

Parking Strategy for Ashford Borough **2026-2030**

Contents

Forward from Portfolio Holder	3
Introduction	4
Parking in context	5
Parking in Ashford Borough	6
Our approach	7
Strategic position	7
Strategic priorities summary	7
Clean, safe, accessible and strategically located car parks	8
Active travel to support wellbeing	9
Sustainability and climate change	10
Supporting town centre regeneration, business growth and the local economy	11
Local Plan	12
Review and monitoring	14
Conclusion	15
Appendix A – Strategic aspirations	16

Foreword

As Climate, Environment and Sustainability Portfolio Holder for Ashford Borough Council, I am pleased to introduce our Parking Strategy for 2026–2030. This document sets out a clear roadmap for how we will manage parking across our borough in the years ahead. Parking is about much more than simply providing spaces for vehicles. It is a vital tool for shaping the places where we live, work, and visit.

Our approach must support residents, businesses, and visitors alike by enabling economic growth, encouraging active and sustainable travel, and contributing to the health and wellbeing of our communities. This strategy has been developed in close collaboration with elected members, local stakeholders, and expert advisors. It aligns with our wider ambitions for climate action, regeneration, and inclusive growth.

Our approach is to deliver a modern, safe, and accessible parking service that meets the needs of today while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. We are committed to providing high-quality, well-maintained car parks that feel safe and welcoming for all users. We will encourage active travel, support the transition to cleaner vehicles, and ensure that our parking provision underpins the vitality of our town centres and rural communities. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy.

Steve Campkin



Introduction

Parking should be a positive and enabling experience and one that supports residents, businesses, and visitors in carrying out their daily activities with ease and confidence.

For Ashford Borough Council, parking is a tool for shaping the place that people live, work, and visit. It plays a vital role in supporting economic development, enabling active and sustainable travel, reducing nuisance parking, and generating income that can be reinvested into improving our services.

This strategy sets out a clear direction for how Ashford will manage its parking provision from 2026 to 2030. It aligns with our Borough Plan and wider ambitions for climate action, health and wellbeing, and inclusive growth.

Our aim is to deliver a modern parking service that:

- Provides high-quality, well-maintained car parks that feel safe and welcoming for all users
- Encourages active travel and supports healthier, more sustainable lifestyles
- Contributes to our climate goals by reducing emissions and supporting the transition to cleaner vehicles
- Underpins the vitality of our town centres and rural communities

The strategy sets out a forward-looking approach to managing parking as a key enabler of Ashford's future.



Parking in context

Parking plays a vital role in shaping how people interact with the borough's town centres, urban and rural neighbourhoods, and transport networks. As the borough continues to grow and evolve, so too must our approach to managing parking ensuring it supports our ambitions for economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and community wellbeing.

What people want from parking

According to national research by the British Parking Association, the top factors influencing where people choose to park are:

1. Location
2. Personal safety
3. Tariffs
4. Ease of access
5. No or minimal queuing
6. Number of available spaces
7. Effective surveillance
8. Size of spaces

These findings align with local feedback and reinforce the need for a parking offer that is convenient, safe, and responsive to user expectations. The findings from our public consultation confirm that convenient, safe, and well-maintained parking is essential to supporting Ashford and Tenterden town centres, with proximity, lighting, security, signage, and surface condition identified as key factors.

There was strong support for sustainable initiatives, including electric vehicle charging, greener infrastructure, and measures to encourage active travel, alongside recognition of our parking team's critical role in supporting the local economy and town centre vitality.

Changing role of town centres

The traditional role of retail as the anchor of town centre vitality is shifting. Evidence from the Association of Town and City Management and wider national studies shows that while tariffs do influence behaviour, it is the ease of finding a space and the availability of parking that most significantly affect where people choose to shop, work, or invest.

People want to find a space when they need it, where they want it, and at a price that feels fair and proportionate to the destination. Most customers accept that parking in town centres comes with a cost reflecting the value of access to a diverse mix of retail, cultural, and leisure opportunities. They also understand that parking revenue helps maintain and improve these facilities.

