

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

Living Streets response to the Department for Transport consultation on parking reform: tackling unfair practices

Introduction

We are the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we campaign to make walking safer and easier – and the natural choice for short journeys. We work with communities, professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30 mph speed limits. More than 85 years later we continue to influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy the benefits of walking.

Summary

We support the view held by the National Transport Committee on behalf of the Local Government Technical Advisers Group (TAG) that local authorities are best placed to identify local parking problems and solutions. Living Streets' report 'The Pedestrian Pound' identified that there are many factors contributing to the decline of local shops, town centres, high streets and parades. The evidence suggests that demand for parking is often over-estimated by businesses and case studies show that good quality public realm can boost retail footfall and turnover.

There is no such thing as a 'free' parking space. Encouraging short-stay, fleeting visits to local shops by curbing parking controls pays lip service to businesses' fears for the future, but is unlikely to 'fuel' their recovery. Cars have become an intrinsic part of the way many people shop, to a great extent because successive Governments have systematically failed to halt the growth of extensive, car dependent, out of town developments which take business away from city and town centres. On the other hand, parking controls e.g. introducing a ban on pavement parking create better places in which spend time and money.

The Government should be doing more to invest in active travel and public transport to support local shops and high streets. Ten years ago 25 per cent of shopping trips were walked, that has fallen to 21 per cent¹. However, walking for shopping, leisure purposes and personal business (e.g. to the bank, library or dentist; all high street destinations) still represents almost 40 per cent of walking journeys. This demonstrates a willingness to walk where people's destinations are within a convenient walking distance (e.g. 0-2 miles). People's willingness to cycle or use public transport will also depend on being able to travel to local shops and services comfortably and conveniently.

¹ National Travel Survey 2013.

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

Local Authorities are best placed to identify local problems and solutions to those problems. However the government could help considerably by reducing some of the unfair advantages that out of town centres have over town centre locations, in particularly their ‘free’ parking.

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? Do you consider local authority parking enforcement is being applied fairly and reasonably in your area?

Parking is not free. The land or road space on which it is constructed is an expense on someone as are the construction and operating costs. It does not seem logical that people walking, cycling or catching a bus to a high street or any shop should be subsidising members of society who drive or to encourage unnecessary car use to undermine efforts to reduce congestion, CO₂ production and increase air pollution. Furthermore, as The Pedestrian Pound showed, people arriving on foot, bicycle and by bus tend to spend more in the shops (either in a single visit or by visiting more often) than car drivers.

Parking controls also form an essential part of transport strategy, including managing traffic, improving road safety, managing congestion and encouraging the use of public transport and such controls are fundamental in ensuring local authorities fulfil their duties under the Traffic Management Act for the expeditious movement of traffic on 98 per cent of the road network. Kerbside space is at a premium, as roads in local shopping centres were not designed to cope with today’s traffic volumes. The use of this limited resource has to be balanced between the needs of bus passengers, loading activities, residents, businesses, visitors and the disabled and provide safety at junctions and for pedestrians to be seen when crossing the roads.

Local authority parking enforcement is often not rigorous enough in the view of many residents and efforts should be made so that inconsiderate parkers are more likely to be caught and appropriately charged/penalised to help the local economies and indeed high streets.

Living Streets is calling on the Government to review the current regulatory framework regarding parking on the footway and to bring forward proposals for a nationwide pavement parking ban along the lines of the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill in Scotland.

Poorly parked vehicles can force pedestrians into the road. They can inhibit the independence of many vulnerable people and be particularly dangerous for older people, for families with pushchairs and for those with visual or mobility impairments. Pavement parking is repeatedly highlighted as a major concern for our supporters and the general public. Research undertaken by Living Streets in 2011 revealed that 11% of respondents commented that pavements free of parked cars would make the biggest positive difference to their everyday life and cars parked on the pavement was the biggest issue (41%) when asked about clutter in the streets.

The Government has identified that “parking strategies must complement and enhance the attractiveness of our high streets and town centres.” Pavement parking is repeatedly highlighted as a major concern for our supporters and the general public. Since February 2013, well a over

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1000 members of the public have written to their local authority calling on them to take action on pavement parking following the launch of our pavement parking campaign.

The current legal framework regarding pavement parking is confusing for all road users. Pavement parking is banned in a number of local authorities including Exeter and Worcester in England through various legislative vehicles. In London pavement parking is banned throughout the 32 London boroughs and the City of London under the Greater London (General Purposes) Act 1974. However, local authorities can make exemptions on a street by street basis. Outside of London, Exeter and Worcester parking enforcement regarding pavement parking is less clear.

It is illegal to drive on the pavement but not explicitly illegal to park on the pavement. Police have powers under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 which makes it an offence to wilfully obstruct the free passage of the highway.

Local councils have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to restrict or prohibit pavement parking on individual streets by the making of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). In the words of the Transport Select Committee in 2006 'The Government must grip the problem of pavement parking once and for all and ensure that it is outlawed throughout the country... rather than relying on the use of individual Traffic Regulation Orders on specific streets and local Acts to impose a ban.' Seven years on the situation remains the same.

More recently the Transport Select Committee report on parking enforcement by local authorities once again highlighted the confusion caused by the current regulatory framework around pavement parking. The report noted that 'we recognise that that parking restrictions should reflect local circumstance'. However, in areas such as pavement parking, where there is a confusing patchwork approach across the country, local authorities must ensure that they communicate clearly to motorists. The needs of pedestrians must be considered alongside other road users (paragraph 8). The Government's response commented on the current system of Traffic Regulation Orders which causes confusion for all road users. This consultation provides an opportunity to review the current regulatory framework.

Living Streets in Scotland has led the creation of the Footway Parking (Scotland) Bill which has recently been introduced to the Scottish Parliament. The Bill will have a positive impact on equalities because it will enable people with mobility or visual impairments to have equal access to footways. The duties contained in the Equality Act 2010 should be taken seriously by local authorities when they consider this issue

Martin Horwood MP's Pavement Parking Bill (2014) raised the profile of this issue among MPs and the general public, and was supported by a wide range of organisations including: Age UK, British Parking Association, Civic Voice, The GlassHouse Community Led Design, Guide Dogs, Keep Britain Tidy, Design Council Cobe, RNIB and Leonard Cheshire Disability.

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