



UK100 Political Toolkit: Workplace Parking Levy

UK:
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About UK100

UK100 is a network of local leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to Net Zero with Clean Air in their communities ahead of the government's legal target.

If you are exploring the possibility of your council implementing a Workplace Parking Levy, then please get in touch with us at membership@uk100.org

We suggest this document is sent to an officer to help plan the WPL policy process.

Find more information on the Workplace Parking Levy on the UK100 [Knowledge Hub](#).

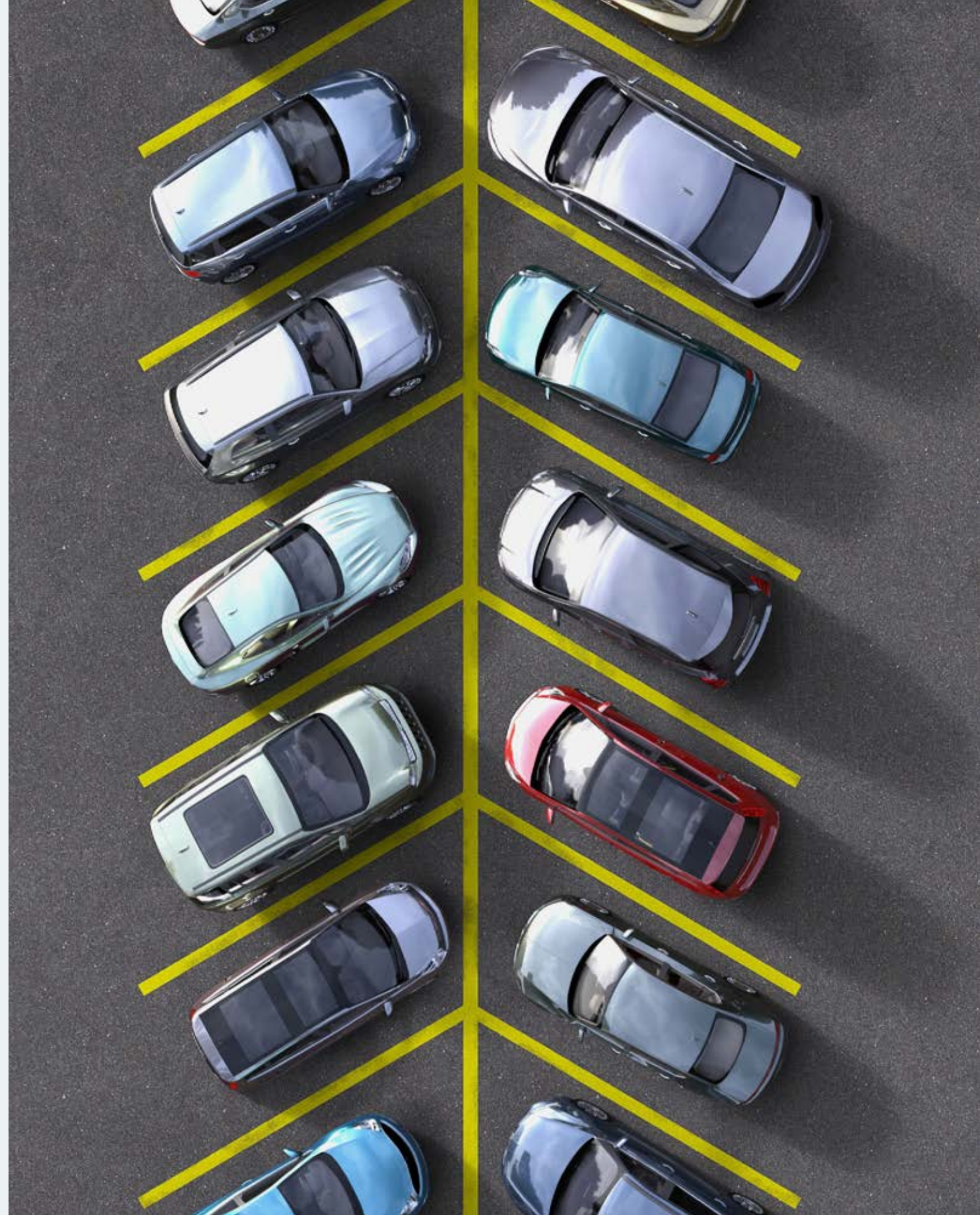
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About this toolkit



