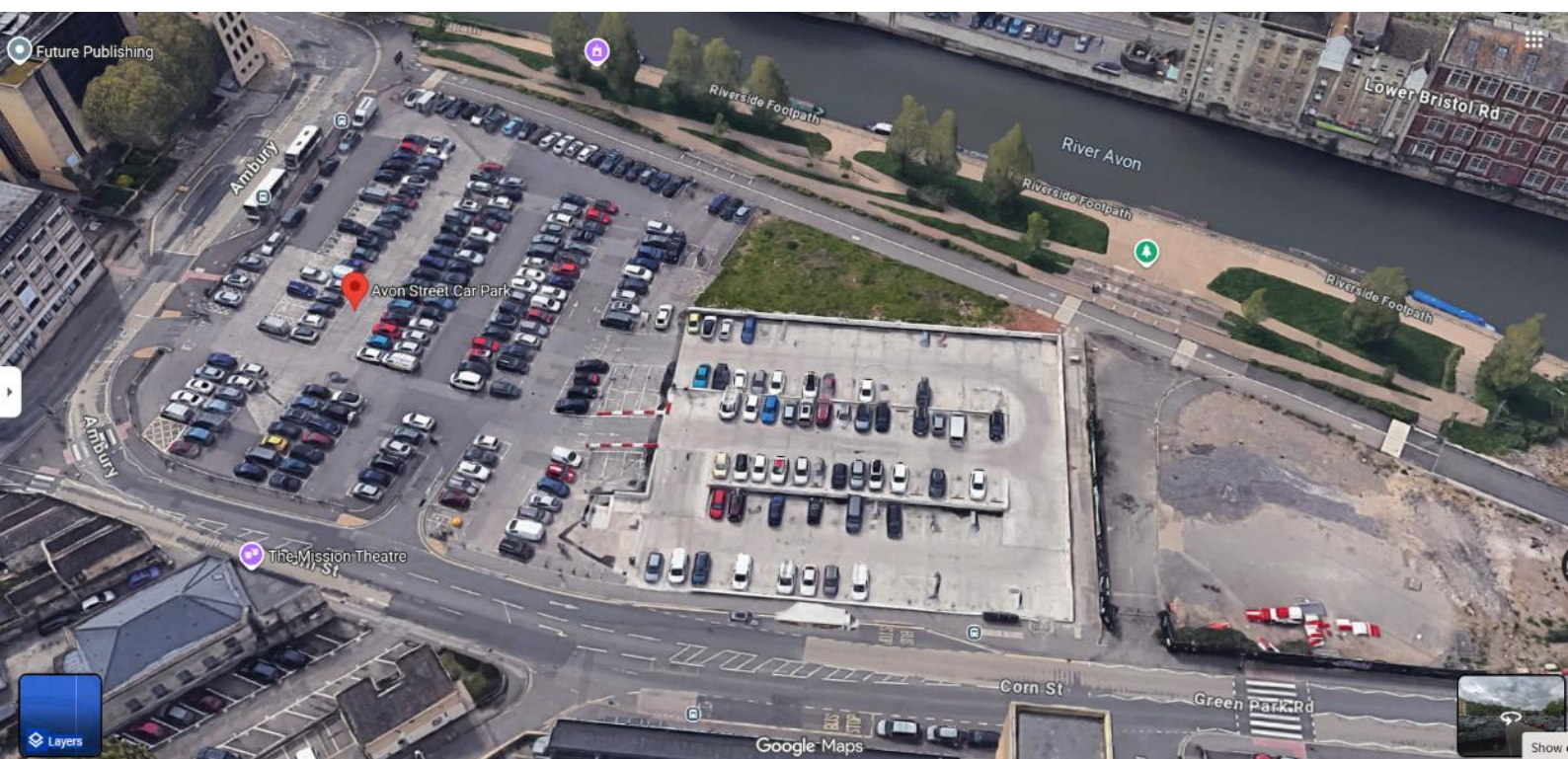


# PARKING

## A guide for Planners, Transport Planners and local campaigners

May 2026



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## 1. Foreword and summary

Most of our towns and cities have very large amounts of land given to surface car parking (see [Parkulator](#)) which could be used for housing or mixed-use development. At the same time, new housing development is often built on green fields on the periphery, in a way that requires more than one, sometimes more than two, car parking spaces per household. This mixture of residential and destination parking undermines public transport among other negative impacts and underpins a pattern of development which has dominated in England for fifty years: urban sprawl.