Technology and expectations

Customers increasingly expect digital tools to support their parking experience such as apps that help them pay easily and avoid queues. These technologies also benefit the council by reducing cash handling and providing data to inform future investment and policy decisions.

As the Association of Town and City Management notes:

"The general availability of spaces is felt to be more important than cost in their overall decision about visiting. Traffic flow and parking signage have as much, if not greater, effect on their decision to visit the town centre, how long they spend there, and how much money they spend."

Parking in Ashford Borough

The borough is diverse in both character and need, and it is important to recognise that different areas operate within very different contexts. Tenterden, in particular, differs markedly from Ashford. As a rural market town with a strong visitor and tourism economy, Tenterden experiences distinct travel patterns and a far greater reliance on car access than a larger urban centre. Parking provision therefore plays a critical role not only in supporting local residents, but also in sustaining the town's economy, visitor offer and accessibility.

The council operates a comprehensive network of 2,285 parking spaces across 14 public chargeable car parks located in both Ashford and Tenterden, supporting the differing needs of residents, businesses and visitors across the borough. Notably, nine of these car parks are equipped with publicly available Electric Vehicle (EV) chargepoints, reinforcing the council's commitment to sustainable transport and future-ready infrastructure while ensuring that rural and urban areas alike are able to transition to low-emission travel.

In addition to these off-street facilities, there are approximately 2,345 restricted on-street parking spaces distributed throughout the borough which are managed in partnership with Kent County Council. This integrated approach ensures a balanced and flexible parking offer, providing short-stay convenience for town centres and tourist destinations alongside longer-stay provision that supports commuters, workers and residents.

The council has also observed a sustained increase in customer uptake of its pay-by-phone service, demonstrating a clear shift away from cash-based transactions. May 2025 marked a record month, with over 60,000 parking sessions processed through the council's mobile payment provider. The ability for customers to extend parking sessions remotely, without needing to return to their vehicle, continues to resonate strongly with users and now accounts for approximately 6% of all parking sessions.

Beyond council-managed facilities, the borough benefits from a number of privately operated car parks and provision associated with key transport hubs such as Ashford International Station. The station's multi-storey car park currently provides significant capacity, helping to relieve pressure on surrounding streets and town centre car parks. According to the Office of Rail and Road, Ashford International Station recorded approximately 3.5 million passenger entries and exits between March 2023 and March 2024, highlighting the ongoing importance of a robust, well-managed parking infrastructure to support economic activity and connectivity across the borough.



Our approach

To provide a modern, inclusive, and sustainable parking offer that ensures car parks are safe, welcoming, and well-located; promotes active travel to support healthier communities; contributes to climate resilience; and supports vibrant local economies.

Strategic position

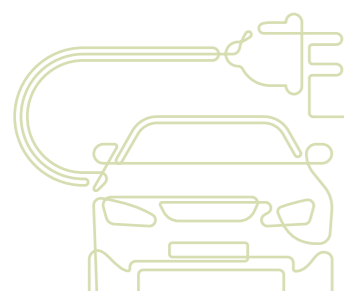
Ashford Borough Council is committed to ensuring that its parking provision continues to meet the evolving needs of residents and businesses across the borough. This Parking Strategy sets out a clear and deliverable roadmap for the period 2026 to 2030, aligned with the council's broader ambitions for regeneration, sustainability, and community wellbeing.

Strategic priorities summary

The council needs a strategy which sets out how it will achieve this that is realistic and fundable. The four areas of the strategy are:

