

WATFORD LOCAL PLAN PART 2

Review of Car Parking Policy and Standards

Evidence Base

February 2012

1.0 **Background**

- 1.1 The Watford District Plan 2000 contains various policies relating to the provision of on-site car parking for all new developments within the Borough. This provision is based upon maximum, demand based car parking standards, in accordance with PPG3 and PPG13 current at the time of adoption. These maximum standards for different types of use were based upon the County-wide maximum standards produced by Hertfordshire County Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance to support Policy 25 of the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2001.
- 1.2 In addition, the Borough is divided into four Car and Cycle Parking Zones which allow further restraint on the level of parking provided within the maximum standard. The location and extent of these zones is based upon various parameters including public transport accessibility, pedestrian and cycle routes, proximity to shopping and retail facilities and the economic health of Watford.
- 1.3 For new residential development, the maximum provision is determined by the Car and Cycle Parking Zone within which the site is located. No minimum standard is given but car-free residential development is acceptable in principle in highly sustainable locations and where adequate on-street parking controls and measures to control displaced parking exist.
- 1.4 For non-residential development, the Car and Cycle Parking Zones allow a range of parking provision within the maximum standard. A minimum provision is required for operational purposes. The range of parking provision permitted for any given development is determined by the Car and Cycle Parking Zone within which the site is located. The greatest restraint is provided in the most accessible locations (0-25%) and the least restraint in the least accessible locations (75-100%).
- 1.5 On-street parking constraints in the Borough include single and double yellow line restrictions, full controlled parking zones (operating Monday-Saturday, 8.00am to 6.30pm) and matchday controlled parking zones (operating for limited periods when there is a football or rugby match at Vicarage Road Stadium). The extent of the controlled parking zones has increased significantly since they were first introduced in 1997 and now cover most of Central and Vicarage wards and parts of

Holywell and Nascot wards around Watford Junction, the town centre and Vicarage Road Stadium.

2.0 Recent research

Research into the Use and Effectiveness of Maximum Parking Standards, Department of Transport (June 2008)

2.1 This study was undertaken by Atkins to review the existing research relating to the maximum standards for non-residential car parking, as set out in PPG13, and investigate the effects of these parking standards on traffic levels and economic development.

2.2 Some of the findings of this study are:

- Restricting parking numbers leads to a reduction in demand. There is a clear link between parking availability and car use.
- Parking is the most effective demand management tool, more so than public transport fare reductions.
- Travel Plans linked with restrictive parking policy can achieve significant modal shift.
- Restrictive parking policy and maximum parking standards operated over a long period of time have had no negative effect upon economic development and inward investment.

2.3 The study concludes that there is strong evidence to retain maximum car parking standards for non-residential uses as set out in PPG13, particularly in urban areas.

Hertfordshire County Travel Survey, Hertfordshire County Council (December 2009)

2.4 This was the fourth County Travel Survey to be undertaken by the County Council. A total of 1652 survey questionnaires were distributed within the urban area of Watford with 284 returned, a response rate of 17.2%. This included data relating to car ownership by households which indicated (albeit from a small sample) an increase in car ownership within Watford since the Census 2001. This was reflected in a reduction in the number of households with no car and a corresponding increase in the number of households with 1 car. The number of households with 2 or more cars remained essentially unchanged.

Number of cars	Census 2001	HCC 2009
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per household		
0	21%	14%
1	45%	52%
2	27%	27%
3	5%	4%
4+	2%	2%