This document sets out a series of policies which can be adopted in Local Plans, and Local Transport Plans, to contain urban sprawl, save countryside and ensure development is well-located within existing towns, particularly town centres, supporting sustainable travel, delivery of affordable housing and the local economy.

We emphasise the centrality of parking policy to achieving these goals, particularly improving public transport.<sup>1</sup> Read this alongside this [presentation](#) with examples and images.

**Successive governments over the past half century have not only allowed, but actively enabled, urban sprawl into the countryside.**<sup>2</sup> But two simple changes will not just promote urban regeneration over countryside sprawl – they will help save our buses, revive town centres and deliver social housing. What are these changes?

- One is to actively promote low ‘parking standards’ in new housing developments, so they have little or no car parking (blue badge and limited car-club parking only), on the assumption people will not need to own or use a car. That ensures development happens within towns and does not generate more car trips.
- The second is to actively encourage the use of surface car park sites within town centres to accommodate new housing or mixed-use development (publicly owned car parks can be used for social-rent housing), ensuring locations are not car-dependent while also encouraging people to use buses, increasing fare income and making town centres more vibrant. As the [Parkulator](#) site shows, vast amounts of land in town centres in England is given to surface car parking.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy supplements CPRE Transport Policy 9 (Parking and Parking Standards) adopted in 2024<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See evidence in RTPI research [Location of Development](#) in particular [Report 4](#)

## 2. Why is parking key to planning better, fairer places?

Parking policies are key to saving our countryside, bringing back our buses and delivering equitable places, reviving town centres - and even to delivering social-rent housing.

**Saving our countryside.** Car parks in England's town and city centres are excellent locations for housing development. If we use them, it saves precious countryside. And town centre developments are better in many ways: they enable people to live near to shops, schools and amenities. They can support older people to avoid isolation. Housing can be built at higher density (gentle density, not tower blocks), meaning land is used more efficiently. At the same time, reducing the overall amount of car parking in a town encourages people to use the bus. Often towns have huge amounts of space given to surface car parking (see [Parkulator](#)).

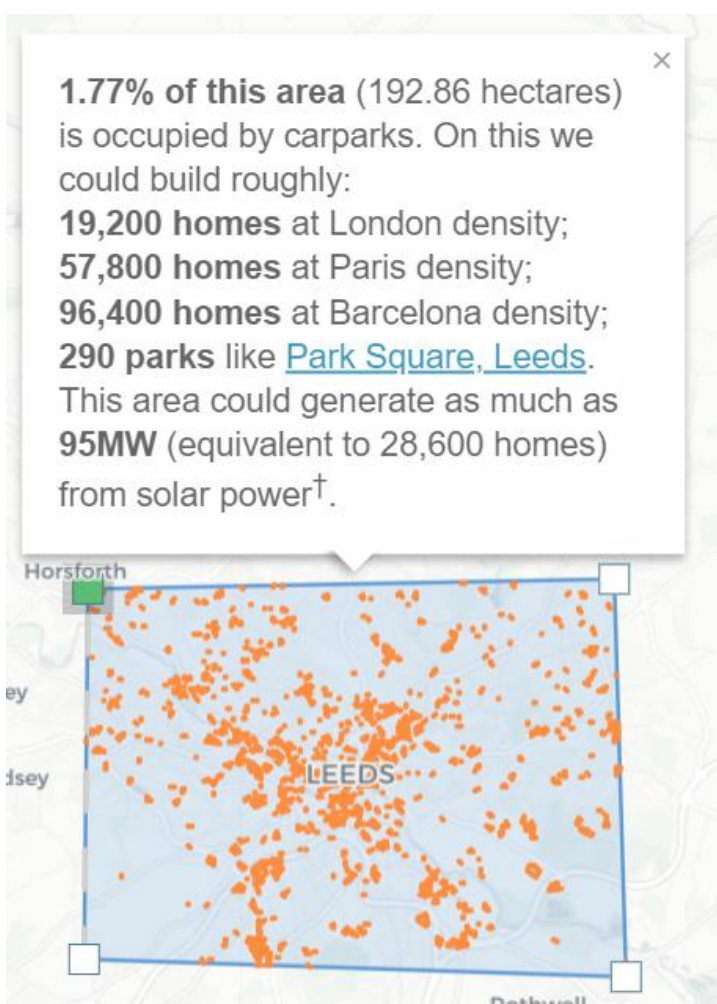
**Saving our buses.** Availability of car-parking is a major determinant of travel mode and over-provision undermines the financial viability and attractiveness of public transport and active travel. Too much parking, especially low-cost parking, starts a negative feedback loop, reducing demand for public transport as more people drive, but also as bus service reliability and attractiveness falls due to rising traffic. This causes cuts to public transport, further undermining services, creating more traffic and pressure for more car-parking space. Those without access to a car have their opportunities reduced as their mobility is curtailed. Car-parking policy is key to creating equitable places.

