"Parking" in the City of Portsmouth:
A Call for a Systemic Approach

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1.1 Context & Purpose

This document summarises a verbal deputation given at the [Traffic, Environment & Community Scrutiny Meeting on 20 September 2017](#). During the deputation, two hand drawn diagrams were used and the chair of the committee asked if soft copies could be made available. Since the diagrams are not self explanatory, this brief document has been written to provide context to any interested parties who were not able to attend the meeting.

1.2 Introduction

Parking, traffic and transport will likely always be a 'poisoned chalice'. There are no easy answers, and interventions that satisfy the needs of one stakeholder group are likely to adversely affect another. It is unlikely there will ever be a true consensus; however, by engaging systemically, understanding a range of perspectives and ensuring those who may be adversely affected are heard and represented, PCC can at least move towards an *accommodation*; a situation that is on balance better and that everyone can accept and live with.

It is clear that PCC have sought engagement from a wide group of stakeholders from around the city, who have a broad range of views. This, in my view, should be encouraged.

Yet, it is my strong view that the scope of the current report is too narrow. The Terms of Reference are very much focused on finding "solutions" to parking "problems". To my knowledge, little analytical work has been carried out to understand the causes of those problems. I therefore believe there is a significant risk that if the momentum continues in the current direction, changes will be made that "fix" the problem for now, but as population grows, the problem will recur. We will be facing the same conversations in five years' time.

I would argue that 'parking' is a symptom of a wider, systemic problem: namely the level of private car & vehicle ownership (and the fact that for many people there are few affordable, desirable, viable alternatives). There appears to be a lack of joined-up thinking *between* policy areas, and 'parking' issues can be caused by seemingly unrelated policy decisions elsewhere. I believe that the conversation needs to be elevated to an even more strategic level. PCC should seek a systemic and joined up approach. To continue the work, the council should take a double-edged approach:

1. **Short term: "Avoiding the iceberg":** Take immediate, tactical action to relieve immediate symptoms.

2. **Medium & long term "Reset the compass":** Create a long term, systemic and joined up strategy.

This paper does not speculate on what the immediate interventions or strategy should be, but provides a framework that could be used to continue PCC's work.

1.3 The Importance of 'Vision'

Whilst the focus group and report have undoubtedly uncovered some very useful potential ideas, the challenge will be assessing which to progress with. Since they were (quite understandably) conceived separately, they are recorded in a somewhat disconnected way. How can the Council be sure they are choosing the interventions which are most desirable, feasible and how can it ensure that they are implemented in a consistent and coherent way? How can PCC be certain that it is spending taxpayers' money (and the focus of its executives and elected members) in the most effective and efficient manner? It would be somewhat of an "own goal" to implement contradictory or conflicting policies.

Up until now, for completely understandable reasons, the discussion has been at a very granular linear 'cause--effect' tactical level. Yet It is my strong belief that the <u>city needs an overriding vision for traffic and transport</u>. This vision should be medium or long term, supported by measurable objectives (so that elected members and officials can objectively track progress). This should be supported by broad strategic themes: in turn the individual actions should be aligned to those strategies.

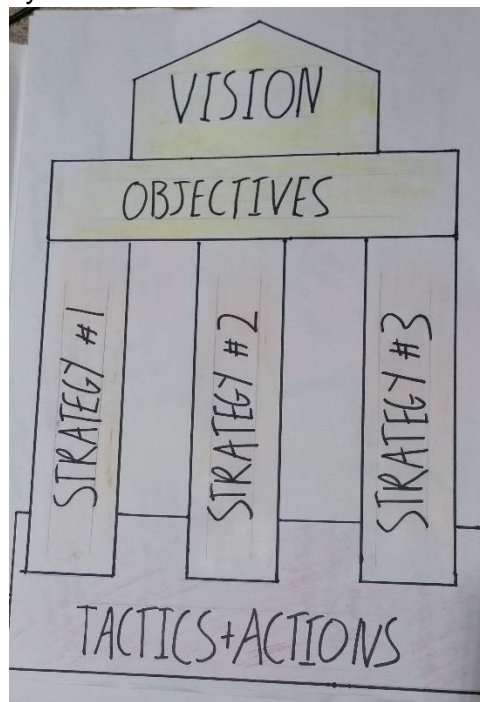This is illustrated conceptually in the model below.

