

## **Taking Parking Forward in Brent – May 2008.**

### ***“The implications of introducing ‘shared use’ resident / pay & display bays and associated free resident parking permits in Brent’s local town and district centres”***

#### **Introduction.**

This paper explores the policy and associated implications of introducing shared resident / pay & display bays in Brent, whereby residents utilising such bays would receive free ‘resident parking permits’ (existing charge is £50-£100/annum). The predominant reason for such a policy would be to increase the availability of parking spaces in Brent’s local retail centres to make it more convenient for people to visit them by car.

#### **How would it work?**

Shared bays would have to be time limited to visitors and they would not be permitted to park in excess of the maximum time nor drive away and return to the same area within a specified time, potentially one hour. This would prevent ‘long-stays’ which would arise from drivers that are happy to pay a long-stay charge and commute into London for the entire day or long periods of the day for meetings. This would contribute nothing to the local economy or promote the turnover of parking spaces, but effectively uses Brent as a ‘commuter car park’ for central London. This could occur particularly in the south of the borough, for example, near Kilburn stations where people might be inclined to park up and travel into London.

#### **Policy implications.**

Primarily, it must be recognised that facilitating or promoting the use of the private motor vehicle runs against global, national, regional and locally agreed environmental and transport policies. With this in mind, the issue of any motor-borne traffic ‘permit’, be it for a resident, a business or a school, for free, would be perceived by external agencies as facilitating and promoting car ownership and would be harmful to the overall image of the Council and the environmental credentials it holds close as part of the approved corporate agenda and agreed core values.

Introducing further free parking permits, or indeed, free parking *per-se* runs against the Council’s agreed environmental objectives and is a policy which does absolutely nothing to negate localised carbon emissions. Introducing a policy which could further harm local air quality already exceeding recommended levels along main road corridors, and residential areas, particularly in the south of Brent – is not something officers would recommend.

Furthermore, the proposal could damage Brent’s credibility in regard to sustainable transport and therefore undermine future bids for transport grants (mainly to Transport for London) which are a key source of income. This could result in a further grant loss of several millions of pounds of income per annum which in turn would not only limit the council’s ability to implement improvements to the highway network but

could also result in a loss of some jobs within the council and with local employers that the associated revenue from existing permits supports.

Finally, it should be noted that there is currently a shortage of bays compared with the number of people needing or wishing to park in Brent. This situation is expected to steadily worsen as car ownership and population density continues to increase. Permit price is a key control mechanism by which the council can attempt to manage supply and demand. Without this control the council's ability to manage this issue will be further limited.

### **Controlled Parking Zones and further implications.**

At present, residents only request controlled parking zones when their local situation is becoming intolerable and they can simply no longer park locally where they could before. By this stage residents are often desperate for the council to act. The modest permit charge is a useful disincentive to asking for a zone as a minor convenience. Resultantly, the potential lure of issuing further 'free parking permits' could lead to additional demand for CPZs. Whether out of genuine need or not, the council will not be in a position to implement zones as there will be no funds to do so. Each zone imposes costs to implement, maintain and administer. By balancing the costs of some permits against others this proposal will help maintain the position where residents only ask for CPZs when they are experiencing real difficulty parking.

Any form of free residents permits building on the existing free (<1101cc) vehicle permits would impact directly on key income stream that supports highway maintenance. It may become impossible to maintain the existing zone signage itself as well as resulting in a deteriorating road condition. This could also cause an increase in injury incidents and claims further reducing budgets available to maintain roads and triggering a spiral of decline. This could also result road condition indicators to fall further reducing the council's current CPA score. The condition of the street environment is also a factor influencing developer's choice of location. Development is critical to the regeneration of the borough. Therefore this proposal seeks to balance a reduction in some permit costs with an increase in others.

### **Financial considerations.**

At present, residents only request controlled parking zones when their local situation is becoming intolerable and they can simply no longer park locally where they could before. By this stage residents are often desperate for the council to act. Arguably, introducing local retail-use parking into a residential area would only add to on-street parking stress and could create a situation whereby residents are once again unable to park within their own streets, as they most likely were prior to the implementation of the CPZ.

The following paragraph (4.9) of a report from the Director of Environment & Culture to the Council's Executive Committee dated 13<sup>th</sup> November 2006, should be noted:

*"Offering a period of free parking across the borough, as in Preston Road, Bridge Road – Wembley, Cumberland Avenue and neighbouring roads in Park Royal, will **significantly reduce** the on and off-street parking income. It is estimate that this could reduce on and off-street parking income by **£1.5m** and the parking enforcement income would reduce by **£1m**. Officers advise that any form of free parking is difficult to enforce, and open to abuse...Officers suggest that expanding*

*free on and off-street parking areas would further exasperate an anomalous situation”*

Perhaps the most concerning point would be the development of inconsistency in policy application, whereby drivers (not necessarily from within Brent) would be able to visit some retail locations and not pay, and others, they would still have to pay (assuming not all residents, borough-wide, embraced the concept). Not only does this cause a situation where the Council would be increasingly (and unfairly) perceived as favouring some business/shop localities over others, by virtue of the fact you can parking for free in some areas and not others. This creates a difficult situation to explain to people and is difficult to defend when challenged.