

Councillor Shaun Hughes statement

I wish to speak to you today regarding the parking charges in **South Road car park, Midsomer Norton that were introduced in 2024**. We now have more than a year's worth of data and experience, and it is clear that this project has failed on every possible metric.

Financially, In the whole of 2025, the car park generated a paltry **£8,435 in parking fees**, while a significantly higher sum of **£12,675 was generated through penalty notices**. This means your revenue is primarily derived from penalising our own residents—often while they are attempting to use the "free" parking period.

Furthermore, despite formal requests for information, this council claims it "does not hold data" regarding the initial cost of works, or even the ongoing running costs however It is safe to conclude that once enforcement and infrastructure costs are factored in, this scheme is running at a **significant financial loss**.

The economic and social costs are even more severe. Since these charges were introduced:

- **High Street footfall has dropped**, visit times have reduced, and local businesses have been forced to close, citing these charges as a primary factor.
- Surrounding residential roads and cul-de-sacs are now plagued by **vehicle displacement**, creating access problems for residents and emergency services.
- Air quality in residential areas has been negatively affected as pollution is pushed away from the car park and into the streets where people live.
- Major local employers and amenities, like the **sports centre and supermarkets**, are now being forced to implement their own private enforcement to protect themselves from the displacement of vehicles.

To compound these failures, the council has even prevented its own business tenants in Midsomer Norton from using their own parking bays.

To be clear, when we look at the core objectives of this policy, the result is a total failure:

- **Income generation – Failed**
- **Support high street economy – Failed**
- **Encourage economic growth – Failed**
- **Protect and increase footfall – Failed**
- **Support for low paid staff – Failed**
- **Improve air quality – Failed**

This experiment is losing this council tens of thousands of pounds that could be better spent on more important issues - **tackling isolation in our elderly, better youth provision, or a novel idea - improving bus services to reduce car dependency**.

It's time for common sense. A U-turn would demonstrate a willingness to listen to public feedback and adapt to new evidence. I urge you to do the right thing and **bring back free community car parking**.