This short guide is meant as a political handbook for anyone considering introducing a Workplace Parking Levy (WPL). It is not a step by step guide to statutory and formal consultation processes – your council officers can advise you on these, as every scheme will be slightly different. Nor will it give you an exact template for how to handle the issue in your area. Instead, it will help you think through how to:

The toolkit is based on the learning from our [Local Power in Action](#) pilot projects that were supported by UK100 in 2022. We are particularly grateful to Leicester City Council and Nottingham City Council for being so generous in sharing their experiences.



Frame the benefits of any changes



Build a coalition for change



Prepare for and minimise the spread of misinformation



What is a Workplace Parking Levy?



A Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) is a tax levied by the council on businesses for each parking space they offer for staff use.



The policy was implemented by Nottingham City Council in 2012 where workplaces with over 10 spaces are now charged.



Some employers will pass this charge on to their employees, others do not, and some pass on a proportion of the cost based on salary.



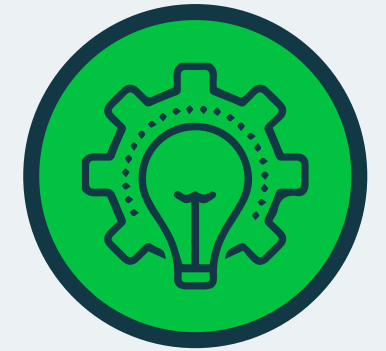
It is one of the few revenue raising tools available to local authorities. Implementing the policy requires consent from the Secretary of State for Transport.



As of January 2023 Nottingham is the only council to have a WPL, but multiple others have explored it, including Leicester and Edinburgh.



Things to consider when exploring a WPL



There are some compelling reasons why WPL's should be commonplace in our major towns and cities. In urban areas, approximately one third of our carbon emissions are produced by our transport systems. There is a growing health crisis linked to vehicle emissions with research showing that as many as 40,000 deaths a year in the UK are caused by poor air quality.¹

These challenges are becoming increasingly difficult to resolve with ever-shrinking Government revenue and capital grants. New local sources of funding, such as WPL's, will be essential to building solutions like 21st century public transport systems.

It may feel, from a council and public health perspective, as though the case for a WPL to fund new investment and tackle these longstanding challenges is irrefutable. However, even if a growing number of people accept that change is necessary in principle, changes to traffic and transport arrangements (Clean Air Zones, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods or Workplace Parking Levies) are some of the most controversial issues that any politician will have to deal with.

They can generate unforeseen levels of anger from those who oppose the changes, and things can get quite personal very quickly. Put simply, implementing a Workplace Parking Levy is not for the faint-hearted. Which is why only one has been implemented in England (by Nottingham City Council) in the several decades since the legislation was created.

¹ Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2016.

Setting yourself up for success



1. Establish a clear narrative

It's vital to set out a clear narrative for your WPL from the outset because a lot of the formal processes that the council will go through will consider what the scheme is, and how it will be implemented. But unless you have a clear answer to why, you will almost certainly get trapped into conversations about the minutiae of the scheme.

Your why should become your narrative thread within all subsequent announcements on this subject, such as press releases, comments, and interviews. It needs to be a positive, compelling argument and one that people will morally find difficult to disagree with (though inevitably, some will). It also needs to position the WPL as the solution to funding something that will be of benefit to the area, rather than expecting people to believe the value of its own merits.

