

# Top Tips: Practical Parking Solutions

## READING BETWEEN THE PARKING LINES

This guide draws on the approach in the 'Between the Parking Lines' report developed as part of the Future High Streets Forum. This approach proposes that you should think of parking as part of the whole journey from home to final destination and not just about what goes on between the white car park lines or alongside the on-street double yellow lines.

Practical parking solutions will best emerge from an understanding of the issues that you gain by speaking to users and recording parking usage street by street and car park by car park. Much of this groundwork can be done by willing volunteers working to a standardised yet simple methodology. The evidence gathered can help you to break down the 'battle lines' so often drawn-up between the different factions in town centres and will often point to some common-sense, quick-win solutions. This evidence helps you to build up a picture of the customer experience of different user groups and to understand the impacts on them of the quantity, quality and costs of parking provided.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

*Quality and convenience:* For the first-time or infrequent visitor to a town or local shopping centre, ease of access and signage to and from car parks will have an important impact on the quality of the experience. This can be easily analysed by tracking journeys using a visitor's eye perspective from all points of the compass to key town centre destinations. Convenience of location will be more important to regular, local users though often they will have fallen in to habitual routes and routines that may no longer best serve them and might create congestion.

The Park Mark scheme managed by the British Parking Association provides customers with added quality assurance about the safety of car parks.

*Quantity and duration of stay:* The availability of parking spaces suiting different users' needs will have a huge bearing on the customer experience. As a rule of thumb, if 15% of spaces are available at the busiest periods, car park managers have got the balance of supply and demand about right. Very often though, the analysis of town centre parking patterns will reveal variable levels of usage across a town and highlight opportunities to make shifts in people's parking habits. The quick turnaround of spaces managed by cheap, short duration tariffs and strict enforcement, may best serve the needs of the quick 'pop-and-shopper'. Infrequent visitors may be better directed to 'park and walk' using clear signage past points of interest and with longer, flexible tariffs.

*Cost and payment method:* The cost of parking can be an emotive issue especially if there have been rapid rises over recent years. Cost has the biggest impact on regular users such as town centre workers who might be suitably served by cheaper parking in peripheral areas. For many town centre users and compared to other costs such as petrol, running costs or refreshments, however, parking charges usually represent a relatively small proportion of the costs involved in a town centre visit.

As much as cost, the inconvenience of scrabbling around for change, walking to and fro to the ticket machine and predicting length of stay are an inconvenience and can put people off. Innovative low-tech local loyalty schemes and evolving, high-tech cashless payment methods, provide opportunities for new solutions than can better serve customer needs and business interests.

## GETTING TO CLOSE TO THE CUSTOMERS

As with any service, it's essential to get to know different customers using your town centre parking so that you can tailor provision to best meet their needs. It's good to get out there and consult users face-to-face but here's a summary of the needs for some of the different car parking customer groups that will start you thinking:

- The pop-and shopper: A guaranteed, short-term space outside the shops
- The leisure shopper: Available, convenient space and flexible duration
- The infrequent visitor: Happier to park and walk guided by clear signage
- The worker: Cost and duration more important than convenience

It's important that you find out proportion of these and other groups using your town.