**Health-positive, age-positive, equitable places.** Reducing car dependency has extensive positive social, environmental and economic impacts: increased activity levels; reduced emissions; reduced isolation for older people, people on low incomes and those with disabilities; increased independence for teenagers and older children; reduced road casualties; wider labour markets for employers and reduced absenteeism; increased footfall for retailers; more attractive settings, not least for historic buildings and town centres, all of which benefit the economy; reduced community severance; and equity for the many people who do not wish to, are not able to, or cannot afford to own or drive a car.

**Reviving our town centres.** The dominance of car parking and traffic makes town centres unattractive places. Evidence shows people are more likely to stay longer and spend more money where places are attractive.

Town centres are no longer simply places to do weekly grocery shopping: they function as an outing destination. Historic towns often benefit from a visitor economy, an important driver of employment and income locally which can be undermined where the town is car-dominated. Town centres, and their economies, can be improved by removing traffic and parking. Living Streets' [Pedestrian Pound](#) is a good source of evidence.

**Delivering affordable housing.** Many town centre car parks are owned by local authorities. Using these sites for development makes building affordable housing more financially viable - for two reasons. Primarily this is because they do not have to pay for the land. But also, infrastructure costs are lower compared to greenfield development, where power, water and road infrastructure all need to be paid for. For privately-owned car parks, councils now have powers under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill [Section 190](#) to compulsory-purchase sites for affordable housing at existing-use value i.e. without paying 'hope value'.



The [Parkulator](#) website shows how much space is given to surface car parking. (Note, 'London density' is assumed to be 100 dwellings per hectare. See more on density, including what different densities look like, in the evidence section below.)

### 3. Car-parking policies to eliminate urban sprawl, revive buses, regenerate towns and deliver social-rent homes

#### Local Transport Plans – policies to promote

**Local Transport Plans need strong residential and destination parking policies to deliver mode shift** from car trips to public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling.

- Ambitious mode shift targets. These are fundamental to ‘vision based’ transport planning and should be ambitious and specific in relation to different modes.
- Controlling parking Transport planners should work with planning, highways and parking teams to restrict, reduce and increase charges for residential and destination car-parking (including considering introducing a Workplace Parking Levy), using any surplus income to improve people’s travel choices e.g. bus infrastructure or concessionary fares. See [Local Authority Parking Finances in England 2023-24](#) (published March 2025) for comparative data on parking account surpluses.
- Take advantage of bus franchising powers Use bus franchising powers to cross-subsidise profitable and non-profitable routes and use surplus from parking accounts to promote bus patronage e.g. by funding concessions or improving infrastructure.
- Adopt ‘kerbside’ policy Transport, highways and parking teams should also work together to allocate a minimum of 25% of kerbside, as well as excess road space and road lanes, for active travel, public transport and green infrastructure.

***Kerbside action and ‘road diets’*** Roads (carriageway / kerbside) need to accommodate bus lanes, cycle lanes, cycle hangars and cycle visitor parking, wider pavements, loading bays to avoid dangerous parking, street trees (on build-outs, not on the pavement), rain gardens (to manage surface water run-off), Electric Vehicle charging points (on build-outs), among other things, to support delivery of walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport. At the same time, roads which have too many lanes induce traffic and cause more road casualties, making streets less safe and increasing pressure on the NHS. Car parking (often free) induces traffic, while also using road space which could, if redeployed, support active and sustainable transport, and green infrastructure.

## Local Plans – policies to promote

### Local Plans should direct that new residential and mixed-use development should promote ‘compact’ towns and cities and deliver mode shift.