It is unlikely that you'll be able to develop your why quickly and succinctly first go. Talk it through with political colleagues and trusted officers; what do they think will resonate with your local communities? What are your local transport ambitions? What's ambitious, but also realistic? And when you think you've got an answer, try to distil it to be as clear and simple as possible. For example, this could focus on simple language that frames the WPL as essential to funding other improvements. Ultimately, you want clear lines that anyone defending the scheme can remember and repeat under pressure.

When asked why you are introducing a Workplace Parking Levy, focus on simple language that frames the WPL as essential to funding other improvements. Avoid using language that might not be understood, is open to interpretation or could feel punitive to drivers.

Suggested Steps

1.

Undertake a 'city conversation' consultation:

The council can be seen to be listening and engaging communities and businesses in a future transport vision or plan for the city. This would give an authentic, evidence based set of ideas that would be harder for opponents to challenge. Your Political Group members could be encouraged to ask forward thinking questions in their own communities which would help build stronger political buy-in, which will be important later in the process.



2.

Commission some focused engagement with schools:

This could take various forms but ultimately, having children signing petitions demanding action, and making their case at council meetings, means that you have a clear and justifiable set of reasons to raise the general challenge of too much traffic and pollution in the proximity of many schools.



3.

Develop a political statement that stresses that a WPL must be demonstrably fair:

For example, a WPL will not increase costs for low income workers, and all money raised will be ring fenced for public transport improvements. All this should be done before the council begins any of its statutory consultation phases. Otherwise you're going into a battle without having thought about how to win it.

4.

Focus on simple language:

Avoid using language that might not be understood, is open to interpretation or could feel punitive to drivers. e.g. Fund shortfalls in government funding for concessionary travel or encourage more people to leave their cars at home. Frame the WPL more as essential to funding other improvements e.g. To build a new tram network.



2. Build a coalition for change

It would be a major mistake to assume that, because the council has the moral arguments in favour of a WPL, it will automatically win the battle of public opinion. The WPL will be debated fiercely in a range of ways; negative voices may feel more prominent than positive ones in the public arena and on social media. When the going gets tough, political support could start to fade.

You can insulate yourself, and increase the likely success of the WPL, by building a wider coalition of support that creates a 'pull' from communities for change, as well as a 'push' from the council.

Remember, the aim is not just to build a list of people who will support the WPL concept, but to engage people from the beginning so they join you on the journey. This is especially important for the business community as this charge is a charge on employers. Approaching the development of the scheme in this way will also help you find allies who are prepared to speak out in favour of it (or at least not say anything negative if they disagree).

Your coalition for change will be bespoke to your area and consist of the individuals and organisations who will stand by you because they believe in the cause.

It's worth thinking about your coalition of support as an onion. As its heart is a solid core of supporters, and then there are layers which make the campaign bigger and stronger over time.



Suggested Steps

1. Engage your businesses as much as possible and as early as possible:

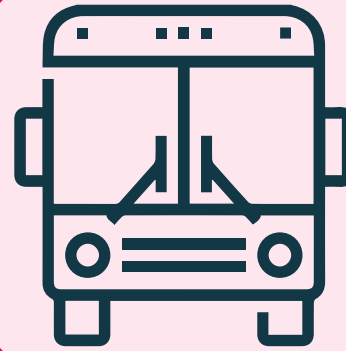
The levy is a tax on businesses so you will need to engage them from the outset if you want your scheme to succeed. This should involve finding common ground such as both wanting to improve public transport infrastructure in the city, and working together to develop ideas to make that possible. The WPL can be incorporated into that plan, and if they are able to help build it, they are more likely to support it. Your council leaders will be pivotal in this, working with your local Chamber of Commerce to begin those conversations, stand by your reasoning and convince leaders of the merits for all involved.



2.

Create an Active Travel Forum, co-chaired by the Cabinet Member:

Active travel campaigners (public transport user groups, cycle forums, clean air lobbies etc) are an untapped resource and this would give them a wider platform and voice.



3.

Plan Political Group seminars and workshops to work through the key messages and timelines for a WPL:

This could be done as part of a wider city transformation plan or development of your next election manifesto. It will help flush out where the internal opposition is and what the real concerns of Group members are. It would also be wise to consider how you can run similar events for other parties to ensure they're included from the beginning.

