

Report on car parking in York

Recently there has been much debate about car parking provision in York's city centre. In January 2021 City of York Council approved the construction of a 372-space multi-storey car park on the site of the current St George's Field car park. In February 2021 the council approved an application for a 636-space multi-storey car park at the front of York railway station. It's anticipated that a further multi-storey car park (with 664 spaces) on the York Central Development will be approved at some point in the near future.

These decisions have generated considerable debate as the building of large multi storey car parks seem at odds with City of York council's net-zero carbon and low car use commitments, but as yet there has been very little data or evidence available for people to form their opinions around.

We understand that the council will be providing an in-depth assessment of car parking in York, and that senior councillors will be given an opportunity to re-consider the St George's Field multi-storey car park as they contemplate the city's post-Covid recovery strategy. We welcome this report and the oversight that it will provide.

This short report is a summary of car parking provision in York and is intended to provide some broader context and to provoke thought about how car parking decisions will impact York's future development and growth. The report has been compiled by Johnny Hayes and Kate Ravilious with contributions from a number of other local people including data analysis provided by Jamie Wood. Johnny Hayes is a former Independent Business and the Chair of Indie York until January 2021. Their motivation for producing this report was a desire for openness and evidence-based decision making. The report is being shared with local businesses and councillors.

We are very grateful for the information and data we have received from York Parking Services, York iTravel and First Bus. The City of York Council website has been a crucial source of information. We'd also like to thank individuals who have provided feedback and thoughts. In the interests of open-ness we invite you all to view the [car parking capacity data](#) and [car parking income data](#) that we have used to inform this report. Please note that these links take you to spreadsheets are not easily accessed from mobile phones.

Unfortunately, many of the electronic counters at council car parks have not been functioning accurately for a considerable time. In particular, Castle car park has not been collecting data for almost three years. As far as we are aware no manual counts have been carried out in recent years to assess car park occupancy which, combined with the lack of electronic counter data, leaves us with very little knowledge about parking demand in York. For completeness we are also sharing the [electronic counter data](#), but did not use this data to inform this report.

Without better data we don't believe that it is possible to fully understand York's parking needs. Nonetheless the car park capacity data does give us an understanding of the amount of car parking available in York and where it is located. And car park income data provides us with a limited understanding of how well York's car parks are used. We present a summary of our findings below.

Parking capacity

To the best of our knowledge York has approximately 19,500 parking spaces across the city, with just over one fifth (4350) of these near to the city centre (Figure 1). Of the 15,114 out-of-town parking spaces 5960 are owned by City of York Council and include the Park & Ride car parks and the Moor Lane car park. Of the 4350 city centre parking spaces just over half (2417) are operated by City of York Council. These totals do not include on-street public paid-for car parking (such as that found on Foss Islands Road) or the short-stay car parking that is allowed in some resident's parking zone areas.

Summary of Car Parking

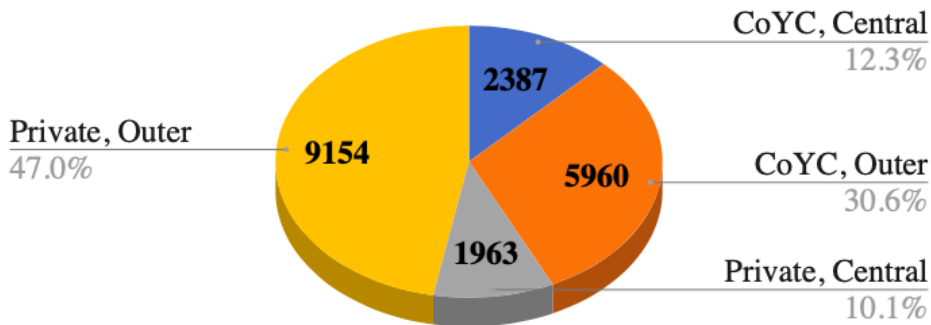


Figure 1 – Pie Chart showing the proportions of different parking across the whole of York. Yellow is private out of town car parks (e.g., Clifton Moor) – 9154 spaces/47%. Orange is City of York Council out of town car parks (e.g., Park & Ride and Moor Lane) – 5960 spaces/31%. Blue is City of York Council city centre car parks – 2387 spaces/12%. Grey is private city centre car parks – 1963 spaces/10%.