- Development should be located within a town’s existing footprint including in the town centre; built at appropriate density to support the financial viability of bus services; and be car-free or low-car (with only blue badge and some limited car-club parking).
- The expected travel mode of new residents should be clear to developers, and Local Plan policy should direct that a very high proportion of trips generated by new development should be made by public transport, walking, cycling or wheeling.
- Density should be high enough to support public transport and low-car living. Evidence suggests a minimum of 62 dwellings per hectare<sup>3</sup> is needed to support financially-viable public transport but ‘gentle density’ of 100 to 200dph, or higher, is more effective at supporting public transport and local amenities and can be achieved with sympathetic, low-rise buildings and even terraced housing (see examples of various densities [here](#) and Annex 1 below, for *10 Reasons why higher density living is good for communities*). Higher density is more land-efficient, a bigger range of shops and services that can be supported and, of most significance, the cost of personal transport diminishes rapidly as density increases. Better transport means better access to jobs, amenities, leisure, etc. At high densities fast, frequent, reliable public transport systems become fully effective with dramatic reductions in energy & costs.<sup>4</sup>
- In relation to car-parking, Local Plans should contain a ‘zero car’ parking policy as the starting point for new development. Local Plans should specify car-parking maximums and introduce ‘zero car as a starting point’ (no parking space except disabled bays) or ‘car lite’ policy e.g. maximum 1 car-parking space to every 3 households or ideally access to car club vehicles only. **Examples of where parking standards are being used by councils** around England [Maximum Parking Standards - Local Plan Policies - Examples March 2025](#) Examples of positive parking policies in Local Plans around England collated in March 2025

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.irbnet.de/daten/iconda/CIB919.pdf> see page 149

<sup>4</sup> See evidence section and Annex 1 (Ten reasons why higher density living is good for communities)

- Local Plans should allocate town centre and urban car parks sites for development, linked to building social-rent housing where car parks are council-owned (or using powers to buy at existing-use value if the car park is privately owned). Car-parking is often substantially over-provisioned in town centres (see [Parkulator](#)). Local Plans should promote redevelopment of town-centre, surface car parks, multi-storey car parks, and car-dependent retail sites for residential and mixed-use development. This will have multiple benefits, enabling new town centre housing (including affordable, social-rent housing) while reducing car trips and supporting public transport. **Examples of developments on car parks** [Developments on car parks - Case Studies March 2025](#) in towns around England (mainly visuals, with some information).
- Place-based, town-centre policies in Local Plans should be linked to reduction in car-parking and traffic, and a shift away from car-dependent retail on the town periphery. Town centres, particularly those with historic settings, can be made more attractive by reducing car parking and traffic so that visitors and shoppers (as evidence shows) will stay longer and spend more (see e.g. [Pedestrian Pound](#)).
- Local Plans should support public transport, walking, cycling and wheeling by allocating space for bus transit, delivery hubs and cycle parking (and other key active and sustainable travel infrastructure). In relation to active travel and public transport, Local Plans should allocate space to support bus transit, low carbon delivery and cycling; and set out policies to support public transport, cycling / wheeling and walking, including via residential and destination cycle parking standards.
- Local Plans should provide clarity for developers, particularly on low car-parking standards, to ensure local authorities can lever investment into public transport, walking and cycling. In [‘Stepping Off The Road To Nowhere’](#), Create Streets and Sustrans demonstrate that better quality, lower carbon, more attractive transport and development solutions can cost the same or less than the dominant road-centric model and be better for local businesses and the economy. Developers need clarity on expectations, not least on low car-parking standards, in order to deliver change.

## 4. A note on supportive national policy

**National policy needs to support Local Authorities to put in place appropriate parking policies to promote better, financially-sustainable public transport.** Government should:

- Promote ‘low car’ development i.e. with little or no car parking space provided, only car clubs and disabled parking. Policy should state: housing / mixed-use development should be ‘zero-car as a starting point’.<sup>5</sup> (Bear in mind the vast majority of existing housing accommodates residential car parking so only a small proportion overall housing stock will be ‘car-free’ or ‘car-lite’.)
- Actively promote redevelopment of under-used, town-centre sites particularly surface car parks, single-storey, car-dependent retail sites like supermarkets and ‘big box’ retail, and multi-storey car parks, for new homes or mixed use development.
- Promote redeployment of ‘grey space’ (carriageway and kerbside) currently allocated to roads and car-parking, to accommodate other travel modes i.e. public transport, walking, cycling/wheeling; green infrastructure like sustainable drainage, trees and benches; and even space for recreation or play. Space given to large road infrastructure like urban roundabouts and too-wide roads can and should be reclaimed for other uses including development. This has both a push and pull impact in relation to delivering mode shift targets.