3.0 Experience from practical application

- 3.1 The Council has consistently applied the maximum, demand based car parking standards and the additional restraints of the Car and Cycle Parking Zones to new developments across the Borough since the adoption of the Watford District Plan 2000 in December 2003. This experience has highlighted several issues (positive and negative) with the application of the car parking policies and the parking standards.
- 3.2 The application of maximum parking standards and car parking restraint using the Car and Cycle Parking Zones to non-residential development is considered by officers to have been very successful. Developers have rarely sought to provide more than the maximum permitted provision (due to land take and/or additional construction costs) but have welcomed the minimum provision for essential staff and to aid marketing.
- 3.3 The restraint on parking provision for non-residential development has also provided a robust justification for seeking travel plans to encourage sustainable, non-car modes of travel and financial contributions towards improving these modes of travel.
- 3.4 There are, however, many inconsistencies in the Car and Cycle Parking Zones map (Appendix 2, Map 7), particularly in Zones 3 and 4. Zone 1, the most accessible, is centred on the town centre and is surrounded by Zone 2, the next most accessible. However, there is no consistent or logical pattern to the distribution of Zones 3 and 4. For example, there are areas within Zone 3 at the northern extremity of the Borough, due to the proximity of a local shopping parade, whilst the Metropolitan Line Station, which is also within walking distance of the town centre, is in Zone 4.
- 3.5 The purpose of the Car and Cycle Parking Zones is to restrain parking provision and thereby reduce car-based commuter travel and encourage the use of non-car, sustainable modes of travel. It would therefore make most sense to base any restraint on parking provision purely on the proximity to sustainable modes of travel and, in particular, proximity to rail stations and bus routes with frequent services serving a range of destinations. Parameters such as the economic health of the town and proximity to shopping facilities are not considered to be

significant factors in influencing travel choice. A new Accessibility Map is therefore proposed that divides the borough into different accessibility zones (3 are proposed) based upon proximity to rail stations and main bus routes.

3.6 The proposed accessibility zones are:

- i) **Zone 1** – within 200m of a bus stop on a main bus route or 400m of a railway station.
- ii) **Zone 2** – within 400m of a bus stop on a main bus route or 800m of a railway station.
- iii) **Zone 3** – more than 400m from a bus stop on a main bus route and more than 800m from a railway station.

A main bus route is a route that is served by at least 4 different services with a frequency of at least 6 buses an hour in peak time and 4 buses an hour at other times, Monday to Friday.

3.7 The proposed parking restraint (Parking Restraint Factor) for each zone is:

	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3
Parking Restraint Factor	0-25%	25-65%	65-100%

3.8 The minimum provision will ensure the operational needs of the proposed use and the needs of people with disabilities are met on site. The maximum provision will act as a restraint on commuter travel by private car and encourage the use of non-car modes of travel.

3.9 The application of car parking standards to residential development is the most extensive and widespread of all and that which raises most objections to planning applications. It is therefore important to get the level of on-site provision right in order to meet the needs of future residents whilst not giving rise to overspill parking on surrounding roads. The operation of maximum standards can potentially lead to an under-provision of on-site spaces and, in the absence of on-street controls, increased parking on surrounding roads.

3.10 Within the full controlled parking zones, overspill parking on the roads surrounding a development site can largely be prevented by excluding the development from the controlled parking zone. This is secured by a variation to the Traffic Regulation Order (the costs of which are met by

the developer through a payment secured via a planning obligation) and means the future residents of the development will not be entitled to permits to park in the on-street parking bays. It has been a matter of unwritten policy that all new residential developments located within a controlled parking zone are excluded from the zone.

- 3.11 It has also been generally accepted by officers and members that the combination of maximum parking standards and the operation of the full controlled parking zones can provide an effective deterrent to car ownership (as opposed to car use). This has been the basis on which car-free developments have been approved by the Council within the controlled parking zones. Outside of the full controlled parking zones, where no effective measures exist to prevent overspill on-street parking, parking provision towards the maximum standard has been sought.
- 3.12 The Car and Cycle Parking Zones do not apply to residential developments in the same way as to non-residential developments and this has been a source of some confusion for developers, residents and members. The purpose of the Car and Cycle Parking Zones is to restrain the provision of car parking for commuters (based upon accessibility) and thereby reduce car based commuter travel and congestion and encourage non-car modes of travel. In respect of residential development, the only aim of parking restraint can be to reduce car ownership. This is a much more complex sociological factor to seek to control and is generally considered not to have been successful. This view has been supported by recent empirical evidence (see below).
- 3.13 It is therefore proposed that a new accessibility map is produced for the application of car parking standards for residential development only. This should be based on the controlled parking zones and have only two zones:
- i) **Zone A** – to include the full controlled parking zones where maximum car parking standards will apply and car-free development will be acceptable in principle. All new development will be excluded from the controlled parking zones.
 - ii) **Zone B** – to include all other parts of the Borough where a minimum car parking standard will apply. This will minimise the potential for overspill, on-street parking.

