

Downham needs more parking, official



More space and charging would ease pressure on Downham car parks, says Alpha Parking

An end to free parking and provision of more spaces will enable a Norfolk market town to cope with rising pressure on spaces caused by an increase in commuter train services, a study commissioned by the town council has recommended.

The rural town of Downham Market sits on the edge of the

Fens between King's Lynn, Norwich and Cambridge. Downham's high street and town centre retail areas serve a large hinterland, meaning there is already high demand for parking from local residents and businesses. In recent years there has been added pressure on parking in the town centre as

Downham Market is on a direct commuter line into London. The number of rail services is expected to double over the next five years, which is anticipated to increase pressure on existing parking.

At present street parking is free, as are the 600 bays provided in the town's six council car parks. In contrast, the three privately run car parks have moved to a charging regime. The train station, run by APCOA Parking (UK) for Great Northern, also charges for its 77 parking spaces. In April, the Wales Court Shopping Centre introduced charges after Napier Parking secured a lease on the site.

In order to understand current and future parking needs for the town, Downham Town Council called in consultant Alpha Parking to conduct a detailed car park review. The project involved surveys and focus groups.

The study concentrated on the parking areas that the council directly controls, but assessed the role of street parking, which is run by Norfolk County Council.

Alpha Parking found that the

town's car parks are either full or at 95% capacity. In its report Alpha states: "These usage levels indicate that the point has already been reached where action to increase capacity is required. In addition, it is not unreasonable to predict car parking demand in Downham will rise by approximately 7% to 10%, and forecasts indicate that the town council will need to provide between 26 and 37 extra off-street parking spaces over the next five years.

"It should be recognised that without significant capital investment, meeting the extra population and thus potential parking can only be achieved by some form of charging. Failure to address these issues will seriously impact on the town's future viability and the quality of life for residents in the area."

The town council is considering its options. Alpha Parking director Penny Winder told *Parking Review*: "The council is looking to strike a balance between addressing the situation and needs of the local community."