Grey space takes up significant land in urban areas, with major negative impacts for transport and environment outcomes: its exclusion from spatial strategy undermines the ability of town planners to deliver effective place-making to improve the attractiveness of an area that will boost the economy as well as improving people’s quality of life. It also hampers a council’s ability to manage surface water, air temperature and quality, and biodiversity habitat (to deliver Local Nature Recovery Strategies).

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<sup>5</sup> In a positive step, government has proposed introducing parking maxima although stops short of removing the requirement to take into account local car ownership levels i.e. instead of requiring a target for reduction in car-ownership levels. (Subject to final NPPF version expected Summer 2026.)

## 5. Winning the argument: getting policies adopted

**1. It's not as unrealistic as you may think.** Councils are already adopting these policies: show case studies of where councils are e.g.

- Allocating car parks for development
- Using low 'parking standards' for new development
- Using parking a/c surplus for e.g. bus concessions / infrastructure
- Adopting and delivering Kerbside Strategy

**2. It may be a difficult ask, but there's a very good case...**

... and many of the benefits will align with wider council goals. Detail the benefits. Use this for discussions and building support. Many people rely on buses; or are in need of affordable housing, etc. Align with them to gain support. Give supportive councillors the wherewithal to champion change.

**3. Present the positive**

Talk about town centre regeneration (more people, stay longer, spend more £); supporting buses and widening labour markets for local business; building homes / affordable homes / homes which reflect need.

**4. Remember voters support positive change in transport**

The media and vocal driver lobby will object, but voters are positive about good transport management. And remember: more people than you think do not have access to a car (check [ONS data 'households with no car'](#)) or are in one-car households (often meaning one person relies on buses).

**5. Have the Inspector in mind, if a Local Plan is being developed**

- Identify sites (surface car parks, particularly under-used ones) in a sustainable location which could be used for housing /mixed-use.
- Make a positive case for why these should be considered for development and show how they compare to any alternative countryside locations.
- Be ready to raise considerations with the inspector at Examination in Public stage. Point to in/consistency with wider policy as appropriate.

- Work with landowners and developers to proactively bring car park sites forward for development.
- Be ready to defend zero / low-car parking standards, showing links to wider Local Plan policies and evidence on impact.

**6. Local government reorganisation and bus franchising are huge opportunities** to align Local Plan and Local Transport Plan policy.

Don't miss them. Get in early. Don't wait for others. Lead the debate.

## 7. Evidence and useful publications

### Parking availability, parking pricing and car use

- [Overview of research on the relationship between parking availability and private car use, Oxfordshire County Council, October 2022](#). This summarises findings from global academic research on parking provision, over the past ten years. “Restrictive parking policies can be a useful tool to influence travel behaviours, importantly noting that this is implemented in the context of a comprehensive approach, which includes the spatial strategy of development, improvements to public transport and active mode connectivity, amongst other factors that can be influenced by planning policy.”
- [Reducing car use through parking policies: an evidence review](#), ClimateXchange, 2023. This large evidence review for the Scottish Government summarises international studies and literature on how certain parking policies affect car use. Among the findings are that car-free developments have been found to have car use levels at less than half of city-wide averages, while parking located 50 metres or more from dwellings was associated with 25% fewer car trips.
- [Climate Smart Parking Policies](#), Local Government Association, 2020. Up to 75% of traffic volume is people driving around looking for car spaces.
- [‘Just the Ticket’, Transport Planning Society, 2023](#). How current parking practice inadvertently promotes car ownership and use, and proposed solutions.
- [Parking Prices and Availability, Mode Choice and Urban Form](#)
- [Parking facilities and the built environment: Impacts on travel behaviour](#), Science Direct, Christiansen et al, 2017. This focuses mainly on cities and workplace parking.
- [Nottingham Workplace Parking Levy](#) - Transport Action Network 2022. Some of the improvements funded by the Workplace Parking Levy introduced in 2012 were: doubling the existing tram system (the tram network now has 50 stops - pre-pandemic, 20 million trips a year were made on a tram); the tram network serves 20 of the 30 largest employers in Nottingham; Rail Station redevelopment – leading it to become the busiest station in the East Midlands.
- [The High Cost of Free Parking](#) (Donald Shoup), 2010 - free parking is not free, it is subsidised by non car owners, businesses and pushes up the price of land.