- **Clean, Safe, Accessible and Strategically located car parks**
To ensure that all car parks across the borough are safe, accessible, and well-maintained, providing a positive and secure experience for all users. This includes improving lighting, signage, surveillance, and design standards to meet the needs of residents, visitors, and businesses. In addition, car parks should be strategically located to align with key routes as they converge with the town centre road networks. This not only enhances convenience for drivers but also helps reduce unnecessary traffic circulation caused by vehicles searching for available spaces.
- **Active Travel to Support Wellbeing**
To encourage healthier, more active lifestyles by promoting walking, cycling, and public transport as viable alternatives to car use. The strategy will support infrastructure improvements and behavioural change initiatives that make active travel more attractive and accessible.
- **Sustainability and Climate Change**
To contribute to the borough's climate goals by reducing transport-related emissions, supporting the uptake of electric vehicles, and integrating parking policy with wider environmental objectives.
- **Supporting Town Centre Regeneration, Business Growth and the Local Economy**
To support sustainable business growth and town centre vitality by ensuring that parking provision is responsive to economic needs. This includes balancing supply and demand, enabling flexible use of parking assets, and integrating parking with regeneration and place-making initiatives. It is also essential that parking strategies support employees working within town centres by ensuring they have reliable and accessible parking options, helping to attract and retain a local workforce and reduce unnecessary commuting pressures.

This will be explored in the next sections of the strategy.



Clean, safe, accessible and strategically located car parks

An independent review conducted in 2024 confirmed that the borough's pay-and-display car parks are in excellent condition, offering a high standard of safety and convenience for all users. Key features include CCTV coverage, adequate lighting, and regular maintenance, ensuring a secure and user-friendly experience.

Accessibility remains a priority. The provision of disabled bays meets – and in some cases exceeds – Government guidance, which recommends allocating 4% of total spaces for disabled users. This commitment helps prevent discrimination and encourages visits from all motorists.

Signage was assessed as clear and informative, with terms and conditions and tariff details prominently displayed. To further support compliance and enforcement, additional payment reminders and more visible signage for terms and conditions are recommended, ideally positioned so they are visible from every bay. Introducing Vehicle Management Signage (VMS) could enhance the user experience by directing drivers to available spaces, reducing congestion and easing pressure on central locations.

Payment facilities are modern and reliable, supporting coins, chip & pin, contactless payments, and 'pay-by-phone' options. The ability to extend parking sessions remotely encourages longer stays and adds convenience for visitors.

Motorcycle parking provision is available within a number of car parks, but current usage by motorcycle riders is low. This indicates a potential opportunity to better align provision with the practical needs of riders, including safe access, secure parking and clearly designated facilities. In car parks without dedicated motorcycle bays, motorcycles may use standard car bays; however, these arrangements may not provide the most appropriate or attractive solution for motorcycle users.

Lighting is present across all sites, with regular inspections ensuring safety and timely maintenance. Effective lighting is essential for deterring crime, supporting the night-time economy, and encouraging use after dark.

Active patrols and CCTV coverage further reinforce safety. The review found no significant signs of anti-social behaviour.

In summary: The borough's car parks are clean, safe, accessible, and strategically located. These standards will be maintained and enhanced throughout the strategy period.