4.

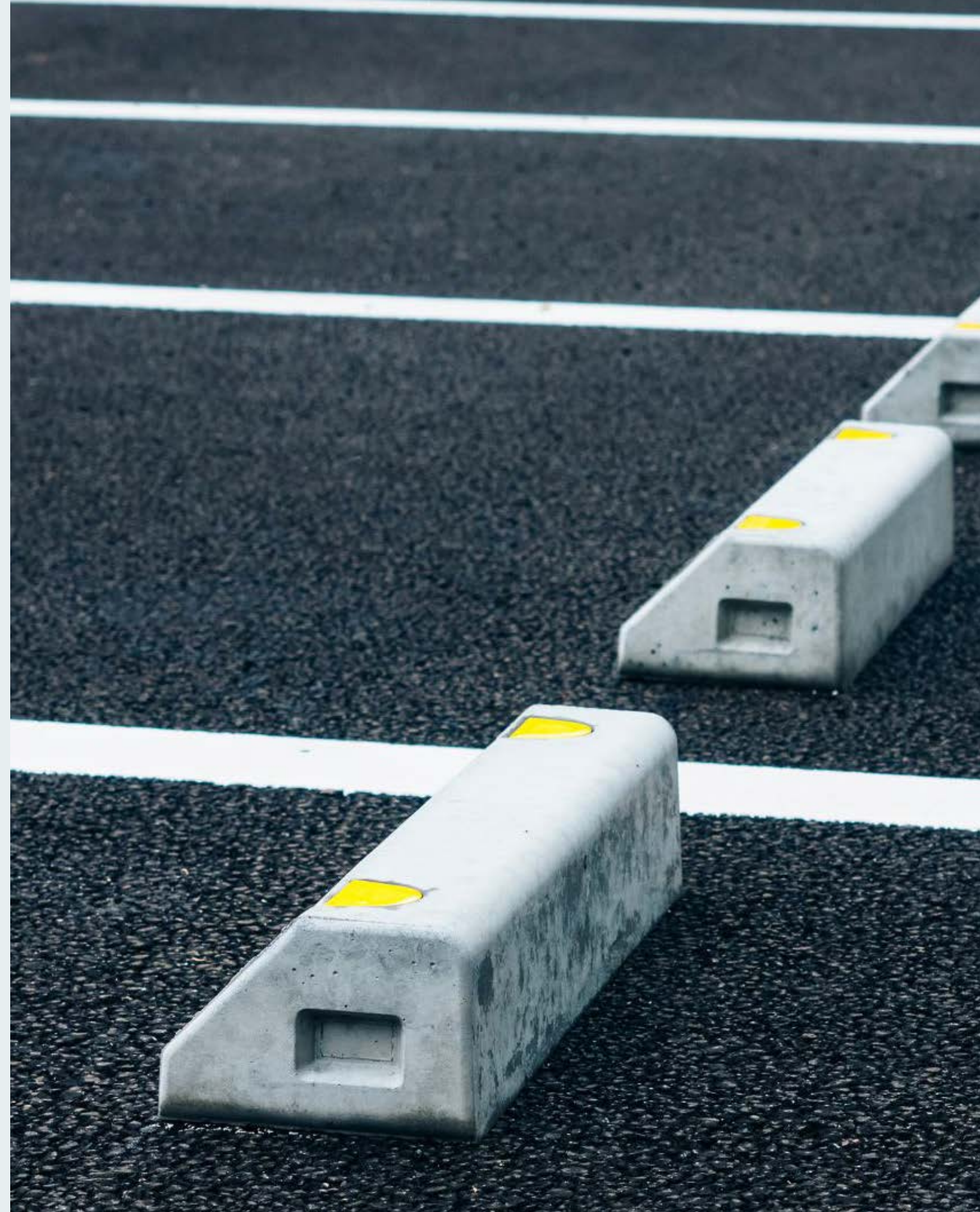
Identify the main opinion formers and groups likely to be affected by the scheme:

Who are they and what bespoke messages will you need for each? Your team can help create these, and the Leader could convene some private discussions (e.g. over a dinner) to ensure leaders and those affected are aligned and understand the vision you're proposing.