- Your local Parking Finance Report - e.g. [Dorset County Council Parking Services Annual Report](#) shows the total expenditure and income. Any surplus must be spent on transport and is used by a number of councils to support e.g. bus concessionary fares (though in this case, Dorset used the £6m surplus in 2022/23 to "to maintain Dorset Council car parks, this includes cyclical vegetation maintenance work, lighting inspections and improvements and surface and relining works. Surplus has also been used to support work carried out across the highways network." This compares to £3.3m bus grant funding for 2025/26. The parking surplus could have been redirected to support public transport.
- [Why local authorities need to re-assess parking policy now!](#) We are calling on all councils to re-assess their parking policy now, using our new [Parking Action Tool](#) – updated and relaunched in May 2023 with our partners Possible and Living Streets. *Parking policy is key to combatting the climate crisis, improving air quality, promoting active, shared and sustainable travel, making transport more accessible, and delivering safe and attractive streets.* It is one of the most effective tools local authorities can use to reduce car use and ownership and is about much more than just providing parking spaces. Have a look at [Parking policy- why it needs to change March 2024 update](#) which has lots of photos to show what a difference parking policy can make.
- Transform Scotland's [Ahead of the Kerb](#) (April 2026). *Why parking matters: Parking isn't free – even when it looks like it. Everyone pays for it, whether they drive or not. It's time to face the real impacts of parking – higher costs, lost public space, stretched council budgets, and streets that are less safe and healthy.* This report focusses on public space, public funds and public health. *"By reforming parking, Scotland can raise vital revenue, cut climate emissions, and deliver a fairer and healthier transport system for everyone, regardless of whether or not they have a car."*

### **Useful presentations from recent CPRE London webinars**

[Parking Policies for Local Plans and Local Transport Plans 18 June 2025](#) presentation (18 June 2025 version). Also, [Chris Todd - Building in mode shift](#) .. [Andrew Potter - Hidden Costs of Free Parking](#) .. [Harry Quartermain - Location of Development](#) .. [Amanda Reynolds - Heritage car parks](#).

## Affordable housing and car parks

- 2024 [Knight Frank](#) reported *"In total, the study identified 103,000 public and private surface car parks across the country, which comprise a land area of 20,000 hectares. Of this, some 7,555 hectares are owned by the public sector. Our estimates suggest that this alone could yield 2.1 million homes, or seven years' supply of housing at the Government's stated 300,000 homes per annum target."*
- [Section 190 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#) introduced a power to remove hope value from the assessment of compulsory purchase compensation. *"Directions to remove hope value can facilitate the acquisition of land at existing use value for provision of housing, development or regeneration schemes where they include public sector led affordable or social housing, health or education uses, and are justified in the public interest. Directions are targeted at these types of schemes as benefits from not paying hope value (i.e. full open market value) for land are delivered directly to the public."*

## The financials – why does it make financial sense

- [Stepping Off The Road To Nowhere](#), Create Streets and Sustrans 2024. Case study in Chippenham shows how better quality, more sustainable, more attractive and more value-enhancing approaches to transport and development can cost the same or less than the dominant road-centric model.

## Parking finances

- The RAC's [Local Authority Parking Finances in England 2024-25](#) (published November 2025). This shows surpluses can be substantial. Councils are restricted in how they can use the surplus: it must be spent on transport activities (as per the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, section 55), which can range from paying for concessionary bus fares to paying for car park maintenance. Local authorities in England are required to publish parking finance reports detailing income (from resident parking permits, pay-and-display, parking fines and 'moving traffic offence' fines for example relating to bus lane enforcement), expenditure and surplus.
- [Example parking finance reports](#): [Hackney Council](#) in north London 2024/25; [Oldham](#) as well as a very impressive and detailed report from [Manchester](#) conurbation both 2024/25; [Dorset](#) (historic 2022-23); [East Herts District Council](#) 2024/25 in Hertfordshire.

## Evidence: Density and transport

- [Double the density, halve the land needed](#) CPRE London, 2019. This has lots of images of what different densities look like.
- [Ten reasons higher density living is good for communities](#) CPRE London 2022. This also contains more links to further reading on benefits of density.
- [The implications of Housing Density](#), by Graham Towers. P151. ‘The reduced cost of servicing, and the efficient use of public transport begin to take effect at densities as low as... 62 dwellings per hectare (100 people per acre).’ Typical Victorian terraces are around 75 per hectare. Barcelona and Paris are more than double the density of London.
- [Stepping Off the Road to Nowhere](#), Create Streets and Sustrans, 2024. Between 2006-2012, 22,000 hectares of green space was lost to new development, predominantly housing. If new developments averaged just 50 homes per hectare (only three quarters of the density of typical Victorian suburban housing) we could have built nearly 50,000 more homes on the same land. If they had been built at typical Victorian densities of 75 homes per hectare, over 100,000 homes could have been built on the same land’ p26. How to use ‘gentle density’ of housing and vision-led sustainable transport to create a new development outside Chippenham.

