

# Methods for Devising Parking Standards in New Developments

Research undertaken for DETR 1998-1999

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## Context

### *The research project*

Research into parking standards was commissioned by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in 1998 and carried out by Llewelyn-Davies with Steer Davies Gleave and the Metropolitan Transport Research Unit. Tim Pharoah was the project director. The project was concluded in August 1999.

### *Policy of reduced parking provision*

The Conservative Government in 1994 initiated a change of policy towards parking in new developments.

PPG13<sup>1</sup> outlined the new parking policy in these terms:

“4.4 The availability of parking has a major influence on the choice of means of transport....Car parking also takes up a large amount of space in developments and reduces densities. Car parking policies should support the overall locational policies in the development plan.

“4.5 Strategic policies on parking should be included in Regional Planning Guidance and structure plans to avoid the destructive potential for competitive provision of parking by neighbouring authorities. Standards in local plans should be set as a range of maximum and operational minimum amounts of parking for broad classes of development and location.”

PPG13 elaborated this policy further (in paragraphs 4.6 - 4.11), although the 1994 version contained no national maximum standards.

### *Failure of implementation*

The problem identified by DETR (through earlier research<sup>2</sup>) was that although a national policy framework for parking in new development had been set out from 1994 in Planning Policy Guidance (especially PPG 13, but also PPG1 and PPG6), implementation of this policy had in most areas not occurred. In

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<sup>1</sup> “*Planning Policy Guidance on Transport (PPG13): Transport*”, Departments of the Environment and Transport, March 1994.

<sup>2</sup> “*Planning Policy Guidance on Transport (PPG13): Implementation 1994-1996*”, Ove Arup & Partners and University of Reading, for DETR, 1997

essence the policy was to reduce parking provision as a means of encouraging more sustainable transport choices, reducing dependence on cars, and creating better quality developments.

Five main reasons for the lack of progress on the implementation of PPG13 parking policy were identified:

- 1 The main reason was that local authorities feared the loss of development opportunities in their areas if unilaterally they required parking provision at sub-demand levels. This was related to a set of fairly entrenched views within the development sector that parking provision to meet unrestrained demand is a pre-condition for the long term viability of property investments.
- 2 The timescale for the preparation of development plans meant that in some authorities revisions to meet policy guidance had not yet been adopted.
- 3 Local authorities were not always willing to follow the policy guidance, especially where this was seen as being in conflict with their economic development objectives. Planning officers attempting to implement reduced parking levels could not ensure the support of their elected members.
- 4 Local authorities were often unwilling to reduce off-street parking provision if that could lead to cars being parked on the street, thus reducing traffic flow or causing other nuisances.
- 5 There were perceived ambiguities in the guidance itself, and consequently frequent calls for more detailed guidance.

### *The research response*

The study was concerned with ways of getting the well-established parking policy implemented.

The study looked at measures that were needed at the national level, and the implications of these for regional and local authorities, and for others involved in the development process. It focused mainly on private-non-residential (PNR) parking in new developments. Other parking issues such as residential parking were included in the study, but were overshadowed by the importance of PNR. The key conclusions of the study focused on the means whereby national guidance could enable regional and local authorities to overcome these difficulties, and to implement PPG13 parking policy in an effective way.

### **Key findings**

#### **1. The consistency imperative**

The fundamental action necessary to ensure consistency between authorities was a nationally determined upper limit to the amount of parking allowed in new non-residential development. The study included discussion of the criteria that should be met by such a mechanism. Essentially it should provide a firm and consistent framework applying to all authorities, backed with mechanisms to ensure compliance. Local flexibility would be within sufficiently

narrow limits to not undermine the core purpose. This was seen as essential if the desired changes in travel choice and development practice were to be achieved.

There are many other aspects of parking policy, but this single point was seen as irreducible and inescapable. The nature of the limits themselves, their complexity or simplicity, the actual parking levels set, the manner of their application, the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing them, all could be open to further debate and refinement. But the need to close off the means whereby adopted policy policies could be undermined or avoided was seen as paramount.

Other conclusions of the study, dealing with the ways in which parking provision in new development could be determined, were only valuable within the context of a clear and consistent national framework of maximum parking levels. Exhortation of regional and local authorities to act unilaterally when specifying or negotiating levels of parking provision would leave the identified weaknesses in the implementation system largely intact.

## **2. A change of parking objectives**

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the original Town and Country Planning Act, the practice was established of applying standards for a minimum amount of parking to be provided within new developments. The idea was that the cars attracted to developments should be parked off the street so that the free flow of traffic would not be impeded. In meeting that objective the policy was very successful.

The objectives of parking policy had subsequently been widened to embrace broader issues of demand management, sustainable development, land conservation and social inclusion. As a consequence the “predict and provide off-street” approach whereby developers were required to provide for all generated parking demand, regardless of how much that might be, was now seen to be completely at odds with current transport and planning policy. To the extent that the old approach continued to be practised, as it was in many parts of the country, this was contrary to PPG13 and amounted to a serious failure in policy implementation.