3. Adequately resource the scheme

At various stages of the WPL implementation, you will be in an uproar of disagreement. It will be very easy for council staff to spend all their time responding to opposition to the WPL, rather than actively making a positive case for it. This means you could start to lose control of the rationale, the narrative, and the moral high ground. Once a mistruth takes root it can be incredibly hard to shift, so challenging these early and robustly is vital.

To prevent this it is vital that you adequately resource the levy from beginning to end. This includes resourcing communications to ensure misinformation does not spiral, as well as implementation to ensure businesses are effectively supported throughout design and implementation. Sufficient resources will ensure you are communicating clearly and giving your team and community the information and support they need to accept the scheme.



Suggested Steps

1.

Ensure dedicated professional communications support:

This will be vital to ensure you succeed in winning public opinion and tackling misinformation. This could include rapid rebuttal, building relationships with local journalists, encouraging comments from campaigners for change especially outside the council and challenging and responding on social media with specifically designed graphics.



2.

Keep updating a list of Frequently Asked Questions on the council's website:

You'll get a lot of concerns, often based on misunderstanding of the scheme, so it's vital to be able to point people to an authoritative source of information. This will save you from typing it all out each time you respond too.



3.

Establish appropriate project management and risk reporting arrangements:

Project delivery timescales and reputational risks to the council need understanding and ownership by the full Cabinet and Senior Management Team. Establish an internal project plan that outlines governance, financial accountability, set-up costs and more. Use this to provide progress reports and risk monitoring in regular confidential Mayoral and cabinet briefings.



