Business and community concerns about the future of public parking are acknowledged. Through this strategy, and ongoing collaboration with Lancashire County

Council and other stakeholders, the Council is committed to ensuring that changes to parking provision are well-planned, phased, and responsive to local needs.

Looking ahead, the Council will continue to:

- Monitor demand patterns using new digital tools.
- Adapt provision based on data, feedback, and growth.
- Link parking strategy to wider goals for housing, health, economy, and environment.

By delivering this strategy, Lancaster will not only maintain a functional parking system, it will support a broader transition to a city centre that is better connected, more inclusive, and more resilient to the future.

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Appendix 1 – Links to County Council Plans including Bay Gateway Development Consent Order (DCO)

Local Transport Plan (2011-2021)

https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/191267/LTP3_through_full_council.pdf

Highways and Transport Strategy (2023-2025)

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/940050/highways-and-transport-strategy.pdf>

Lancaster District Highways and Transport Masterplan (2016)

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/899614/final-lancaster-highways-and-transport-master-plan.pdf>

Bay Gateway Development Consent Order (2013)

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010008/TR010008-001441-Final%20TSO%20DCO.pdf>

Lancaster City Centre Movement and Public Realm Strategy (2020)

https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/920691/2517-id-001-08-movement-strategy_compressed.pdf

Lancaster Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) (2024)

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/951846/lancaster.pdf>

(Joint) Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) (2022)

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/938611/lancashire-and-blackburn-with-darwen-bus-service-improvement-plan-update-31-october-2022.pdf>

Appendix 2 - Glossary

Glossary	
ANPR	<i>Automatic Number Plate Recognition</i> – A digital system used to monitor vehicle entry, exit, and duration in car parks. Supports enforcement and real-time occupancy tracking.
EV	<i>Electric Vehicle</i> – A vehicle powered wholly or partially by electricity. EV infrastructure includes public charging points in council-managed car parks.
LCWIP	<i>Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan</i> – A framework guiding investment in active travel networks across the district.
BSIP	<i>Bus Service Improvement Plan</i> – A County-led programme designed to improve the coverage, frequency, and quality of bus services in line with national transport policy.
MSCP	<i>Multi-Storey Car Park</i> – A vertical parking structure offering off-street capacity, typically more efficient and long-term than surface lots.
P&R	<i>Park and Ride</i> – A parking facility at the city’s periphery linked to public transport, designed to reduce city centre congestion.
LTP	<i>Local Transport Plan</i> – A strategic framework (managed by Lancashire County Council) that sets transport priorities, funding, and planning policy.
SPD	<i>Supplementary Planning Document</i> – A local planning policy tool that provides guidance on specific topics such as sustainable travel or parking design.
CCA	<i>Combined County Authority</i> – The emerging devolved structure expected to oversee Lancashire-wide transport and strategic planning.