On-street parking in residential areas

INTRODUCTION

Much of the housing built in urban areas prior to the 1970’s does not have adequate space for the parking of vehicles within the curtilage of the property. At the extreme many Victorian and pre-1940’s properties have no space at all.

The demand for parking, especially from residents living in properties where there was little demand for parking facilities when the housing accommodation was originally built, has begun to create problems on-street in some areas. This problem is further exacerbated when:

- a property is converted for multi-occupancy without any requisite increase in parking provision for those likely to require a parking space;
- the number of single occupancy households and multi-car owning households continues to increase the demand for on-street parking spaces in these areas;
- changes in lifestyle result in more cars being purchased; of which an increasing number (such as 4x4s and MPVs) are perceived to be larger than the standard family saloon car of a few years ago;
- front gardens are adapted for the accommodation of parked vehicles thereby reducing the length of kerbside available for parking.

The parking of vehicles connected to a resident’s employment also generates complaints when residents feel their view is restricted by vans etc. parked outside their residences.

In some narrow streets it is not unusual to see vehicles parked partly on the pavement. This then restricts the safe passage of pedestrians walking along narrow pavements especially those with sight disabilities or in charge of young children. It can also damage the surface of the footway and the services underneath.

There are often no secure parking spaces on-street for powered two wheelers (PTWs) where properties do not have parking for them on their curtilage. PTWs could help deal with the problem of on-street parking as up to 7 PTWs could be parked in a kerbside space occupied by one car. However PTW riders prefer to be able to see their machine from their residence, grouping is, therefore, not a preferred option. PTWs are often tethered to street furniture, potentially obstructing the footway.

A further problem is that as a street becomes congested with parked cars it is easier for vehicles to be abandoned unnoticed thereby restricting parking supply even more.

The time spent and environmental pollution created when searching for a vacant parking space is another effect of the limited on-street parking supply.

Part of the problem could well be caused by local authority planners often not giving due regard to the likely demand for parking spaces and where or how that demand would be accommodated. Planners have sometimes...
taken the view that remote communal parking is best for the streetscape. However drivers will invariably park as near as possible to their property – sometimes to the detriment of others.

Although residents generally have no entitlement to park outside their homes they still expect to be able to do so. Difficulties with parking close to one’s home can lead to disputes between neighbours. There is anecdotal evidence that there has been an increase in the number of disputes between neighbours relating to parking issues. A survey of AA members has found that 80% of respondents felt that parking is now more difficult than 5 years ago.

In accommodating this demand for parking spaces in some areas the situation has resulted in larger vehicles such as buses, commercial vehicles, emergency vehicles and refuse collection vehicles having difficulty in easily travelling unhindered along these roads. Whilst the slowing of traffic can increase road safety it can also inhibit the unhindered passage of buses thereby delaying their passengers or emergency vehicles attending an incident. Parked vehicles are also liable to damage to their protruding wing mirrors, etc.

To date many local authorities have regulated on-street parking by giving priority to residents through the issue of permits that enable them to park more easily near their home. The ratio of permits to spaces is 2:1 in Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and 1.25:1 in Westminster. This generally works well as many people are away at different times of the controlled hours. However there are often problems overnight and at weekends when all the residents return with their vehicles.

When issuing permits the local authority has the choice of either limiting the number of permits issued, and then deciding who should receive a permit, or issuing permits to every resident with a vehicle without guaranteeing a space. Residents often object because, having received and probably paid for a permit, they are not then able to fully benefit from it. The alternatives are often worse. In many cases residents prefer not to use their car for fear of losing their parking space, using taxis or public transport or cycling or walking instead. It has been reported that the number of vehicles per household in Putney and Chelsea in London has decreased in recent years. This decline has been attributed to the difficulty in finding an on-street location to park one’s vehicle.

When the needs of residents’ visitors, carers, trades people and delivery vehicles are all taken into account the demand for kerbside parking spaces far exceeds supply on an increasing number of residential roads.