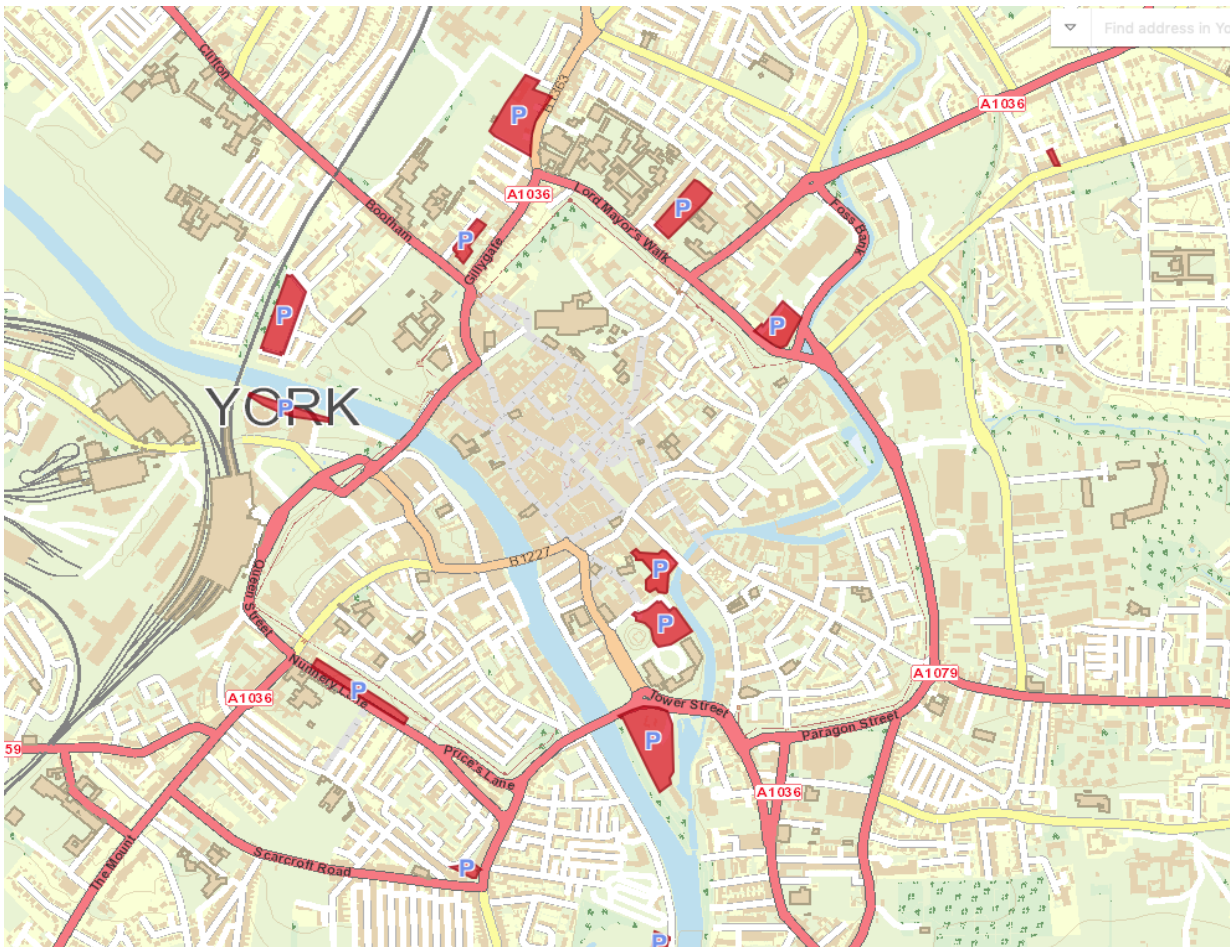


Figure 2. Map showing current city centre car parks operated by City of York Council.

