

Local Authority Parking and Traffic Management Operational Advice during Covid-19



Wales Version 3 – 16th April 2020

Introduction

This guidance has been produced jointly by the British Parking Association and the WLGA to assist local authorities to consider appropriate temporary measures in the unprecedented and very challenging circumstances around Covid-19. This guidance is supported by the Welsh government. The authors of this advice will keep it under constant review in light of the rapidly changing situation and update & reissue as necessary.

Benefits of Parking Management

Parking management is an important public service, which provides benefits to motorists and the wider community. Those benefits include maintaining road safety and ensuring access to goods and services. This is extremely important, particularly for certain key workers, as local authorities aim to keep providing essential services at this challenging time.

Parking for NHS, health and social care workers and NHS volunteers

Critical workers in the NHS and social care are doing vital and highly-valued work to support the most vulnerable in our society, save lives and keep our country running. They have been working day and night as they step up to the unprecedented challenge we face as a nation. As they seek to minimise the spread of infection, we recognise that many will be travelling to and from their place of work by car and other vehicles.

Following an announcement on 25th March by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick, local councils in England are providing free car parking for NHS staff and social care workers during the coronavirus outbreak. This enables them to park in on street parking bays and council owned car parks without having to worry about cost or time restrictions.

All councils should have therefore suspended parking charges for health and social care workers for on-street parking and council car parks. This includes NHS volunteers. We have also urged councils to waive all fines received by NHS and health and social care workers while carrying out their duties since the 16 March 2020. These workers should be encouraged and supported to appeal any fines, with supporting evidence of their work.

Government Parking Pass and Other Evidence of Entitlement to Parking Concessions

On 6th April 2020, the Welsh government launched a parking pass scheme for NHS staff, health & social care workers and NHS volunteers, critical workers, who are eligible for free parking from local authorities. The pass will be distributed via employer networks to NHS staff, health and social care workers and NHS volunteers and will be accompanied by guidance about its use. A copy of the pass and guidance has been sent to members by the BPA and WLGA. If you require a copy please contact Alison.t@britishparking.co.uk as the pass and guidance will not be published to reduce the risk of misuse.

Councils will need to make their frontline teams aware of what the pass looks like and the guidance so they are aware of where they have been told they can use it.

Council parking teams are not required to administer the pass scheme. But should they receive enquiries about where to get a pass they can:

1. Refer the person to their employer. For NHS volunteers this will be the WCVA and for health and social care it will be the local council health and social care team or care provider. The NHS will also be distributing the pass across their network so local trusts will be able to issue them.
2. If it is simpler and quicker to do so, the parking team may send a copy of the pass to the enquirer upon receipt of satisfactory evidence of entitlement.

If a special Covid-19 permit system for critical workers had already been set up by your council or other evidence of entitlement had been accepted following previous advice this should just continue and the pass does not need to replace it. The guidance for users clarifies this point.

It should be noted that it may not be obvious to identify care workers as they come from a diverse set of organisations within the care industry. Where the Government pass is not being used, this diversity should be taken into account and on street enforcement officers asked to look closely and record any evidence placed in windscreens.

NHS_Freeparking.co.uk

To help deal with enquiries about where concessions for critical health workers apply, BPA and some of its members have developed an online search site www.nhs-freeparking.co.uk which councils can publicise on their own websites and use themselves if they are trying to identify additional free parking facilities in their area. The site uses a specially filtered search powered by Parkopedia, which already lists all local authority car parks across the UK. Should you need to amend the details for your council due to car parks closing or changes in operating hours during COVID 19 you should contact support.uk@parkopedia.com Please provide them with the name, address including post code or latitude/longitude for the car parks you wish to amend.

The search also features all private car parks and any private driveways which are providing free parking for the same critical health workers.

It is important to clarify that this site relates directly to those who qualify for the universal parking pass so will not provide information about parking for other key workers.

Parking for other key workers

Wherever possible it is important to try to provide support and exemptions to other key workers too, such as the wider emergency services, essential transport staff and others helping unwell and vulnerable people in their communities. These workers may also be working longer hours and may no longer have the full range of travel choices they would normally have. This means that they may be struggling to park near their place of work or the places they need to visit.

