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Town Planning and the New Local Transport Plans

“PLANNING FOR LESS PARKING – IMPLEMENTING PPG13”

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This paper provides a summary of points raised by the presentation on the implementation of PPG13 parking policy.

1. Private non-residential parking (PNR): an idea whose time has gone

PNR is only part of the parking equation. It should be planned in relation to other types of parking both on and off-street. This currently is rarely done. PNR is seen largely as a separate matter as part of development control decisions rather than as a component of transport planning.

This is explained by the post-war view that developers should take responsibility for accommodating all car parking demands cater off the street. From 1947 until now, the principle has been (in most situations) “predict and provide” all parking within the site.

In town and city centres the on-site requirement is often dropped (and impractical), but overall “demand level” provision is often maintained.

Traffic forecasts have forced the abandonment of “predict and provide” in relation to roads, so it makes little sense to continue the practice in relation to parking.

2. A change of policy

PPG13 Transport set out new policies for parking, including:

- maximum standards of provision rather than the traditional minimum
- reduced levels of provision
- parking generally kept to the “operational minimum”

After five years, little progress has been made. Why?

There are a number of reasons including:

- confusion as to what the guidance means (e.g. what is “operational” parking)
- inertia in revising development plans
- lack of influence over public transport alternatives
- concern about parking diverted on to the street
- loss of “commuted payments”

The main reason, however, is that local authorities will not act unilaterally to reduce parking in new developments for fear of losing developments to competing authorities or regions. This is especially true amongst local authorities that are having difficulty in attracting new development. PPG13 calls for a consistent approach, but for the same reason this will not materialise without a strong Government lead.

3. Sub-demand provision is necessary

Getting people to use cars less and the alternatives more depends on increasing the deterrents to driving. While there are several ways of doing this, the most efficient and readily available is reducing the availability of car parking.

Put another way, if parking is provided, especially if it is free or cheap to the user, people will not choose alternative modes, however good they are. For most people, for most journeys, the car is the mode of first resort.

PNR provision is fuelling traffic growth. Currently 4 out of 10 trips are made by people driving cars. In new developments, parking provision typically caters for twice that proportion. Every development that has a level of parking provision above 40% of potential demand increases the proportion of trips made by car.

Research undertaken by Llewelyn-Davies into developments undertaken within the last decade has found that parking provision is often well in excess of peak demand. Particularly in retail and leisure developments, peak demand is rarely or never more than two thirds of the parking capacity at many sites.

4. How can PNR parking be reduced?

If parking is to be provided below the level of "unfettered demand", as required in PPG13, important impacts have to be dealt with:

- Access to developments by non-car modes must be assessed and provided for
- Problems created by parking diverted on to the street (or elsewhere) must be avoided
- Developments themselves must be located and designed to function without dependence on cars
- Transport facilities must be planned (and funded) to cater for non-car travel

It can be seen immediately that in these circumstances PNR can no longer be treated as a stand-alone development control matter. It must be considered as part of the wider land use and transport planning process.

Local authorities are currently poorly equipped to deal with this degree of integration, but the 1998 White Paper, draft guidance on the new Local Transport Plans and Transport (not traffic impact) Assessments should prompt improvements.

5. How much can/should PNR parking levels be reduced?

It makes sense to require bigger reductions in the locations best served by non-car modes. But this can have the perverse effect of encouraging developers out of town.

It is necessary, therefore, for the range of permitted parking to be small.

It also makes sense for the size of reductions (per 1000 square metres of floorspace) to increase with the scale of development. Larger developments have larger catchments, which invariably means that lower proportions of people can access them by alternative modes.

Since it makes no sense to plan car-based developments without sufficient car parking for them to function, the clear message is that there must be changes in the "development products" being brought forward. This is already happening in the retail industry. It needs now to be followed in leisure, employment, education, health and other schemes.

6. Dynamic transport and land use planning

What happens where development sites have poor accessibility, but are needed for non-residential schemes?

Application of the sequential test (as in PPG6) or other policies for ensuring development goes to preferred (accessible) locations is only effective up to a point. Eventually, sites will dry up and less accessible sites will have to be brought into use.

Two things can happen, either the development product should change (usually smaller scale schemes serving more local catchments), or accessibility by non-car modes should be brought up to the required standard before development is allowed. This may not always mean investment in infrastructure – Green Travel Plans can also be implemented to deliver a lower car share of travel.

More likely will be the need for a combination of the two approaches – truly integrated transport and land use planning.

7. Conclusions

- There must be a national maximum level of permitted parking.
- This maximum must be significantly below current minimum levels, and below the level that reflects unrestrained demand.
- The range of parking allowed in different locations should be small.
- Rates of provision should be tapered to favour smaller scale developments.
- Development products must be changed, especially scale and location, and local authorities should be more pro-active in getting this change.
- Developers must take responsibility for the **access** they require not just the **cars** they require to serve their schemes.
- Funding mechanisms must be devised that relate transport payments (e.g. within s106 agreements) to overall access requirements.