City centre car parking, current and projected

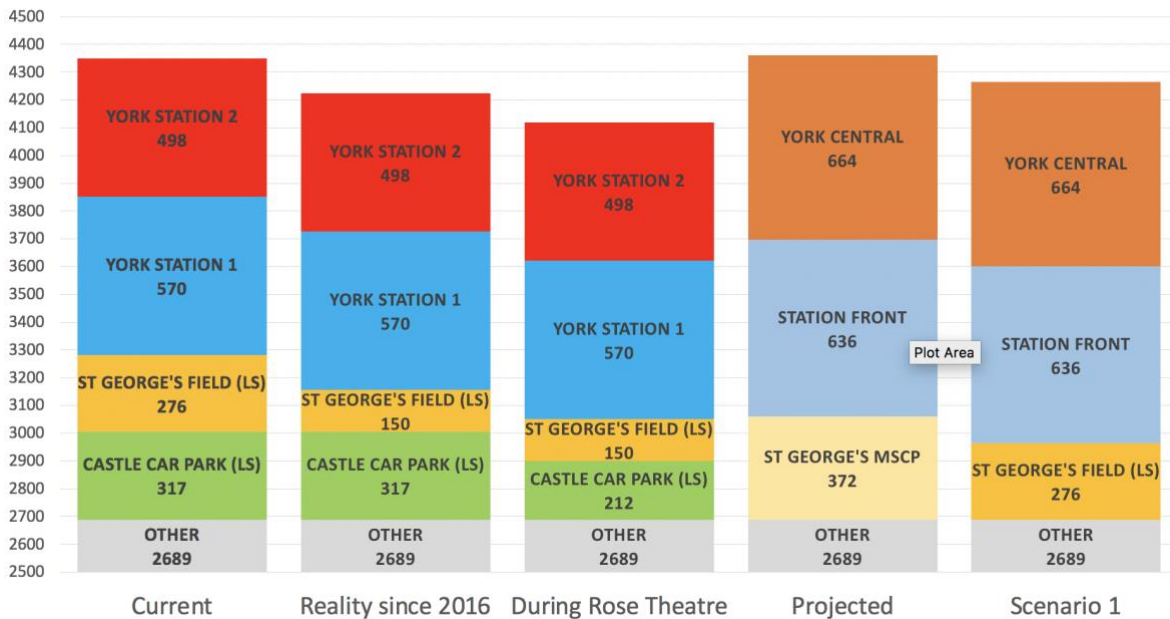


Figure 3. Changes in city centre car parking capacity. 'Current' represents the total amount available. 'Reality since 2016' shows the loss of spaces due to the Foss Barrier works. 'During Rose theatre' shows the additional loss of spaces whilst the Rose Theatre was in place. 'Projected' shows the amount of parking that will be available if Castle car park is closed and the three multi storey car parks are constructed. 'Scenario 1' shows the number of spaces available if St George's Field was retained as a surface car park rather than a multi-storey (with Castle car park still closed and the two other multi-storey car parks being constructed). Note the y axis starts at 2500 spaces with 'other' depicting all the city centre car parks that are not projected to change. This scale was chosen so as to clearly depict how the changes will impact city centre parking provision.

We have defined city centre car parking as parking that is close to, or within, the inner ring-road. We did not include the private parking at the supermarkets and retail centres along Foss Islands Road in city centre parking because it is limited to 2 hours of parking. We are also aware that we have missed some of the private car parks in our tally due to lack of information about them. With all this in mind we anticipate that the precise numbers presented in the forthcoming City of York Council car parking assessment report will differ from ours, but nonetheless we believe that our research still provides a good 'broad brush' picture of the parking available in York.

Since 2016 city centre parking has been reduced by around 125 spaces (to accommodate work on the Foss barrier) – Reality since 2016, Figure 3. During the summers of 2018 and 2019 city centre parking was reduced by a further 110 spaces (to accommodate the Rose theatre) – During Rose Theatre, Figure 3. This loss of around 4% of city centre parking capacity appears not to have caused significant problems.

- The above figures don't include the closure of the Castle Mills car park. We are not sure exactly when that closed, or how many city centre spaces were lost as a result, but again its loss does not appear to have created undue pressure on parking provision in York.
- St George's Field car park is closed due to flooding for an average of 6 days every year (including days taken to clean up after flooding). Data for the last four years show that St George's was closed due to flooding for 6 days in 2017, 7 days in 2018, 5 days in 2019 and 6 days in 2020.
- The closure of Castle Car park and the construction of three multi-storey car parks (St

Georges, Station Front, York Central) will increase York's city centre parking capacity by 11 spaces – Projected, Figure 3.

