

Discussion Paper on Parking Charges

Peebles Parking Facts

- As the town continues to grow, there is no possibility of building in additional parking space.
- Eastgate is often full during the week and deters drivers from accessing the town centre. See 4.6.22.
- The current parking system is confusing to visitors who often need advice on the Saturday only charging.
- Even amongst those car parks that charge, Peebles is and will still be a low-cost charging environment.
- An annual parking permit is available at £26, equating to less than 50p per week.
- If people are deterred from parking in Peebles, then they must shop elsewhere. The cost of going to Innerleithen in monetary terms is like the parking cost and will take 30 minutes longer to shop. Galashiels is thereafter the only alternative and much more expensive in cost and time.
- Tourists come to Peebles because it is a key holiday destination. A parking charge which is broadly like any other holiday destination will not be a deterrence.

Extracts from – “Assessing the Impact of Car Parking Charges on Town Centre Footfall March 2015 Prepared for the Welsh Government”

The Welsh government undertook this research to examine the relationships between local authority decision making in relation to parking charges in Wales, the views of people visiting town centres across Wales, local stakeholders, and examples of best practice across the UK.

Key Findings

1.3.1 Charging for car parking is a **complex issue**. It is only one aspect of a complex interplay of **factors influencing willingness to travel by car, time and money spent, and business activity in town centres**. It is **very difficult to separate the influence of car parking charges from other factors**.

1.3.2 Car park charging is often perceived, particularly amongst businesses, as being a key determinant for changes in footfall levels in town and city centres. Over three-quarters of the business owners / workers interviewed suggested that car parking options have an impact on the number of people coming into the town centre and therefore on their custom. **However, the available evidence almost entirely anecdotal.**

1.3.4 Visitors to town centres suggested that car park charges impact on how long they to remain in the centre and, consequently, how much they spend whilst there. **However, the general availability of spaces is felt by visitors to be more important than cost in their overall decision about visiting**. Traffic flow and parking signage are felt by visitors to have the same, if not greater, effect on their decision to visit the town centre, how long they spend there, and how much money they spend.

1.3.6 Whilst a ‘blanket’ free parking strategy has been suggested to encourage more car park users, these were generally found not to benefit target visitors **(for example, the spaces were used primarily by town centre workers who were taking up the spaces all day, rather than shoppers) and consequently had an unexpectedly negative impact on footfall.**

1.3.7 **Firstly, there is a lack of robust evidence that can be used to link car parking strategies and town centre footfall.** Secondly, charging for car parking is one of a complex array of factors that can influence town centre vitality. Disentangling them through qualitative research and a small-scale survey is a challenge. Further research using larger sample sizes would be needed to build a stronger evidence base. Finally, town centre

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economies are highly localised and are hyper-specific. Towns are very different economically; different factors are at play across locations.

3.2.1 In general, business owners and their representative bodies say that they want free car parking in town centres. **These views are frequently expressed but are only infrequently backed up by evidence** showing a clear relationship between car parking charges and footfall and/ or revenue.

3.3.2 Two research-based reports have concluded that footfall and **car parking charges are, at best, only weakly related**, and that several other factors may be more important. For example, the **British Parking Association showed that car parking charges are not very strongly related to footfall**, or to the quality of a town's retail offering.

3.3.3 Furthermore, Yorkshire Forward, a regional development agency, concluded that the key factor affecting the economic vitality of market towns is what the town has to offer, rather than parking. They also concluded that **several aspects of parking are more important to customers than price, availability of spaces being the most important factor.**

3.3.5 For business owners and the public, charging is a key, contentious issue. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has published a number of reports on local trade and town centre vitality. While these repeatedly make the point that there is a link between increasing car parking charges and dwindling footfall and revenue, **little is provided in the way of evidence beyond anecdote.** They do recognise the need for an integrated approach to town centre transport and parking and that charges can be used to help manage daily demand. However, formal research by Sustrans found that traders over-estimated car use and under-estimate pedestrians, potentially skewing their view on these issues. Furthermore, pedestrians have been shown to spend more per month than bus users and car users; they spend less per individual visit, but make more visits, further **indicating a bias in the views of business owners.**

3.4.2 **Where formal, robust, research has been carried out, it can contradict the views of the business community,** for example, by demonstrating that pedestrians visit the town centre more often and spend more per month (but less per visit) than car or bus users.