The case for a more robust approach to lower levels of parking provision does not rest solely on the contribution to reducing dependence on the car. It must be seen within the wider context of promoting sustainable patterns of development, and fostering a renaissance in urban culture and lifestyles. In the long run, lower levels of parking provision will reduce car dependency, will contribute to traffic reduction, and will open up exciting opportunities for compact, efficient, attractive and socially inclusive patterns of urban development.

The change in the objectives has important implications. When parking standards were primarily to facilitate accessibility by car without impinging on surrounding areas, they could be determined mostly as a free-standing planning requirement. A more integrated approach means that parking

provision must be determined in relation to wider planning and transport considerations. These include:

- Accessibility by all modes;
- Mechanisms for influencing the choice of mode;
- The suitability of particular locations and developments and their access requirements; and
- The amount and characteristics of alternative parking within the walking catchment of the site.

The description of such desirable consequences has little resonance with the forms of development typically on offer over recent decades, such as large car-based shopping, leisure and employment facilities.

### **3. Local authority response to PPG13 parking policy**

Post PPG13, development plans were still being revised and adopted even in 1999, that continued with minimum parking standards. The Government therefore had an interest in the means whereby compliance of local plans with national guidance could be monitored and ensured.

Since the publication of PPG13, there had been a number of attempts by local authorities to amend parking standards, and the methods by which they are arrived at. These attempts had tended to include the need to define accessibility levels and their potential for reducing parking demand. The importance of the scale as well as the land use category of developments also was increasingly recognised. The study concluded that all of these aspects have important implications for the determination of parking provision.

The research highlighted other important factors that were less well represented in local authority revisions to parking policy:

- 1 First, local authorities introducing more restrictive parking standards had tended to focus on town and city centres, or on employment-related development. The strongest growth in road traffic, however, was occurring outside town centres and for non-work purposes. Reduced parking only in central locations would simply encourage the dispersal of development activity to non-central locations, precisely the opposite of what planning policy was attempting to achieve through the sequential test and other mechanisms.
- 2 Second, where maximum standards had been adopted, too often these simply involved changing the pre-existing standards from minima to maxima. As demonstrated in the research, this did not meet PPG13 policy requirements, and was unlikely to produce any change in travel behaviour.
- 3 Third, there had been little apparent attempt to shape development pressures so that they fit better with the aspirations of planning policy. Attempts to introduce more restrictive parking standards had so far paid little attention to the dynamics of the development process. The premise here was that reducing parking provision would cause friction and inefficiency if the type and location of development being proposed remained unchanged. A more pro-

active approach to influencing the type of schemes being brought forward by the development industry could help to smooth the adjustment to the new policy framework. This would be possible only if the parking policy supported and encouraged the right form of development in the right place.

- 4 There was some suggestion (though hard evidence was hard to come by) that developers were deliberately proposing large-scale developments in order to avoid being required to locate in town centres, and thus being allowed to provide higher levels of parking.

#### **4. Negotiated levels of parking provision**

The implementation of PPG13 (reduced) parking policy would require a number of fundamental changes in the way parking is dealt with in the planning system. To achieve the required results, parking in future would need to be part and parcel of a more integrated approach to accessibility, land use and transport planning.

The approach would place less emphasis on the concept of parking “standards” in new developments, and to require negotiated “levels of provision” up to and no higher than maxima to be set at the national level. In preparing their development and transport plans local authorities would interpret national and regional location policies. When considering development proposals, they would require developers to show how their proposals were consistent with this framework, especially in terms of attraction of trips by car, and the scale and type of development. The research report included a suggested sequence of steps that local authorities could undertake to meet this requirement.

The policy called for the definition of “maximum parking standards”. There was a danger, however, that these maxima would become the norm, and be treated as “target” levels to be requested with little attempt being made to achieve better results in terms of increased access by non-car modes and reduced parking demand. The researchers therefore suggested that the term “standard” be dropped in favour of “level”. Local authorities would request low levels of parking provision but negotiate upwards from this to no higher than the specified maximum.

Accessibility, either present or planned, would be the key to such negotiations. Ways of assessing accessibility and other planning factors were reviewed, and the conclusion was drawn that local authorities could fairly readily assess the spatial boundaries of different levels of activity without recourse to elaborate or costly studies. The study also established that accessibility could be mapped based on more objective measures using “off the peg” GIS systems that were becoming common amongst local authorities. This meant that accessibility could be incorporated as a planning factor within reasonable resource requirements, either in drawing up accessibility zones for inclusion in development plans or supplementary planning guidance, or for assessing larger individual development proposals.

#### **5. A new national parking limit**

The main requirement was for an upper limit of parking to be set at the national level for new non-residential development. To establish the departure from past practice, and to avoid the problem of development “migration”, it was judged that a level somewhere between 25% and 35% below current local authority standards of provision would be appropriate as a starting point.