- If St George's Field multi storey wasn't built, and the surface car park retained instead, then York's city centre parking capacity would reduce by 85 spaces – Scenario 1, Figure 3. This is 41 more spaces than the city has managed with since 2016 (whilst the Foss Barrier works have been ongoing) and 151 more spaces than were available during the summers of 2018 and 2019 (when the Rose Theatre was in place) – Figure 3.

Parking income

Using monthly car park income data we have estimated the average hourly earnings per parking space at each of the different council operated city centre car parks (Figure 4). This gives us some idea of how well used the car parks are, relative to one another. It is not a perfect measure (some car parks are open for more hours per day than others and some car parks charge a higher hourly rate than others) but it is the best we can do with the limited data available. In order to properly understand how well used the different city centre car parks are we would need reliable data from the electronic counters and/or manual counts of car park occupancy. Our conclusions are summarised below.

- City of York council sells around 33,500 parking permits across the city every year, making an income of just over £2 million from permit sales.
- Approximately 1400 of these parking permits are for spaces in city centre car parks, raising a revenue of around £600,000 per year.
- The average annual income that CoYC makes from city centre parking revenue (not including parking permits) is just over £5 million.
- Around one fifth of city centre parking revenue is currently provided by Castle car park, which brings in an average of just over £1 million per year.
- Castle (317 spaces), Piccadilly (287 spaces), Foss Bank (316 spaces) and Marygate (350 spaces) are the largest city centre car parks.
- Despite providing a similar number of parking spaces the four largest city centre car parks bring in very different levels of income. Based on income figures for 2018-19, Castle car park provides 14% of the council's city centre car parking but brought in 21% of the income in 2018-19. Piccadilly has 13% of the spaces and brings in 11% of the income. Foss Bank has 14% of the spaces, brings in just 7% of the income. We haven't analysed Marygate because the electronic counters and payment mechanism have had significant periods where they haven't worked, making the data too unreliable.
- Using the average hourly income as an indicator of how well used different car parks are, the data in Figure 4 shows that Castle, Bootham Row, Piccadilly, St George's and Union Terrace all earn a high average income per space and appear to be well used. By contrast Monk Bar, Esplanade, Foss Bank and Nunnery Lane earn a significantly lower rate per space and would appear to be poorly used. As mentioned previously the income data for Marygate is too unreliable to draw any conclusions.
- It must be noted that these figures are somewhat distorted by the variation in opening hours and parking charges. For example, City of York Council's multi-storey city centre car parks (Piccadilly and Foss Bank) are only open for 12 hours per day, whilst many of the surface car parks are charging for parking for 16 hours per day – 33% longer. Similarly, there is a variation between the car park charges with Foss Bank charging £1.40 per hour, St George's charging £2.30 per hour and Castle charging £2.60 per hour, for example. Furthermore, poor management of car parks (not maintaining electronic payment barriers and not enforcing parking payments for example) may also distort these figures, making some car parks appear

to be less well used than they really are.

- The loss of around 110 parking spaces from Castle car park during the summers of 2018 and 2019 (when the Rose Theatre was in place) is reflected in the income figures by a 25% dip in income (£24,000) at Castle car park (compared to the monthly average for Castle Car Park), and a 34% increase in income (£17,000) at Piccadilly car park (compared to the monthly average for Piccadilly). This suggests that Piccadilly accommodated the majority of the car parking that was lost from Castle car park over this period.
- Car park income data shows that December is the most profitable month (coinciding with the Christmas markets) and brings in over 10% of the annual income for City of York Council city centre car parks. Comparing average December earnings per car park space with the 22 month average reveals that the relative popularity of the various city centre car parks remains similar, with Monk Bar, Esplanade, Foss Bank and Nunnery Lane appearing to be significantly under-utilised even during this period of peak demand (Figure 4).

