

Briefing Note No. 26 - 23

St Stephen's Multi-Storey Car Park, Trowbridge: agreement signed

Service : Assets
Further enquiries to: Mike Dawson
Date prepared: 21 October 2026
Direct line: mike.dawson@wiltshire.gov.uk

Agreement confirmed

Wiltshire Council has completed the legal agreement to transfer the freehold of St Stephen's Multi-Storey Car Park to Patet Ltd, the owner of the adjoining Castle Place Shopping Centre.

The agreement implements the revised approach approved by [Cabinet in July 2026](#).

The agreement means that when the council vacates Castle Place Leisure Centre the freehold of the car park will transfer to Patet Ltd.

The transfer removes the council's future responsibility for the maintenance, refurbishment and eventual demolition of the ageing structure.

[Independent engineering advice](#) indicated that extending the car park's operational life by around 10 to 15 years would require estimated investment of between £3.5m and £5m within the next two to five years.

As the council cannot charge for parking at the site, there is no income stream to offset those costs.

Safeguards for the council

The signed agreement includes milestones to be met by Patet Ltd in respect of approval and physical for demolition. Once the transfer has formally taken place, the council will be in a position to confirm more details on the agreement.

What happens to the car park now?

The car park remains open and is expected to remain available until at least the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre opens.

Future redevelopment

No redevelopment proposal is being announced as part of this agreement.

Any future scheme would be brought forward by the new owner and would need to follow the relevant planning and statutory processes.

Further information and enquiries

A press release will be issued shortly, and detailed questions and answers will be available on our website. They are enclosed for your information.

More information

If you would like more information, please contact mike.dawson@wiltshire.gov.uk

Questions and answers

What has been agreed?

Wiltshire Council and Patet Ltd, the owner of Castle Place Shopping Centre, have completed the legal agreement allowing for the transfer of the freehold of St Stephen's Multi-Storey Car Park.

The agreement provides for ownership and future responsibility for the car park to transfer from the council to Patet Ltd.

Has the agreement now been signed?

Yes. The legal agreement has been signed. The car park will formally transfer to Patet Ltd after the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre and its car park open.

When will the car park formally transfer?

The car park will formally transfer to Patet Ltd when the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre and its car park open. A date will be confirmed in due course.

Who will be responsible for maintaining the car park?

Wiltshire Council will remain responsible for the car park until the formal transfer takes place. Following the transfer, responsibility will pass to Patet Ltd as the new owner.

Why has the council transferred the car park?

The car park is an ageing structure approaching the end of its original design life. Independent engineering advice indicated that extending its life by around 10 to 15 years would require estimated works of £3.5m to £5m within the next two to five years.

The council would also face further maintenance and eventual demolition or replacement costs. Because the council cannot charge for parking at the site, there is no income to offset these costs.

The transfer removes these long-term liabilities from Wiltshire taxpayers and creates the

potential for the combined site to attract private investment.

What are the benefits of the council transferring the car park?

The transfer will:

- support regeneration ambitions in Trowbridge town centre
- provide a better financial outcome than retaining the ageing structure
- reduce the council's long-term financial liabilities
- avoid substantial future repair and maintenance costs
- provide the potential for future financial benefit if the site is sold.

What would happen if the council kept the site?

If the council retained ownership, it would continue to be responsible for:

- ongoing structural inspections
- future maintenance and repairs
- potential major refurbishment costs
- longer-term demolition and replacement liabilities.

Retaining the car park would therefore expose the council to significant future costs.

Has the council considered other options?

Yes. Previous work considered options including retaining and repairing the structure, demolition and rebuilding, disposal on the open market, challenging the legal agreement preventing charging, and purchasing the shopping centre for comprehensive redevelopment. These have been included in Cabinet and Full Council reports leading up to this point.

The council concluded that the transfer represented the most financially responsible and deliverable option.

Why not refurbish the car park?

Engineering assessments indicate that major refurbishment could cost between £3.5m and £5m and may extend the life of the structure by around 10 to 15 years.

Even after this investment, the council would remain responsible for future maintenance and running costs and would still need to address the longer-term future of the structure.

Why not demolish and rebuild it?

Demolition and replacement would involve very significant costs of many millions, substantially higher than refurbishment. The council would also remain responsible for the cost of replacing the car park and its future maintenance. There would be no way to recoup any costs from a re-built car park as the covenant would mean that parking would need to be free of charge.

How does this fit with Wiltshire Council's Asset Management Strategy?

The council's Asset Management Strategy seeks to ensure that assets are used effectively, deliver value for residents and do not create unnecessary financial burdens.

The St Stephen's agreement supports those objectives by reducing long-term liabilities while creating opportunities for regeneration and investment.

What would you say to people who rely on the free parking at St Stephen's?

We understand that the free parking at St Stephen's is valued by many people and that any future change will have an impact on those who regularly use it.

However, keeping the existing car park would require significant ongoing public investment, with no parking income available to help meet those costs. The council therefore concluded that continuing with the current arrangement would not be financially sustainable in the long term. The car park is the only free public Wiltshire Council car park in Wiltshire.

The car park will remain available under the current arrangements for now, and people will be given clear information in advance of any future changes.

Why is the council paying someone to take the car park, rather than selling it?

The car park comes with significant financial liabilities, which means its costs exceed its value. This was reflected in a valuation obtained at the end of 2024, which stated that the car park was a liability of around £2million. The legal covenant enforcing free parking would continue to negatively affect the value of the car park, even if it was demolished and rebuilt.

