

BID Parking Survey: Main Findings

The survey, which was supported by the District Council and the town's Transport & Parking Group, canvassed the views of the town's businesses and customers on parking matters. Some 158 businesses -- covering 1,500 employees and 793 of their customers -- completed the survey. The results therefore provide a credible evidence-based measure of the effectiveness of the town's parking policies. The main messages emerging from the survey are as follows:

Employees (commuters)

- Travel to work is dominated by car (43%) and walking (32%);
- 43 of the 158 businesses surveyed provided company car parks and these received the highest rating in terms of convenience and quality;
- The second highest rating went to Park & Ride – those staff who regularly finish work before about 6.30 pm find the service convenient and high quality;
- It is estimated that about a quarter of car users park on-street, i.e., in uncontrolled residential streets, etc. (this has been raised in the Town Council parking survey – residents are very angry about commuter parking in residential streets);
- Employers believe that about 38% of their customers use off-street car parks (roughly half use short-term car parks, while the other half use long-term car parks);
- Only 6% of customers are thought to use Park & Ride.
- Customers regularly complain about the cost of parking, difficulty finding suitable parking and the amount of time they are permitted to stay (particularly in relation to on-street parking);
- Employers believe that customers often leave without completing their purchase, because of the need to get back to their car before the parking ticket runs out, and most believe this has cost them custom during the past 12 months.

Customers

- 50% of respondents were shopping, 22% were doing business in the town, while the remaining 30% were visiting for leisure or tourism;
- 11% of respondents were staying for up to 1 hour, 62% for between 1 and 4 hours, while the remaining 27% were staying for longer (including 6% staying overnight);
- 77% rated the availability of on-street parking as poor, or very poor, while 56% said the same about off-street parking;
- 85% rated on-street parking costs as poor, or very poor, while 76% said the same about off-street parking;
- In terms of value for money, a mere 8% felt they were getting value for money from their parking (i.e., rated it excellent or good), while only 16% felt the length of stay enabled them to maximise their visit requirements;
- Nearly 30% of respondents rated their overall visit experience as excellent, or good, but only 10% rated their parking experience as excellent, or good;

- Finally, nearly two-third of respondents indicated that parking in Stratford was worse than in other towns.

What Do the Above Responses Tell Us?

What stands out about the above responses is:

- A well designed Park & Ride facility can be made attractive to commuters;
- The half-hour on-street parking restriction in Bridge Street, High Street and Union Street is no longer fit-for-purpose – the underlying economic structure of the town has changed and miscellaneous chores can no longer be completed within a half hour time window;
- Parking charges are too high – relative to comparator towns like Warwick and Leamington -- and are seriously damaging the town. On street charges are significantly higher. A 1-hour stay in Stratford costs £1.40, compared to £0.90 in Warwick and £1.00 in Leamington. Likewise, the short term tariff is higher than both comparators and is higher even than Touchwood – a 4-hour stay in Stratford costs £5.00, compared to £3.10 in Warwick, £3.20 in Leamington and £3.80 in Touchwood. Long term charges are also generally higher than the comparators. Season ticket costs is the only area where Stratford is lower than the comparators.
- The town's parking offer is too confusing – as evidenced by the large number of short-term shoppers parking in long-term parking spaces – because signage and guidance is unclear (i.e., on-street signage, leaflets and web-based information).

What Action Should be Taken?

The following actions could potentially deal with most of the above parking problems:

- Park & Ride could be made more attractive for commuters who either regularly work late (e.g., restaurant staff), or cannot guarantee being able to leave the office before 6.30 pm (this even applies to senior SDC staff). Park & Ride could be made more attractive for such staff by abolishing the current release charge and allowing locked in vehicles to be released following a telephone call (or similar) as in Shrewsbury;
- Park & Ride could also be made more attractive by discouraging commuter parking in uncontrolled residential streets, i.e., by restricting them to residents only, and providing a viable southern Park and Ride facility.
- Park & Ride could be further encouraged by offering promotional rates, or a discount on season tickets sold to BID members and their employees;
- The half-hour parking limit in Bridge Street, High Street and Union Street needs to be replaced by a 1-hour limit.
- On street parking charges should be £1.00 for 1-hour and £2.00 for 2-hours. The short stay tariff should be lowered to £0.80 for 1-hour, £1.60 for 2 hours, £2.40 for 3-hours and £3.20 for 4-hours, while the long term tariff should be adjusted upwards for short term stays – to discourage short term parking – to £1.00 for 1-hour, £2.00 for 2-hours and £3.00 for 4-hours, but should be lowered to £5.00 for stays of over 4-hours.

- Parking spaces need to be clearly branded as ultra short stay, short stay, or long stay/commuter. This could be done by restructuring the off-street short-term/long-term tariffs and improving the flow of information. The short term tariff could restrict the maximum length of stay to 4-5 hours in all short-term car parks, while the long-stay tariff could start at £4.00 for up to 4+ hours to discourage short-term parking. Improving the flow of information would then focus on better information on the web – if you are visiting for 1-2 hours, do this, if your visit is likely to last 4-5 hours, do this, and if it is going to be longer than 5 hours, do this – via the SDC/WCC web pages, the BID web page and the web pages of the town's businesses. On-street signage and leaflets should then be designed to clarify the branding and provide the motorist with the necessary information to enable them to maximise the value of their trip.
- Car parks should have more clearly defined usage, e.g. shoppers car park, visitors car park etc. This information needs to be standardised and disseminated. It also needs to be supported by better wayfinding and promotion. The tariffs likewise need to support the car park's branded usage.
- Collectively we need to change the perception of parking in Stratford. The above changes therefore need to be supported by a positive PR campaign over the next 6 months.

Other Issues not Linked Directly to the Survey

- District Council employees do not all need to have a car park within 100 metres of their desk. Those staff who do not need to use their car during the day should be issued with free season tickets for Park and Ride. Part of the car park can then be used for regular short term parking (shopping) to help balance the town's short term parking provision.
- Wide spread grumbles raised outside the parking survey suggest that, during the past 2 years, the Parking enforcement Officers have acquired a reputation for being over enthusiastic and heavy handed. A new approach ideally needs to be adopted towards the enforcement process as part of the 6-month PR campaign by, for example, reintroducing the Town Ambassador courses that used to be delivered by the Town Management Partnership.