Active travel to support wellbeing

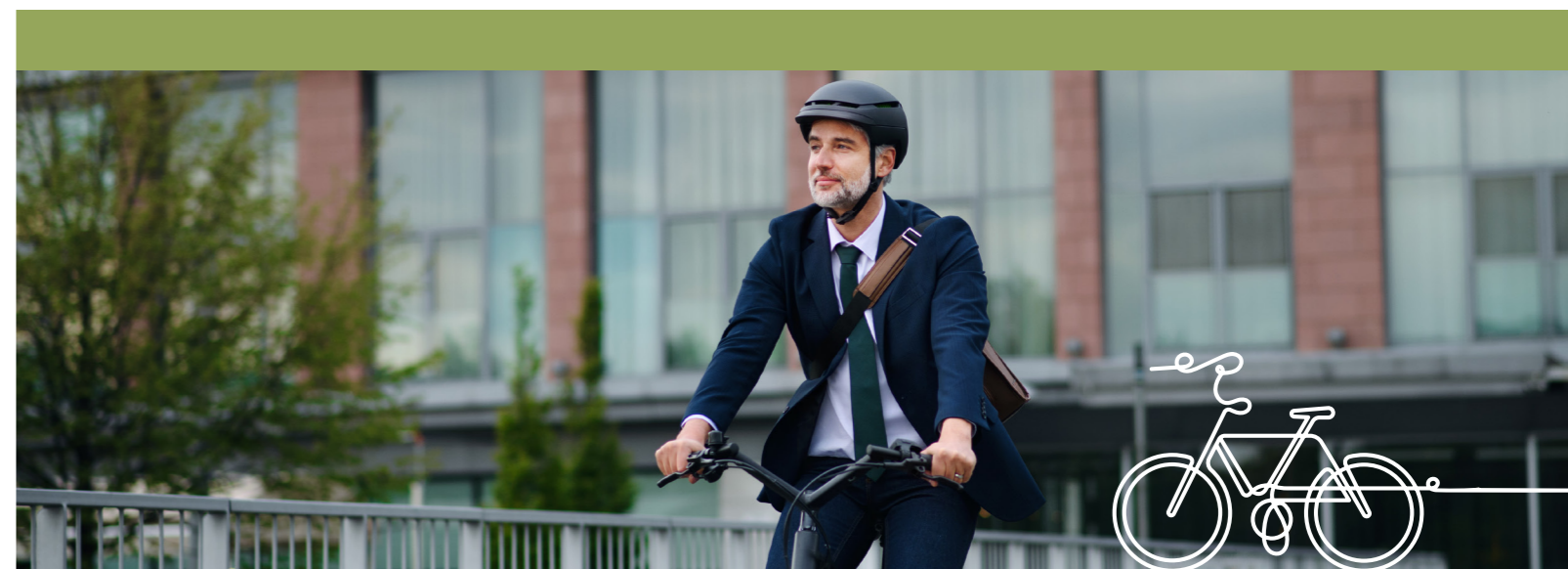
Ashford Borough Council recognises that active travel such as walking and cycling is a vital contributor to public health, environmental sustainability, and community wellbeing. Embedding active travel into the borough's Parking Strategy reflects the council's commitment to creating inclusive, accessible, and healthier environments for all residents.

Promoting active travel supports several strategic priorities, including reducing congestion, improving air quality, and encouraging physical activity. By integrating infrastructure such as secure cycle storage, car share initiatives, and well-connected walking and cycling routes into parking provision, the council aims to support a shift away from private vehicle use and towards more sustainable modes of transport.

An independent review of the borough's car parks in 2024 identified limited secure bicycle storage, with only a few Sheffield cycle hoops in place. To effectively promote active travel, it is essential to provide secure and accessible cycle parking in appropriate locations whether within or adjacent to car parks. To ensure maximum impact and integration, these initiatives will align with the wider Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), supporting strategic connectivity and long-term active travel goals.

Equally important is the role of community engagement in shaping travel behaviours. The council is committed to working collaboratively with residents, businesses, and local organisations to encourage more sustainable travel choices. Behaviour change is central to this approach. Through targeted campaigns, improved infrastructure, educational initiatives, and community-led events, the council aims to foster a culture where walking, cycling, and shared transport are seen as convenient, safe, and attractive alternatives to car use.

By embedding active travel and community engagement into the Parking Strategy, Ashford Borough Council is not only addressing transport needs it is delivering a public health intervention.



Sustainability and climate change

Ashford Borough Council is committed to addressing the challenges of climate change and embedding sustainability into all aspects of its operations, including transport and parking. The council has set ambitious targets to become carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030 and to support the wider borough in achieving net zero by 2050.

Sustainability is a strategic priority that underpins the council's objective for a healthier, more resilient, and economically vibrant borough. The Parking Strategy plays a key role in this agenda by promoting low-carbon travel options, reducing emissions from transport, and supporting the transition to more sustainable modes of mobility.

The council's emerging Energy and Land Management strategies outline a range of initiatives that intersect with parking policy, including the further roll out of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, investment in walking and cycling routes, and exploring the introduction of solar arrays within car parks. These measures are designed to gain maximum benefits from our assets, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, improve air quality, and enhance the liveability of Ashford's communities.

The council's approach to electric vehicle charging provision is informed by the evolving Local Area Energy Plan and associated infrastructure strategies. This includes data-driven insights into where demand for Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) is emerging, ensuring that investment is targeted and equitable. This strategic alignment ensures that EVCP deployment is not only environmentally sound but also socially inclusive helping to ensure that residents are not priced out of adopting low or zero-emission vehicles.