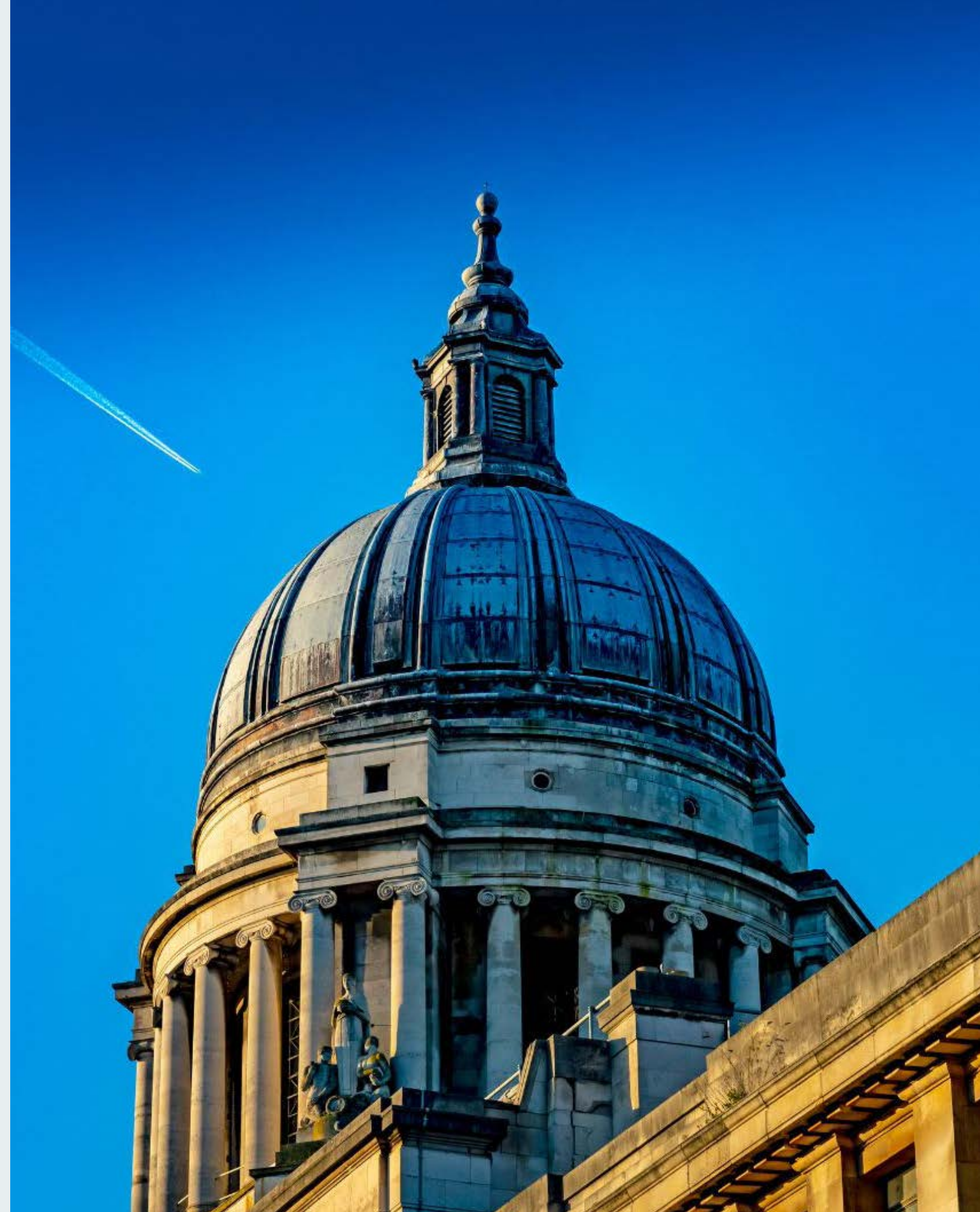


Case Study:

The UK's first WPL

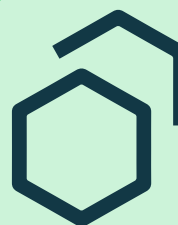
Nottingham City Council implemented the first Workplace Parking Levy in the Western Hemisphere in 2012. Despite successfully implementing this replicable model, it is still the only council in the UK to have introduced such a scheme.

When they began considering the levy, congestion was costing the city of Nottingham £160 million a year. Doing nothing was not an option, so they chose to use the Levy to deliver a step change in their public transport system through the extension of the tram network.



Now, over ten years on since implementation the city is reaping the benefits, including:

5780 tonnes of carbon saved.



47% reduction in congestion growth.



Annual savings of £15.4 million for the city.

17km of track added to turn the tramline into a tram network.



£55m of investment into improving cycling and active travel infrastructure across the city.



A 26% growth in new businesses in the city because of the public transport provision.



Over £1 million in grants to employers for sustainable transport improvements for their staff.

Watch this video to find out more about Nottingham's scheme.

A timeline for implementation



Though each scheme will be different there are a number of steps you will need to take in developing your levy to help you fine tune it to fit your own circumstances, needs, and communities. The following is a guide on how to begin the process and some of the questions you may want to answer with your colleagues as you progress.

Formal Steps to Implementation

1

Initial Scheme Identification

Make formal decision to investigate a Workplace Parking Levy as part of a package of measures to tackle congestion and improve public transport (e.g. as part of the Local Transport Plan).

2

Scheme Feasibility Study

Consider WPL alongside any alternative options and decide if the benefits merit the development of a formal business case.

3

Informal Local Engagement

Engagement and consultation with businesses and residents on the merits of a WPL and why it would be preferable to any alternatives.

4

Business Case Development

Prepare Draft Scheme Order with detailed information and appraisal about the operation and enforcement of the scheme. Formally agree to public consultation.

5

Formal Consultation

Undertake a formal consultation period (12 weeks) with all those potentially impacted by the scheme, including options appraisal, equalities impact assessment and 4 & 10 year revenue plans.

Important Political Considerations

Why do you want to do it?

What will it achieve?

Who are your allies in making the case?

