

Parking reform: tackling unfair practices

27th May 2015

Discussion paper and call for evidence

LGA Response

The Local Government Association (LGA) is a voluntary membership body and our member authorities cover every part of England and Wales. Together they represent over 50 million people and spend around £113 billion a year on local services. They include county councils, metropolitan district councils, English unitary authorities, London boroughs and shire district councils, along with fire authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and passenger transport authorities. The LGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

1. Do you think there are problems with how parking on private or public land is regulated, or the behaviour of private parking companies?

We are not aware of any systemic problems in the regulation of parking on council-owned land either by councils or by private contractors operating on their behalf. As with any other regulated activity, there will be occasions when mistakes are made or performance falls below acceptable standards. There is no evidence to suggest that the appeals systems in place covering council-managed car parking are failing to deal with these issues effectively.

2. If you answered Yes to Question 1, what problems do you think there are with parking on private land, or the practices of parking control companies managing parking on private or public land?

N/A

3. If you answered Yes to Question 1, what steps do you think the Government should take to rectify these problems?

N/A

4. Are you able to offer any evidence to support a case for change, or examples of best practice?

The LGA provided some examples of best practice in its written evidence to the Transport Select Committee's inquiry into local authority parking

enforcement in 2013.¹ The LGA does not collect parking case studies on a regular basis, but if the Department wishes to be better informed on the subject we recommend that it consults the British Parking Association and the Association for Town Centre Management

5. Do you think there are other steps the Government could take to ensure that parking supports local shops and high streets?

The LGA believes that parking and local traffic management are local matters and it is councils that are best placed to provide solutions to local challenges. The Government's role should therefore be to equip them with the tools to do this job effectively. For example, DfT has attempted to prevent councils using ANPR technology in council car parks. The use of this technology – commonplace in the private sector – allows car park operators to offer a better and more cost effective service to customers and councils should not be prevented from using this technology.

At present councils lack sufficient powers to ensure that all high streets have an optimal bus service, or to enforce moving traffic offences such as banned turns and yellow box junctions in England (outside London). Without these powers councils are effectively attempting to manage town centre traffic with one hand tied behind their backs. The DfT estimates that traffic on local roads will increase by 42 per cent by 2040. If realised, this would bring many town centres to a standstill with catastrophic implications for local businesses. Unless the government empowers councils to manage traffic effectively and provide viable alternatives to the car for town centre business, congestion will force increasing numbers of shoppers to abandon the high street altogether

6. If you answered Yes to Q5, what steps do you think the Government should take to help support local shops and high streets, for example by encouraging the provision of free and competitively priced parking spaces?

The discussion document seems to start from the false premise that shortcomings in parking provision are responsible for the supposed decline of the high street. However the available evidence suggests that the price and availability of parking are not key issues here and that availability is more significant than price.²

The idea that the problems of the high street are caused by overly high parking charges is incorrect. UK high streets are evolving as a result of changing economic and retail circumstances. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently highlight that six out of ten British adults use the internet to buy products such as food, clothing, music or holidays, twice the average of the

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmtran/118/118we14.htm>

² http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/The_relevance_of_parking_in_the_success_of_urban_centres_-_A_review_for_London_Councils.pdf
http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf
<http://www.parkmark.co.uk/key-issues-for-drivers>

OECD's 34 member states (including the US, Germany, Australia and France).³

A recent report by the government-led Future High Streets Forum pointed out that:

'In many cases, increasing parking provision may not even be desirable regardless of the practical impediments. An opportunity cost often comes with the loss of other uses that parking provision may replace, potentially taking footfall and spend with it. More cars could also contribute to undesirable changes to the public realm that come with roads and traffic, something that is especially problematic for historic centres that thrive on tourism. Recognising the potential incompatibility of the car with historic architecture, many of Europe's best preserved and attractive towns and cities limit access by private motorised vehicles as a matter of necessity. There is also the issue of the cost of parking. Both local authorities and private companies have to cover their costs in relation to parking. Maintenance, management and long-term investment in the quality of the car park are all serious considerations that must be taken into account. ... car parks attract business rates that must be paid. Consequently, neither on-street nor off-street parking is free. The cost needs to be covered by someone, somewhere, somehow'.

The decision on whether to provide free or cheap parking around local shops is one that can only be sensibly taken at local level. In particular it is important to remember that where all-day free parking is provided in high street locations it is likely to be occupied by commuters and shop workers rather than by shoppers.⁴

The ideal parking policy will vary from place to place depending on road system capacity and alternative means of access and the nature of the 'offer'. In some locations it may be necessary to limit free parking or set charges at a particular level to encourage turnover and discourage commuter parking, but the correct use of these methods can only be determined in relation to the specifics of location. Councils already have an incentive to help high streets succeed and have made considerable investment in providing car parks to support town centres. Quite often council car parking is cheaper than that provided by the private sector.

7. Should there be an obligation for local authorities to offer the ability to pay for parking by cash within a reasonable distance of where they have parking (for example via ticket machines or via local shops)?

No. We are not aware of any local authority which currently does not offer this option other than Westminster where cash payment is not available for on-street parking. This step has been taken by Westminster in response to customer demand. Statutory obligations of this nature are likely to prove burdensome as technology develops to a point where there may – in

³ <http://tinyurl.com/cfmt7tl>

⁴⁴ *Spaced Out - Perspectives on parking policy* -John Bates & David Leibling July 2012 RAC foundation p.53

perhaps ten years – no longer be any demand for cash payment facilities and are likely to involve the imposition of an inappropriate one-size-fits-all approach. Councils consult on changes to parking policy. Moreover, the government has already granted businesses and residents the power to challenge parking policies and if councils fail to provide appropriate cash payment options this will provide a suitable avenue for complaint and policy change.

8. Do you have any examples demonstrating best practice approaches in the UK or abroad?

See response to Q4.

9. Do you have any best practice suggestions for councils to follow?

The LGA believes the BPA and ATCM are already providing their members (many of whom are our members) with access to best practice and advice on these matters.

The LGA would be happy to assist the department in any further consideration it wishes to undertake on either the future of the High Street or parking regulation.