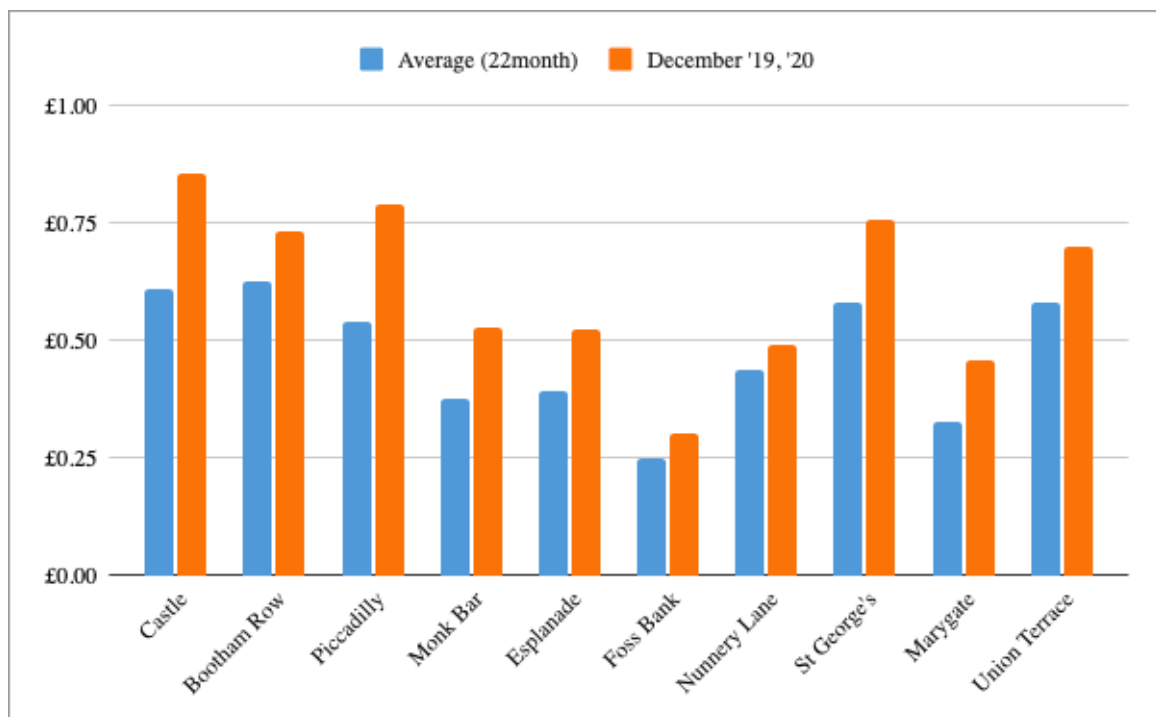


Figure 4. Estimated average hourly earnings per parking space at CoYC city centre car parks.

Public transport and active travel

Understanding how public transport is used, and in particular the role that the Park & Ride bus services play, should be an important part of the city centre parking assessment. As far as we are aware the council does not collect data on occupancy at Park & Ride car parks. However, First Bus have been kind enough to share some of the data they gather on how their services are used. We summarise this below.

- Pre-covid, P&R car parks typically accommodated around 2,000 cars per day. However, use of the bus service is around 5,500 return trips per day (based on average car occupancy of around 1.8, together with customers who use the service but do not travel to the sites by car).
- Service buses (non-park and ride) in York carry around 35,000 people a day, which is assessed to equate to around 12-15,000 return trips to the city centre. Rail carries around 15,000 return trips a day.
- On busy days, such as bank holidays, special events, and some school holiday days, park

and ride car parks are close to full capacity (nearly 5500 spaces).

- On average there are around 3500 surplus parking spaces available at P&R car parks, but on busy days P&R car parks reach close to capacity (5500 spaces).
- In the last work done on access to central York (in 2011), assessed on the basis of the split of people crossing Lendal and Ouse bridges, it appeared that around 25% of trips to central York were by car, 30% by bus (mix of service bus and park and ride) and 45% by walk or cycle (which would include anyone arriving by rail or on a coach).

Carbon emissions

City of York Council has set itself the objective of the city of York reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. The Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for York, recently presented to the council's Climate Change Policy and Scrutiny Committee, sets out how York could reach net-zero by 2050 (with some two-thirds of the emissions cuts being achieved by 2030). The report clearly shows that significant changes to transport and travel are essential if York is to work successfully towards net-zero carbon emissions. Given the critical role that transport and travel needs to play in reducing York's carbon emissions we believe that carbon emissions need to be considered when planning car parking provision for the city. Below we summarise some of the key facts from the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for York.