Authorities may also wish to explore opportunities to increase parking capacity by talking to closed business, shopping centres or opening parks for additional key worker parking.

Enforcement

We advise that the majority of enforcement activity, and especially that relating to lower level contraventions, should cease during the lock down period. Authorities may need to continue to deploy their front line teams in some capacity to focus on priority areas and controls. Enforcement officers should be focused on providing help and advice about where people can and can't park and encouraging the drivers of poorly parked vehicles to move where possible rather than issuing PCNs.

It is recommended that any enforcement activity focuses on incidents of obstructive or dangerous parking that could have a more significant impact on safety and access for emergency and essential services. This would include yellow lines at junctions, bus stops, loading restrictions and obstruction of dropped kerbs.

Those local authorities that undertake vehicle removals should only do so if a vehicle is parked dangerously or obstructing traffic flow. Where possible, any vehicle that needs to be removed should be relocated to a safe, lawful position close by rather than removed to the vehicle pound. Removing to a pound should absolutely be a last resort.

It is likely that in residential areas, parking demand may currently outstrip supply due to most residents staying at home. This additional pressure will need to be managed carefully to prevent obstructive parking hindering emergency services and the delivery of essential supplies and services, such as waste collection. However, to especially help those who are self-isolating, authorities should take a pragmatic approach to unlawful parking if it is not dangerous or causing an obstruction, particularly in residential controlled parking zones.

Authorities should consider maximising parking spaces in one-hour single yellow line restrictions where commuters might usually park, by relaxing those parking restrictions to enable home-working. Authorities should also consider temporary extensions to their resident's permits for the next 3 months and then keep this under review. All available off-street provision should be considered as an option to provide additional parking for residents. As far as is possible, councils should communicate to their communities the location of additional parking and advice regarding the need to park considerately, safely and responsibly and the reasons why this is important.

Blue Badge enforcement

Acknowledging that local authorities may have to delay processing new Blue Badge applications and reapplications, and may also have an existing backlog of current applications, the UK and devolved governments and local government associations are advising that local authority parking teams should not issue Penalty Charge Notices to citizens using Blue Badges with an expiry date of

1 January 2020 onwards. This relaxation of enforcement against expired Blue Badges should continue initially until 30 September 2020.

Moving Traffic Contraventions

Most moving traffic controls, such as no entries, banned turns and yellow boxes are for important safety and traffic management purposes. The continuation of enforcement is therefore likely to be important to ensure compliance. However, authorities should consider whether to continue the enforcement of non-safety critical controls.

***NEW* PCN Case Progression**

It is recommended that, during the COVID 19 emergency period, outstanding PCN cases are put on hold in recognition of the difficulties many people may currently be in.

Authorities have 56 days from the receipt of a representation to issue a response. Any representation that is not responded to within this timeframe is deemed as accepted. Authorities should consider extending hold periods on cases that are already in the system but be aware of the maximum 56 day deadline. Notices must be responded to by post unless the recipient has clearly stated that they wish to receive them by email.

With respect to sending a Notice to Owner, legally you have six months to do so. However, Statutory Guidance states “we expect authorities to send them (NtOs) within 56 days. The ultimate time limit, in exceptional circumstances, is six months from the “relevant date”. There should be a very good reason for waiting that long to serve a Notice to Owner” As COVID 19 qualifies for exceptional circumstances, the delay in sending an NtO could be taken to the maximum period if necessary, although current information does not suggest that will be necessary and a period of three months may be more suitable.

When progressing PCN cases, it is highly recommended that authorities do what they can to employ flexibility towards taking payments to recognise that many people may be struggling financially. Suggestions include re-offering the discounted rate or extending the discount payment periods and providing an offer to put cases on hold to a specific date when the person indicates that they will be able to pay.

If your authority has not yet done so, you should consider suspending debt and warrant registrations to the Traffic Enforcement Centre. These are not so time critical.