Is a WPL the right option?

Are there any alternatives?

When do you want it to start?

Is your messaging clear?

Are the benefits obvious?

**Is there any impact on council
or off street parking provision?**

**Has the council got the right communications
support in place to deal with the level of responses?**

Who will front up the public debate?

**How will you win the battle of public opinion
(especially on social media)**

Formal Steps to Implementation

6

Agree Final Scheme

Assess consultation responses, respond to issues raised, consider any necessary alterations to the scheme and any mitigation required. Submit formal request for approval to the Secretary of State (and the Mayor, if a London Borough).

7

Prepare for Implementation

Make any changes required by the Secretary of State, put implementation and enforcement measures in place, register and licence businesses.

8

Scheme Implementation

Consider a period of time for ‘shadow’ implementation by waiving fees for a period of time (e.g. 6 - 12 months).

9

Delivery

Undertake necessary enforcement, tackle displaced parking, establish annual licencing process.

10

Review and Modify

Undertake regular reviews of the scheme to ensure it is having the desired impact. Any modifications will need to undergo formal consultation.

Important Political Considerations

**How will you assure people that views are taken seriously?
How will you keep people and businesses informed, and
handle any ongoing dissent?**

**How will you communicate specific details of the scheme?
Are any further concessions necessary?**

**How can the scheme’s official launch be explicitly linked
to public transport improvements?**

**How can the council respond quickly to complaints about
the impact?**

How can you demonstrate the scheme has been a success?



Messaging cheat sheet

Issues

**Is the WPL the right way
to reduce car usage?**

**This is penalising
individual motorists**

This is a cash cow for the council

**The WPL will just displace
parking into nearby streets**

**The WPL will force businesses to move
and the city will lose jobs as a result**

Multiple councils across the UK have explored a WPL, including Leicester City Council. This messaging cheat sheet highlights some of the common issues and questions Leicester received as they explored the scheme as well as potential responses to them. However, this sheet is only intended to give you an indication of some of the issues you will deal with. You will need to generate appropriate responses for your own area.

Potential response

It's part of our approach to investing more in public transport / lowering transport costs / encouraging people to make alternative choices.

The council won't ask a single individual to pay anything. Responsibility for paying the levy is for the employer, so it is up to them, in negotiation with their staff, as to whether they pass on the cost to individuals.

All money raised will go to fund public transport improvements.

We will monitor this carefully and consider further measures – such as extending residents only parking zones or time limited parking bays – if there is a problem.

Evidence from Nottingham is that the WPL, once established, has increased confidence in the city and the public transport improvements it has funded have created economic benefit.

Issues

Some areas of the city aren't well served by public transport so people will have no choice but to continue driving

Small businesses will be particularly badly affected

Special arrangements should be made for shifts, part time workers and anti-social hours workers

Lots of people (e.g. low paid workers, those with childcare needs, people with disabilities etc) have no choice but to use their car so they will be penalised

The current cost of living crisis in the whole country makes paying a levy difficult for everyone.

Potential response

The WPL is part of our solution to funding these gaps, so that we can make a difference over time.

There will be some exemptions for operational vehicles and small business discounts.

Special consideration can be given to arrangements for charging in relation to shift, part-time and anti-social hours working patterns.

It is up to employers to decide whether to pass on the cost of the WPL to their employees, and we would expect them to take peoples' circumstances into account. In Nottingham, some employers who pass on the fee to employees base it on salary levels so the higher paid pay more. Improved public transport benefits everyone, particularly those on low incomes who do not own a car.

We would expect employers to take this into account. The WPL will fund lower cost alternatives to owning and using a private vehicle, including passenger transport and better walking or cycling routes.

The image features a dark asphalt background with several bright yellow lines that intersect to form a grid pattern, resembling a parking lot or a sports field. In the center of the image, the text "UK:100" is displayed in a white, sans-serif font. The "UK" is on the top line, and "100" is on the bottom line. A green colon is positioned between the two lines of text, acting as a separator.

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