The environmental impact and safety of an area can also be adversely affected by excessive on-street parking. If remedies are not developed soon there could ultimately be parking gridlock in some suburban areas where streets and properties are not designed for parked cars.

The provision of underground parking facilities is not seen as a viable option in addressing this problem due to the inordinately high costs involved. A study of the cost of providing underground parking facilities in the UK found that it would be more costly than in some European countries because in the UK underground services such as gas, water, electricity tend to be buried under the road surface rather than below pavements. Also the land required for an underground car park is usually owned by the property owners themselves thereby making land purchase onerous and costly.

Dealing with on-street parking in residential areas is clearly a situation that will get worse as the number of vehicles increase.

Action is required if communities are to maintain a pleasant and safe urban environment that is not overwhelmed by parked vehicles.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite the growing problem of on-street parking in residential areas predominantly those in areas of high density housing) actions will be required which are also capable of adoption in other areas. The following are, therefore, recommended:

- It should be acknowledged that the rising demand for residential on-street parking facilities is unlikely to ever be satisfied unless a range of different measures are introduced.
Local authorities issuing permits should review how to equitably distribute permits giving due regard to the need to provide parking facilities for those (e.g. carers, trades people, visitors, delivery vehicles etc.), wishing to visit/service residences in an area and enabling traffic to flow along a road unhindered by parked vehicles.

Local authorities should undertake annual reviews of the demand for parking in an area and adjust allocation of permits etc., accordingly.

Local and central government should encourage, through publicity, the perception that parking is a privilege in some areas not a right. This will be partly achieved by designating some areas as parking free or parking restricted residential areas.

Parking controls should be introduced to prevent commuters from parking in residential areas – one hour no parking restrictions during the middle part of the day have been successful in dealing with this problem.

Encourage the establishment of schemes whereby a group of residents can share cars rather than each own a car.

Restrict the conversion of front gardens to parking when there is no overall gain in parking spaces (when on-street parking is also taken into account).

Local authority planners should, when assessing planning applications, give due regard to Planning Policy Guidelines (PPGs), Section 106 Agreements etc., in dealing with the likely demand for parking spaces and deciding how that demand would be accommodated if at all.

To facilitate the unhindered passage of traffic along a road ensure that busy roads have a useable width of 7 metres, less busy routes 5 metres, minor road 4.5 metres, minor residential roads 3.5 metres. If necessary roads may need to be converted to one-way flows to facilitate minimal delay to public transport, HGVs such as refuse collection vehicles and emergency vehicles.

Local authorities should use their best endeavours to ensure that parking supply for a street is contained within that street. This will inevitably affect property values so will need to be introduced gradually. Emphasising the benefits of low kerbside occupancy in streets will be appreciated by some residents (both real and potential). Consultation with residents should be undertaken to secure buy-in of any proposals a Council may make.

Actively enforce parking regulations at parking hot spots in residential areas such as at/near shops and stations as a means of protecting the ambience of an area.

Improve facilities for cycling, walking and powered two wheelers in a locality, encourage more use of public transport (including demand responsive transport) and introduce schemes such as car clubs and car-free housing to discourage car ownership.

Provide more secure on-street parking for powered two wheelers.

Set the price of residents’ parking permits at such a level so as to encourage ownership of more environmentally friendly vehicles. The price of permits should also be linked to the type and, by implication, length of vehicle – this should also include powered two-wheelers – as a means of discouraging the parking of larger vehicles.

Encourage residents to use under-utilised off-street parking facilities covered

Deal with abandoned and/or unlicensed and/or uninsured vehicles more speedily. This could involve a nominal payment to motorists who take their vehicles to an appropriate disposal point.

Introduce more dynamic parking regulations to cope with the varying demands for parking space at different times of the day or days of the week. This could, however, lead to a proliferation of large visually obtrusive regulation plates at the kerbside which, research has shown, motorists have difficulty understanding.

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