4.4.12 It was also suggested that the overall offering of the town and city centres was far more likely to have more of an impact on footfall than car parking charging, and that the offer and charging are viewed by visitors almost as a 'trade-off'; **for example, people will be willing to pay more for parking in towns or cities where there are more high street retailers, restaurants, and leisure activities.** It was also felt that out-of-town shopping developments are taking trade out of town and city centres, not purely because they offer free parking, but mostly because they often offer a greater variety of shops and other experiences.

4.6.21 Denbighshire County Council and Wrexham County Council both tried offering completely free parking in their car parks and found several of the parking spaces were consequently **used up by people working in the towns, reducing the number of spaces available for shoppers/ visitors.** As a result of this, they suggested that if they wanted to implement a similar scheme in future, it would need to be in a way that prevented the same thing happening, for example only offering the first few hours for free.

4.6.22 Furthermore, the aim for the free parking strategy in Wrexham's case was to encourage new visitors to come into the town centre. This was not achieved since town workers were taking up the spaces. "We had a multi-story car park with historical usage around 45-55% ... we wanted to try to support the local businesses, so we made one of the multi-story car parks free. **And that car park over a short period of time became around 100% full, so you were almost a victim of your own success.** People were going in there trying to park but were just circling and never getting a space." Local Authority "The scheme was intended to bring new visitors into the town centre. Anecdotally, it was used by staff; workers in the town centre took advantage of it for the

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free parking, so whilst it made the car park busy it didn't generate the new business it was intended for. We still do that now, but only after 3pm." Local Authority "Straight free parking in a lot of our town centres is not the thing to do ... partly because the experience where we've done things like that before is what tends to happen is all the shop workers come and fill up all the spaces and stay there all day. So, if we were going to do something, we'd have to do it in a way that would prevent that sort of thing happen.

4.6.25 Whilst, clearly, there are some example of charging strategies that have had a notably negative impact on footfall, there was a sense among a few of the Local Authority representatives interviewed **that charging has very little impact on footfall altogether**. For example, Denbighshire County Council dropped the car parking charges in some of their towns for a period and did not see any change in footfall. "In some towns we did drop the parking charge for a while, but it didn't seem to have any measurable impact on footfall.

Extracts from – "Sustrans 20.10.14 Free Parking not good for High Streets"

Similar results have been found outside the UK. In New York, new bike lanes (and the removal of some parking) boosted trade on 8th Avenue compared to other areas in the city.

Having unlimited free parking can actually hurt high streets by attracting people who are making other trips to park there all day – perhaps to commute within a walking distance of their workplace. This means retail customers needing to arrive by car can't find a space.

Evidence from throughout the world is available for what does work, and it doesn't point towards a solution of cheaper car parking as being the way to make our high streets a success again.

Extracts from – "British Parking Association"

The BPA recognise that there is a significant amount of anecdotal evidence, opinion, and speculation over the relationship between car parking provision and town centre prosperity. This confusion has been problematic for policy makers at numerous levels, which is most acute for local authorities who must balance the sometimes-conflicting needs of multiple stakeholders.

Parking is not usually one of the primary factors affecting competitiveness.

When changes to parking arrangements are made the primary response is

- An acceptance and behaviour remains unchanged.
- A change to parking location to try and reduce cost.
- A reduction in length of stay

Despite fears to the contrary, there is little evidence to suggest that the primary response is more extreme than this. There is no evidence that visitors use alternative destinations more.

https://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk/files/documents/extract_parking_policies_and_strategies_research/Extract%20-%20Parking%20Policies%20and%20Strategies%20research.pdf