Many of the people and organisations contacted during the study regarded such a reduction in parking as being a radical change. However, in terms of the study brief, the principal concern was that the suggested reduced level would be insufficient to make a noticeable impact on traffic generation at new developments. This concern arose from the fact that (as revealed in the research) usual local authority parking standards were resulting in substantial over-supply. Other factors, as explained in the report, also suggested that lower maxima would be required to make a significant impact on car travel choices.

The study also reviewed and made recommendations for residential and other forms of parking, and considered consequential changes to ensure the success of the policy.

### Summary of main conclusions

- 1 Parking provision in new developments should be an output of an **integrated process** of land use, transport and accessibility planning.
- 2 **Maximum levels of parking provision** set at the national level will ensure consistency between areas at the regional and local level.
- 3 Locally determined maximum levels of parking provision for individual types of development should be set at the local (and regional) level within the **prescribed national maximum level**.
- 4 Substantially reduced levels of parking associated with new developments would be needed to have any significant **impact on travel** choice other than the car.
- 5 Reductions in parking can be related to **accessibility** by non-car means. Accessibility of particular sites, or whole areas, could be assessed using GIS-based accessibility measures. These could assess the **relative accessibility** by car and non-car modes, and be weighted according to population.
- 6 The **potential** for access by non-car modes does not necessarily equate with actual mode choice. **Fiscal and other measures** would be needed in addition to infrastructure measures to achieve the desired travel outcomes.
- 7 To **discourage migration** of development to areas offering less choice of access mode (and hence more dependence on car

access), variations in parking maxima between areas and authorities would have to be confined to a relatively narrow range.

- 8 **Negotiating practice** in development control would need to be radically changed, whereby local authorities negotiate non-operational parking with the developer upwards from the operational requirement.
- 9 Developers should be required to show how users would access their schemes (an **access profile**, part of a Transport Assessment in major schemes) and to demonstrate how basic accessibility and location criteria were to be met. This requirement could be waived for smaller developments, say less than 500 square metres of gross floor area.
- 10 A **step-by-step approach** for local authorities to follow in determining the parking provision to be allowed in new developments was provided.
- 11 Planning guidance could emphasise the **benefits of shared and public parking** in meeting the parking demand resulting from non-residential developments, especially in town and city centres.
- 12 Planning guidance could emphasise the benefits of a case-by-case assessment of **residential developments** to achieve parking provision that is sensitive to location and housing type.
- 13 **Developer contributions** could be related to securing adequate accessibility in line with local development and transport plans, rather than simply in lieu of parking provision. These could be based on one or more of the following: the development accessibility profile; accessibility of the site or area, specific schemes designed to facilitate this accessibility; and standard rates for wider packages of schemes specified in Local Transport Plans, including public transport Quality Partnerships and Contracts.
- 14 The potential for major upgrading of public transport and other non-car transport to bring **less accessible sites** into use should be the subject of further consideration. This would include planned extensions to existing large-scale car-based developments such as regional out-of-town shopping centres.
- 15 In view of the pressure for **consistency** of approach, close monitoring by the DETR and Regional Offices would be required to ensure local authority compliance with policy.
- 16 **Incentives** for local authority compliance should be provided through the allocation of transport grants and credit approvals. Conversely non-compliance should lead to withholding of such

financial assistance.

- 17 Consideration could be given to the establishment of short-term “mentor” facilities (perhaps regionally based) to kick-start **expertise** in delivering the new approach. Such a service should be made available to both public and private sectors.
- 18 In view of the importance of scale in determining mode split, consideration should be given to measures to encourage developers to alter their portfolios in favour of **small-scale developments** to serve local catchments. These could include planning or fiscal measures.
- 19 Migration of some types of development to other countries with less restrictive parking policies could be a possibility (for example footloose global commercial and industrial activities). The **relevance of parking provision** compared to other factors in such trends would need to be established through more specific research.
- 20 Some consultation responses suggested that there should be a transition period or phased implementation of lower parking provision. This was not thought to be appropriate, however, as both would be likely to tempt and prolong the **destructive competitive behaviour** which national policy was seeking to avoid.
- 21 There was evidence of considerable **support for national maximum levels of parking** in both the public and private sectors. Most players indicated a willingness to adhere to the new rules, but only if the playing field was level.
- 22 The term “parking standards” should be replaced by “**levels of parking provision**”. It should be made clear to local planning authorities that parking levels should wherever possible be negotiated below the maximum level.
- 23 The study uncovered no distinct or robust method for objectively assessing operational parking requirements. It was concluded that there was **no case for an “operational minimum standard”** of such provision, as stated in the original PPG13 (1994).
- 24 Separation of operational and non-operational parking would **simplify negotiations** between local authorities and developers on overall levels of provision.