- The majority (76%) of all future carbon cuts needed for York to transition to a 1.5 degree consistent pathway need to be delivered in the next 10 years.
- Transport is currently responsible for 32% of York's carbon emissions.
- The transport sector has the greatest emissions reduction potential, with changes to the way we travel providing just over 40% of the city's carbon cuts.
- Seven of the top ten most cost-effective carbon emissions reduction measures are within the transport sector, with six of those measures requiring people to change their mode of transport from a car to public transport, cycling or walking.

Summary and outstanding questions

It is evident that a thorough assessment of city centre car parking is required, encompassing anticipated changes to the way people travel and associated carbon emissions. We have only scratched the surface in our small report, and are left with more questions than answers. The following are just some of the questions that we believe need to be addressed before major decisions are made about car parking in and around York.

High level strategy

- What are the key objectives when redesigning City of York Council car parking facilities?
- What future level of car use is consistent with these objectives?
- In particular, how does the city's proposed car parking provision support York's goal of becoming carbon neutral?
- How robust is the economic case for investing in car parks? Is the current car park investment strategy consistent with City of York Council's other objectives such as reducing car usage and becoming carbon neutral?

Basic data

- On average how much spare capacity currently exists in the car parks in York (both central and outer)? How much does this vary over time?
- How many days of the year are York's car parks operating at full or near-full capacity?
- How effectively is the Park & Ride service being utilised?
- How do people travel into York currently? What proportion arrive by car, public transport, cycle and foot? How is this anticipated to change in the coming years?

Alternatives to building car parks

- What measures could be used to spread peak parking demand out?
- Can the city's electronic signage improve the efficiency of York's city centre parking?
- Are there other ways in which people could reasonably be expected to reach the city centre? (Park & Ride, e-scooter, walking and cycling for example.)
- Has congestion charging been considered as an alternative source of income? What city centre parking provision would be required under this scenario?

St George's Field

- How many days of the year would St George's Field car park be expected to be at full capacity if it remained as a surface level car park instead of a multi-storey being built?
- How many car-based trips to the city centre might not occur if St George's Field multi-storey car park wasn't built?
- St George's Field multi-storey car park is expected to cost £14.2 million. The council estimate that this will take 17 years, a significant investment with a very long payback time. What level of car park occupancy is required to achieve the estimated payback in the 17-year timeframe?
- How much will be saved from reduced maintenance by giving up Castle car park? Will economic returns will be gained by converting Castle car park into a public space?

Carbon budget

- What are the estimated carbon emissions associated with building the proposed multi-storey car parks in York? (Construction projects tend have considerable carbon emissions associated with them.) How does this impact on York's objective of becoming a net-zero carbon city?

Conclusion

The aim of this brief report is to provide some very basic facts about parking in the City. We want to initiate an open conversation about parking in the City for local businesses, stakeholders and other interested parties, in the absence of any detailed or accessible data on the numbers of spaces available and how these spaces are used.

Parking is often a heated topic of debate for local residents, shop keepers and interested parties. Yet it is clear that data to inform this debate is lacking and assumptions rather than facts are often the order of the day.

There has been no comprehensive assessment of parking carried out to our knowledge since the year 2000 when a COYC report was produced for the Public Enquiry into the then planned closure of the Castle Car Park (report shared separately).

COYC intend to carry out a detailed analysis of parking in the City later in year. This is a much-needed review to fully understand how best to organise the parking of cars in the City. There have been too many assumptions and theories about car parking in the City and too few facts.

Within the report there are links to a number of spreadsheets, graphs and data. This information is a crucial part of this report and shows a much more detailed picture of levels of income from different car parks. But at times the data also shows the lack accurate information on occupancy levels.

In producing this report, we have tried to be as accurate as possible with the figures but know that there may be some errors and omissions. This is often due to the lack of easily accessed official or private data. For example, the figures for out-of-town private car parks were not available and were hand counted from satellite images but are as accurate as possible. Occupancy levels are very difficult to determine when occupancy levels are not recorded properly. It is worth stressing our way of estimating occupancy is based on income and does not distinguish between poor yield, poor management or low occupancy.

We hope that you find the report interesting and useful and that it helps to inform the debate around parking in the City, the planned future reduction in car use and other transport issues.