In line with the council's Climate Impact Assessment framework, all parking-related projects will be evaluated for their environmental impact, ensuring that decisions contribute positively to long-term sustainability goals.

By integrating sustainability and climate resilience into the Parking Strategy, Ashford Borough Council reaffirms its leadership in environmental stewardship and its commitment to building a greener, cleaner, and more inclusive future for all.



Supporting town centre regeneration, business growth and the local economy

Ashford Borough Council recognises that a well-designed Parking Strategy is a critical enabler of town centre regeneration, business growth, and local economic resilience. As the borough evolves, the way people access and experience its town centres must also adapt to support a vibrant, inclusive, and economically sustainable future.

As part of our commitment to supporting residents in the town centres, the council will undertake a comprehensive review of the resident permit scheme. This review will assess current permit allocation, pricing, and enforcement, ensuring that the scheme meets the needs of residents while balancing the demands of visitors and local businesses. Stakeholder engagement will be central to this process, with findings informing future policy and operational improvements.

Parking provision plays a pivotal role in this transformation. By ensuring that car parks are safe, well-maintained, and strategically located, the council can support footfall to local businesses.

In addition, the Parking Strategy will:

- Support local businesses by maintaining convenient, affordable parking options that encourage repeat visits and longer dwell times
- Enhance the visitor experience through improved signage, lighting, and payment systems, making town centres more welcoming and accessible
- Promote town centre events, services and activities through electronic signage
- Enable modal shift by integrating parking with active travel infrastructure and public transport links, reducing congestion and improving air quality

The council is also committed to working with local businesses, residents, and stakeholders to ensure that parking policies reflect the needs of those who live, work, and invest in the borough.



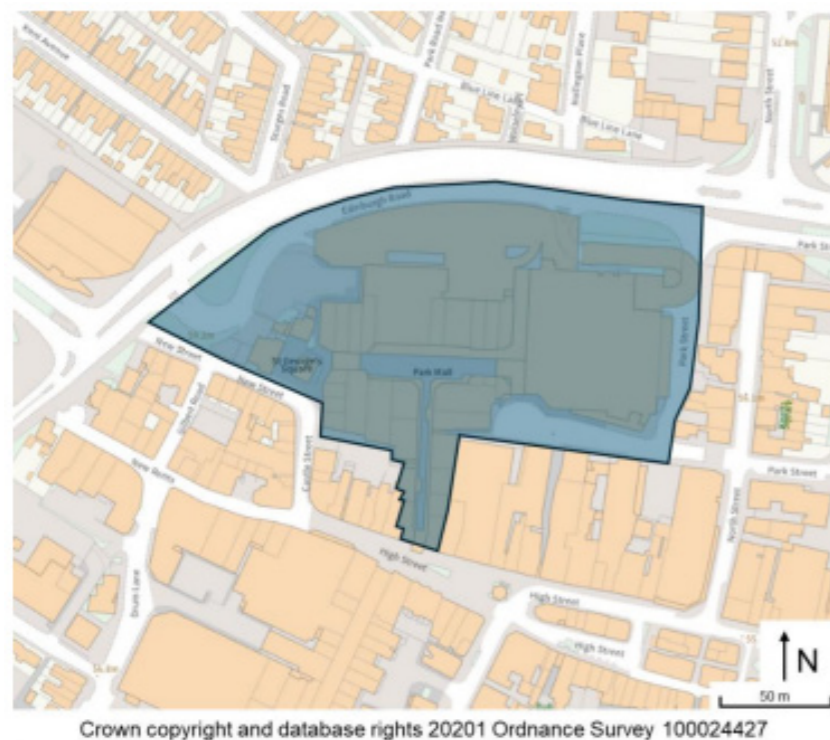
The Council's Local Plan to 2042

This parking strategy has focused on what could be termed the more 'operational' matters associated with parking. However, there is an additional consideration surrounding the potential for existing car parks to accommodate new development in the future. These are 'brownfield' in nature, located in sustainable locations, and therefore represent opportunities that the planning system, in broad terms, supports.

The council recognises these opportunities, although they have not formed a central component of the parking strategy to date. As thinking continues to evolve, these matters will need to inform future reviews of the parking strategy.

