



A future vision for parking and transport in Marlborough

Wiltshire Council has launched a public consultation on parking throughout Wiltshire, with a questionnaire for each town.

However, parking cannot be considered in isolation. Parking is part of a journey and it is therefore necessary to consider the overall impacts of proposals to change the provision and cost of parking on our local community.

At present Marlborough faces a series of transport problems, as follows.

1. **Air pollution.** Air pollution levels from vehicles are routinely exceeding safe levels in several parts of the town. Salisbury Road, Herd Street and High Street are the worst affected areas. The health impact of such pollution is only recently being recognised and the people that suffer are not travellers but residents that live close to the polluted areas. In practice the only way to reduce this pollution is to reduce traffic levels.
2. **Congestion.** There is routine congestion on the Salisbury Road, High Street, Herd Street and to a lesser extent the A4 where it approaches to the town. It is clear from observation that much of the traffic is to and from local housing estates. Congestion is also the primary cause of the air pollution referred to above.
3. **Roads.** Improvements to the road system within the town would be quite impossible without destroying homes and the older buildings that give the town its character. So this option is not one that can be reasonably considered.
4. **Development.** The town is getting bigger. There is continued pressure from local and central government to provide more housing. Wiltshire Council recently granted planning permission for residential development at the old depot site on Salisbury Road and The Crown Estate is applying for planning permission for 230 new houses and a hotel next to the Marlborough Business Park on Salisbury Road.
5. **High Street.** Marlborough High Street is one of the widest and oldest high streets in Europe, and yet this lovely space has been converted into a giant car park, with associated noise, pollution and congestion. How much better it would be with less cars and more space for people. A good example of a town rediscovering its heritage is Salisbury, where the market square has recently been paved over to create a fine open space in the centre of the town.
6. **Parking.** At present there is an abundant supply of short-term parking but no affordable long-term parking. Consequently there is strong demand for the free on-street parking in residential areas. This creates tension between residents and incoming workers as well as restrictions to the free movement of vehicles on these residential streets. Areas affected include Hyde Lane, Kingsbury Street, Frees Avenue and Ducks Meadow.
7. **Public transport.** The overall provision of public transport in the town is poor and bus services within the town are non-existent on Sundays.

Balanced against the above, it must be recognised that residents enjoy the convenience of driving a short distance into town to find abundant and inexpensive parking close to shops and services they wish to use. Similarly, businesses see parking as essential to their survival.

But as the town expands the current arrangements become less sustainable. The issues listed above are the early symptoms of unsustainable development. All our major cities and town have all been through this process and have recognised that there is a time when the unrestrained use of cars in their central areas is no longer possible.

Those places that recognise this and plan accordingly are able to thrive but those that fail to see emerging problems inevitably become more congested and run-down.

So, against this background, what are the alternatives for Marlborough in the future?

Marlborough is a compact town, clustered around the High Street, where many of the shops and services are to be found. The business park to the south of the town also provides local services in a convenient location, although the Salisbury Road that links the two areas is often congested and would be difficult to upgrade. Schools are located within the town boundaries, but away from the central business area.

Within this compact area, walking and particularly cycling provide feasible ways of getting around, but facilities are poor and, with the exception of the schools, there is little encouragement to adopt these healthy and sustainable ways of travelling.

However, the most important change would be to provide better public transport for short local trips such as a shuttle bus service working wholly within the town boundaries. To be popular, it would have to be reliable, frequent and affordable. The cost of a return fare should be substantially less than the cost of parking. This means that the cost of parking would have to increase to encourage the use of the bus.

An associated option is to rationalise car parking. Affordable parking should be provided for incoming workers and permit parking for residents at appropriate rates. Those people that wish to bring their cars into town rather than using the local bus service would find short-term parking, but at a higher price than at present.

In association with the above and using the principles of shared space it would be possible to return the High Street from its current condition of a glorified car park, where cars get priority, to something where pedestrians and cyclists have equal status. Widening the pavements, slowing traffic flow, creating meeting and art spaces. These need to form the basis of a discussion about what all the residents of this town envision for their High Street.

Finally, the introduction of technology can play a vital part in making best use of the available facilities. For example contact-less payment for parking and bus services reduces the need to carry cash. Variable rates for parking with lower charges at quiet times could help to make the maximum use of the available parking places as well as reducing congestion. Local residents could have pre-paid travel cards, like the Oyster card in London, to pay for buses and for parking. These technologies are already available but their implementation would require vision and investment.

The overall impact would be an improved environment with less congestion, noise and air pollution; a better environment for shopping and a more attractive town. The cost of providing the bus service should be sustainable but could be subsidised from parking charges, if necessary. It opens up options for the beautification of High Street, and a competition could be launched to attract ideas. But, against these benefits, there is some loss of convenience, so residents and business owners would need to understand and be convinced that the continued enlargement of the town requires this form of future vision to preserve the heritage, attractiveness and viability of the town.