Figure 1: Vision, Objective, Strategy & Tactics

This would allow conversations to simultaneously happen at the tactical level ("we need to put out the fires") and a strategic level ("how can we change the game so there is never a fire again"). Crucially, it allows open and transparent dialogue to happen between PCC's elected members, officials and residents over what vision we are aiming for. Getting buy-in for the vision will make it easier to act collaboratively to achieve desirable changes.

This probably all sounds rather abstract, so a worked example is given below. **It should be noted that all the ideas populated on this model are examples only; I am not suggesting they should be taken verbatim, but present them as an illustration of the technique**. If this were to be used, the model ought to be co-created with the Portsmouth community. It should also be noted that there could be more than three broad strategies; although only three are shown on both diagrams.

Figure 2: Annotated (Below)
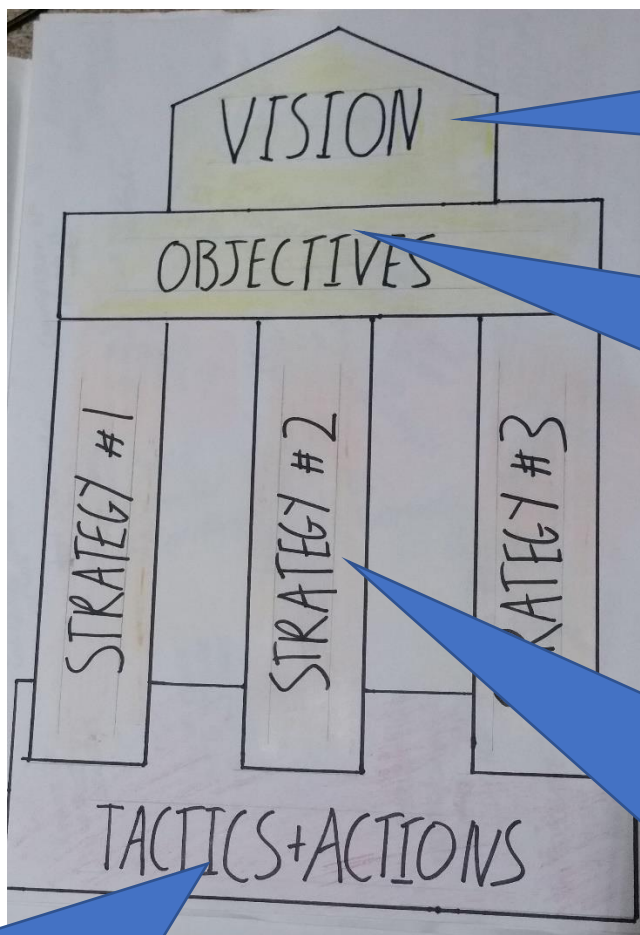
A vision should be co-created with stakeholders. An example might be

"For Portsmouth to be a leading eco-friendly city where *not* owning a car is feasible and desirable by 2020"

Objectives would be defined to show progress towards the vision. Perhaps:

Private Cars owned to reduce to x by y

of cars travelling on key routes during rush hour to reduce by x% by y

Amount spent on road repairs to reduce by x% by y

Broad strategic themes might include:

"Encourage Alternatives": Focussing on encouraging, providing and promoting viable alternatives to car ownership (public transport, cycling, shared car schemes and many other ideas would be tactics that would align to this strategy)

"Engage Employers": Working with employers to cut down cars on the road (Collaborative car sharing schemes, cycle to work schemes, encouraging working from home and many other ideas would all align to this strategy)

At the most granular level, there will be a prioritised list of actions/tactics; these *align* with strategy to ensure that we are pushing in a clear, consistent direction. As a single illustrative example "Establish 'Boris Bike' scheme" might align to the 'encourage alternatives' strategy. There would be many actions & tactics, pulled together by these strategic 'themes'.

Having this conceptual structure helps us to prioritise.

This model can be a useful one-page strategic beacon, aligning the work of the council. It allows crisp, coherent communication, allows progress to be accurately measured and ensures that everyone is 'pulling in the same direction' (or at the very least that inconsistencies are surfaced and discussed).