The council is currently in the early stages of preparing a new Local Plan. Engagement and evidence gathering are underway in line with the latest national planning policy approach to plan-making.

The Local Plan will identify a range of development needs relating to housing, employment, retail uses and other land uses over a planned period of at least fifteen years (currently up to 2042). A key consideration will be the identification of sites to be allocated for development to meet these needs. While this process remains at an early stage, it will require the assessment of several potential locations, including consideration of the role that existing car parks might play.



Within this wider context, emerging Local Plan evidence and site assessments reference the Park Mall area (location map below), which includes the Edinburgh Road multi-storey car park.

The Park Mall site is identified as an opportunity area within the town centre with potential to deliver major development, primarily residential-led and supported by complementary town centre uses. This reflects the council's long-standing commitment to the regeneration of Park Mall, as set out in the Borough Plan 2024–2028 and the Ashford Town Centre Reset Strategy and Report (Autumn 2022).

In addition, planning permission has been granted for the demolition of the existing shopping centre and multi-storey car park. This demonstrates a degree of flexibility in exploring the longer-term role of public car parking provision in and around the town centre. However, this does not predetermine whether future redevelopment proposals will include replacement parking provision, as this will need to be assessed in detail as part of any scheme.

As the Local Plan progresses and policy direction becomes clearer, it will be necessary to review and update the Parking Strategy to ensure alignment with this evolving context.



Review and monitoring

Ashford Borough Council is committed to ensuring that the Parking Strategy remains a dynamic and responsive framework that evolves alongside the borough's needs. To achieve this, a robust system of review and monitoring will be implemented to track progress, measure impact, and inform future decision-making.

The council will establish a structured monitoring framework. This will include:

- Annual Progress Reviews: Each year, a formal review will be conducted to assess progress against key milestones and deliverables. This will include updates on infrastructure improvements, behavioural change initiatives, and sustainability outcomes
- Performance Indicators: A set of measurable indicators will be developed to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy. These may include car park occupancy rates, EV charge point usage, active travel uptake, customer satisfaction, and reductions in vehicle emissions
- Stakeholder Feedback: Regular engagement with residents, businesses, and community groups will be used to gather feedback on the strategy's implementation and identify emerging needs or concerns
- Transparent Reporting: Progress will be reported publicly through the Joint Transportation Board, ensuring transparency and accountability

By embedding continuous review and monitoring into the Parking Strategy, Ashford Borough Council will ensure that it remains fit for purpose, evidence-led, and capable of delivering long-term benefits for residents, businesses, and the environment.

Conclusion

This Parking Strategy outlines a roadmap for how Ashford Borough Council will manage parking provision from 2026 to 2030. It reflects our commitment to delivering a modern, inclusive, and sustainable parking system that supports the borough's broader goals of climate action, public health, economic vitality, and community wellbeing.

By prioritising safe and accessible car parks, promoting active travel, embedding sustainability principles, and aligning with town centre regeneration, this strategy positions parking as a catalyst for positive change. Parking is not just about vehicles; it's about people, places, and the quality of life we want to nurture across our borough. The accompanying strategic aspirations (Appendix A) provides a practical framework for implementation, with measurable steps, clear responsibilities, and realistic timelines. These will be reviewed regularly to ensure the strategy remains responsive to evolving needs, emerging technologies, and community feedback.

As we move forward, Ashford Borough Council will continue to work in partnership with residents, businesses, Kent County Council, and other stakeholders to ensure our parking policies are fair, forward-thinking, and fit for the future. Together, we can create a parking system that meets today's needs while supporting a thriving, sustainable, and connected borough.