## Locating new development: car dependency

- RTPI research [The Location of Development](#) shows the vast majority of development in England has been car-dependent.
- [ONS car ownership statistics](#). What proportion of households in your area do NOT have a car? Older and young people, and those on low incomes are less likely to own a car and are significantly disadvantaged where car dependency has undermined public transport. Often this problem also impacts ‘one-car’ households, where the car is used by one member of the household for work, leaving others unable to get around.
- [Trapped Behind The Wheel](#), New Economics Foundation, 2024. More developments are being built on rural land and green belt: In 2010, 17% of new houses in England were built in rural areas, but by 2023 it was 26%. In the South West, this rose from 28% to 41%. These are usually on greenbelt land, creating sprawl in ‘donut’ form such as (Milton Keynes) or ‘cowpat’, sprawled in the country, away from amenities.

- [What is being built in 2025?](#) Transport for New Homes, 2025. Of more than 30 new housing developments that were built in 2024, the majority are car-dependent.
- [Checklist to determine how car dependent a new development will be:](#) Transport For New Homes:
- [Convenient Town Centre living in every town](#) - how councils are starting to promote development on car parks. Transport for New Homes 2025
- [Planning Less Car Use](#). Friends of The Earth, 2019. Study of current developments from 2012-2017 show they are built far away from transport, (>2km), and at a low density of 32 dwellings per hectare, half the minimum considered viable to support public transport (bus) provision.

### **Bus use and accessibility**

- [Bus Users UK](#) has a very useful compendium of research and reports on bus use and statistics
- [Decarbonising transport: The Role of Buses](#), Local Government Association, 2020. Lower carbon emissions of buses vs cars.
- [Increasing bus patronage through an audience strategy: Bus segmentation report](#), DfT, 2023. Government report on how to increase bus patronage by identifying six demographic segments that might use buses. Among the findings: reliability and convenience are the main factors that can be improved, most frequent users are under 35, ethnic minorities, and in London (where bus service is good and regulated). Quote: “cars are highly prevalent and a key driver of bus usage, significant intervention is required to push away from cars, and pull towards the bus”, p23. [Also Bus Market Segmentation Report](#).
- [Making the case for buses, a toolkit for local planners](#), Bus Centre of Excellence, Nov 2024

### **Carparking and space**

- [RAC Motoring FAQs](#). There are 34 million cars in the UK. 25% are parked overnight on the street, taking up a lot of space. Cars are parked 96% of the time. One in six households does not have a car.
- [ONS Car ownership 2020 census data](#): % of households with no car or van, by Local Authority district, 2021
- [Government owned car parks could hold the key to 110,000 new homes](#), Knight Frank, 2020. There are 103,000 public and private surface car parks across England, which comprise a land area of 20,000

hectares. Some 7,555 hectares are owned by the public sector, enough for 2.1 million homes.

- [Collaborative Mobility UK, Car Club Annual Report UK 2023](#). Car clubs free up space and reduce car ownership. One car replaces between 14 and 32 private cars, the equivalent of 132 hectares of space that was occupied by parked cars that is freed for other uses.

### Other useful links

- [Parkulator](#) mapping tool: calculates the % of an area that is covered by carparks, or brownfield land, and how many homes could be built on it.
- The [Pedestrian Pound, Living Streets](#). Pedestrianising town centres is good for business. Investing in making town centres walkable generates more money than the same investment in cars.
- [Peter Jones “link and place” approach](#).

### Healthy planning - active travel

- Local Government Association - [tools to empower councils to lead in developing healthy places](#).

This document was produced following consultation with local resident and CPRE branch groups, Transport for New Homes, the Better Planning Coalition, Transport Action Network and CPRE’s transport policy committee and others.

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With thanks to volunteer Jane Shaw

Find out more about CPRE London’s work on parking:

- Parking policies for planning and transport planning [here](#)
- [Why local authorities need to reassess parking policy now](#) (focussed on CPZ and kerbside policy)