1.4 Systemic causes
However, as alluded to in the opening of this paper, it is my belief that a double-edged approach should be taken. I have discussed addressing the strategic level, clearly action needs to be taken in the short and medium term too. Progress cannot be halted.

A challenge already raised by residents at previous deputations, which is also highlighted in the most recent report is the highly complex 'mess' of interconnections that affect traffic and transport. Decisions made in one area (planning, granting of HMOs) affect another (number of cars on the road). It would be all too easy to make 'knee-jerk reactions'; yet I strongly urge the council to look at chains of causation.

One way of doing this is with a multiple cause diagram. An example, to show the format, is pasted below. **Again, it should be noted that this diagram is provided for illustrative purposes only and I am not suggesting the content presented below is right or that it should be used in its current form.** However, officials within PCC could work with the Portsmouth community to construct such diagrams allowing tactical interventions to target root causes. In doing so we achieve greater agility; we can draw a line of scope, intervene, set some success criteria and measure regularly to see if there is an improvement. We 'learn our way through' the issue as a community, accepting that no one person or group has all the answers.
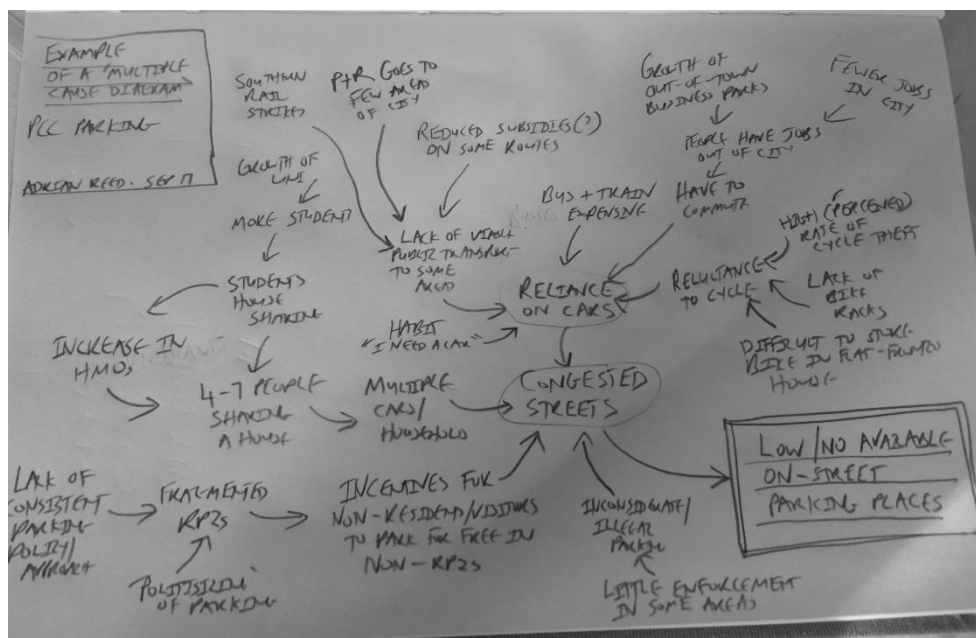

Figure 3: Example of a 'multiple cause diagram'
Adapted/expanded version

By collaboratively thinking the problematic situation through in this way, we identify strings of causation. This enables joined-up decisions to be made on *where* to intervene. This allows actions and tactics to be selected, tried and tested.

It should be noted that this is just one type of diagram, and indeed the diagram above shows only a small proportion of causes—and only represents *one* person's perspective. In some ways the type of diagram used is unimportant; what is crucial is the collaborative co-creation of a shared understanding of the complexity underpinning the problem situation.

2. Conclusion
In conclusion, I believe that the approach PCC has taken in this inquiry has been more participative than any other I have seen PCC use in the past. Yet with the current narrow scope, I believe the initiative will achieve at best limited success. Indeed, it is notable that critical success factors/measures of success are themselves not defined in the report.

The council should be encouraged for grasping such a thorny issue; but I encourage the council to address the short term need whilst also simultaneously elevating the conversation to a more strategic and systemic level. With the enthusiasm, passion and creativity of the Portsmouth community, I truly believe we could achieve something awesome. And I believe it is our duty to future generations to have the hard discussions.

Distribution
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