Appendix A

Strategic aspirations

What we want to achieve	How will we achieve this	How will we measure our success
Ensure safe, clean, and accessible car parks through regular maintenance and inspections.	Continue regular inspections of car parks, including surface conditions, lining, signage, lighting, and cleanliness.	Completion rate and timeliness of inspections and remedial actions.
	Digitise the inspection process using a mobile app for real-time reporting by Civil Enforcement Officers and Asset Surveyors who carry out regular Health & Safety inspections.	Uptake and usage statistics from the mobile inspection app.
	Introduce a cleaning regime for signage and undertake periodic assessments to ensure visibility and accuracy.	Reduction in reported signage issues.
	Perform annual lining reviews and coordinate with contractors for timely repainting.	Reduction in reported surface and lining issues.
	Monitor lighting levels after dark and repair or replace faulty units promptly.	Reduction in reported lighting issues.
	The design of new car parks should consider the increase in vehicle size.	User satisfaction.
Enhance signage, lighting, and security to promote safety and deter anti-social behaviour.	Review CCTV provision in car parks. Ensure that clear 'CCTV In Use' signage is in place if relevant.	Reduction in incidents of anti-social behaviour and crime.
	Apply for safety accreditations such as Park Mark.	Number of safety accreditations achieved (e.g. Park Mark).
	Conduct periodic security assessments and log incidents to inform deterrent measures.	Reduction in incidents of anti-social behaviour and crime.
Improve user experience and operational efficiency through digital transformation.	Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for Vehicle Management Signage (VMS) to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion.	Integration milestones with VMS and traffic flow improvements.
	Register interest in the National Parking Platform (NPP) to enable app-based payments.	Integration milestones with NPP and user adoption rates.
	Promote local events, services and community activity through digital signage in our car parks.	Number of units installed. Engagement metrics and user feedback.
	Review the opportunity to transform parking permit system into an app for mobile usage.	Increased use of mobile app for visitor permit applications.

Support sustainable and active travel through infrastructure and incentives.	Audit existing motorcycle parking provision and enhance security by installing chain bars, relocating motorcycle bays to more appropriate areas of the car park, and improving surfacing.	User satisfaction surveys and feedback from community consultations.
	Install secure cycle storage and pilot a Park and Pedal initiative.	Increase in usage of sustainable travel options (cycling, walking, EVs).
	Upgrade lighting and signage to support safe walking and cycling.	Reduction in reported lighting and signage issues.
Future-proof parking assets by integrating smart technologies and aligning with climate goals.	Introduce green infrastructure (tree planting, green walls, permeable surfaces).	Installation metrics for green infrastructure.
	Install solar arrays and expand EV charging points.	Installation metrics for EV chargers and solar panels.
	Review our pricing structure to consider offering discounted or preferential rates for electric and ultra-low emission vehicles.	Increased EVCP usage.
	Use sustainable and flood-resilient materials in upgrades.	Application of Climate Impact Assessments to all new projects.
	Evaluate Dual-Purpose Use of Car Parks for Energy Innovation.	Project comes forward dependent on feasibility and funding.
	Apply Climate Impact Assessments to all new projects.	Application of Climate Impact Assessments to all new projects.
Align parking strategy with broader urban planning and community needs.	Conduct surveys and consultations with residents and businesses.	Use the data gathered to inform forward planned parking provision and for consideration in future travel planning.
	Promote walking, cycling, car sharing, and public transport through campaigns and incentives.	Engagement metrics for public campaigns and incentive schemes.
	Align parking strategy with the Town Centre Reset and Local Plan and energy strategy.	Strategic alignment to ensure that economic development and place making are supported by the parking strategy.
	Review the resident permit scheme, consult stakeholders, benchmark best practice, recommend improvements.	Resident satisfaction, permit uptake, reduction in parking conflicts, improved access for residents.
Introduce a dynamic pricing framework to influence parking behaviour and support strategic goals.	Promote parking provision for existing residents that live within the town centre.	Resident satisfaction, increased use of car parks overnight.
	Provide designated motorhome overnight stopovers within Tenterden car parks.	Use of motorhome overnight stopovers.
	Develop and implement a pricing model that encourages short-stay visits in town centres to support local businesses and discourages long-stay commuter parking in high-demand areas to reduce congestion.	Improved customer satisfaction and reduction of long stay parking within high demand zones.
	Consider preferential rates for electric and ultra-low emission vehicles and supports modal shift by aligning tariffs with public transport and active travel incentives.	Increased EVCP usage and increased uptake of active travel modes.