Keeping the car park would require an estimated £3.5m to £5m of repairs in the next two to five years, with further costs when it eventually reaches the end of its usable life.

The payment enables the council to transfer the car park along with its future maintenance, repair and demolition costs. The agreement also means the council could benefit from any future increase in the value of the land arising from redevelopment.

For comparison, the recent reconstruction of Sadlers Mead car park in Chippenham cost around £8million. The St Stephens site is considerably more complex, not least because it is next to a well-used park and attached to another building. This, together with inflation, will ensure that the costs of demolishing and rebuilding St Stephens would be considerably more.

Is this good value for taxpayers?

The council believes the transfer is the most financially responsible available option.

Retaining the car park would require an estimated £3.5m to £5m of works within the next two to five years to extend its life by around 10 to 15 years, with further costs arising in the longer term.

The transfer removes those future liabilities. The agreement also includes milestones to be met by Patet Ltd in respect of demolition, plus planning approval for comprehensive redevelopment.

Was the payment already budgeted for?

The July 2026 Cabinet decision repurposed the £5.1million capital funding that had originally been approved for maintenance and repairs to St Stephen's Multi-Storey Car Park to facilitate the transfer. This decision reduces the borrowing costs that would otherwise be incurred.

What safeguards are in the agreement?

The agreement includes milestones to be met by Patet Ltd in respect of demolition, plus planning approval for comprehensive redevelopment.

How can the council spend money originally intended for repairs and maintenance on transferring the freehold?

Cabinet agreed that capital funding allocated for repairs and maintenance to the car park could instead be used to facilitate the transfer. This is a standard procedure used regularly by Cabinet to enable the council to make best use of capital and reduce borrowings.

The transfer removes the council's longer-term responsibility for maintaining, repairing and ultimately dealing with the ageing structure.

Is the multi-storey car park unsafe?

No. The car park remains open and operational.

However, structural surveys have found that the building is ageing and requires ongoing monitoring, inspections and maintenance. Recent repair works have helped to extend the life of the structure in the short term, but they do not remove the need for future investment or address its longer-term future.

What did the structural report find?

The report found:

- the car park is near the end of its design life
- there is ongoing deterioration of the reinforced concrete structure
- cracking, water ingress and chloride contamination from road salts are contributing to deterioration
- further inspections and repairs will continue to be required
- significant investment would be needed to extend the life of the structure over the longer term.

Can I see the structural report?

Yes. You can [read the structural report](#).

Why couldn't the council publish the structural report earlier than July 2026?

The report produced earlier in 2026 was originally subject to a confidentiality clause, which meant it could not be published.

The council subsequently requested an updated report from the contractor that was capable of public release and provided further information.

Will parking remain free?

Parking remains free while the current arrangements continue.

Following the transfer, future operational and charging decisions will rest with the new owner, subject to the terms of the signed agreement and relevant legal requirements.

When will the car park close?

There is currently no confirmed closure date. The car park is expected to remain available until at least the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre opens.

Future decisions will be the responsibility of the new owner following transfer, and users will be given information in advance of any changes.

Will free parking be provided elsewhere?

There will be no alternative free-parking arrangement to replace St Stephen's.

The current free public parking at St Stephen's results from historic legal arrangements attached specifically to this site. Parking at other council car parks is governed by the council's wider parking policy and tariffs.

Why can't the council simply keep the car park free?

Keeping the existing structure would require substantial public investment and continuing maintenance, with no parking income available to offset those costs.

The council concluded that this would not be financially sustainable or fair to taxpayers across Wiltshire.

Can the council start charging for parking instead?

No. Legal agreements dating back to the original development of the site significantly constrain the council's ability to introduce parking charges at the multi-storey car park.

Legal advice concluded there is no straightforward or cost-effective mechanism to remove those restrictions.

What is the 1974 Deed of Covenant?

The 1974 legal arrangements require the council, while it owns the car park, to provide the parking facility and prevent it from charging users. They also relate to access and the adjoining shopping centre.

Does this mean redevelopment has been approved?

No. The transfer agreement is not planning permission and does not approve any particular redevelopment.

Any future development proposals are a matter for the new owner and would need to go through the relevant planning and statutory processes.

What might be developed on the site?

The council will not be the developer of the site. Any future development proposals would be a matter for the new owner and would need to go through the usual planning process. We are aware of draft plans published by Patet Ltd, but no formal planning applications have been submitted, and these will be considered on their own merits. Achieving planning permission in a timely manner is a requirement to release some of the money to Patet Ltd.

Will the council carry out or pay for future redevelopment?

The council will not be the developer. Any future development would be led by the private owner.

What happens to Castle Place Leisure Centre?

Castle Place Leisure Centre will continue to operate under the current arrangements until services transfer to the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre, at which point Castle Place will close.

Customers will be updated separately about the move and relevant dates.

How could this proposal proceed when Full Council rejected it in January 2026?

Cabinet agreed to transfer the freehold in October 2025. Full Council was subsequently asked to approve additional funding required to progress the transfer because it would have increased the council's agreed capital spending for 2025/26. Full Council did not approve that amendment to the 2025/26 budget.

Cabinet subsequently agreed to use 2026/27 capital funding allocated for repairs and maintenance to St Stephen's Multi-Storey Car Park to facilitate the transfer.

Why were parts of the process confidential?

Some financial and legal information was considered in private because it was commercially sensitive and disclosure could have affected the council's negotiating position. This is standard procedure for all business negotiations undertaken by the council. Once the transfer has formally taken place, the council will be in a position to confirm more details on the agreement.