4.0 Non-residential car parking standards

- 4.1 The research study undertaken by Atkins on behalf of the Department of Transport concluded that there was strong evidence to retain maximum car parking standards for non-residential uses, particularly in urban areas. In light of these findings, it is proposed to retain the

maximum car parking standards as set out in Appendix 2 of the Watford District Plan 2000, subject to certain amendments.

4.2 The proposed amendments are principally for purposes of clarity:

- Removal of parking standards for uses that are unlikely to be the subject of applications in Watford (i.e. golf course).
- Removal of parking standards for 'one-off' uses where parking provision would be negotiated on the merits of the application (i.e. hospital, college, ice-rink).
- Simplified parking standards where the existing standards are unduly complicated to apply (i.e. hotel).
- New parking standard introduced for Class A1 use <500m² where no standard existed.
- Clarification of the parking standard for Class B1(b) use, considered to have characteristics more similar to B1(a) than B1(c).

4.3 The amended parking standards are contained in Appendix 1.

5.0 Residential car parking standards

Watford Residential Car Parking Survey

5.1 The significance of the increase in car ownership from the *Hertfordshire County Travel Survey* was that it occurred during a period when the Council was operating maximum parking standards for new development. However, the survey questionnaires would have been distributed across all types and ages of dwellings and not just dwellings built during this period. In order to explore this further, the Council undertook its own limited survey of more recent residential developments. This would enable the Council to determine whether the operation of maximum car parking standards had led to a reduction in car ownership.

5.2 The survey was undertaken in January 2012. A total of 1599 questionnaires were delivered to selected developments completed within the past 15 years, with 460 delivered to houses and 1139 delivered to flats. By 13th February, 402 questionnaires had been returned giving a response rate of 25.1% (Table 1).

Table 1: Response rate

	Forms delivered		Forms returned	
Houses	460	28.8%	167	36.3%
Flats	1139	71.2%	235	20.6%
Total	1599	100%	402	25.1%

- 5.3 A list of the developments selected for the survey is contained in Appendix 2 and a copy of the questionnaire in Appendix 3.
- 5.4 A summary of the survey results is given in Appendix 4. Of particular relevance are the overall car ownership figures by household when compared with the Census 2001 and the County Council's travel survey (Table 2).

Table 2: Car ownership by household

Cars owned	Census 2001	HCC 2009	WBC 2012	
0	21%	14%	6%	24
1	45%	52%	54%	216
2	27%	27%	36%	144
3	5%	4%	3%	14
4+	2%	2%	1%	4

- 5.5 The increase in households with 2 cars and the decline in households with no car is significant as this has occurred during a period when the Council has been operating maximum parking standards and parking restraint policies, in accordance with national policy advice. This evidence, albeit from a small sample, indicates that the operation of maximum parking standards and parking restraint policies for residential development is not having any significant impact on car ownership levels, which are increasing despite these policies. The operation of maximum parking standards therefore needs to be reviewed in light of this evidence.
- 5.6 The figures for car ownership by household type and number of bedrooms give a good indication of the level of parking that needs to be provided (excluding any visitor provision) in order to avoid uncontrolled parking within a development or overspill parking by residents on to surrounding roads. These are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Car ownership by dwelling type

	Flat	House
Average car ownership	1.17	1.72

Table 4: Car ownership by number of bedrooms

	Number of bedrooms			
	1	2	3	4+
Average car ownership	0.98	1.26	1.68	1.88
	1.17		1.79	
	1.40			

- 5.7 Based on this evidence, it is proposed that the car parking standards for Zones A and B (see paragraph 2.13 above) should be as shown in Table 5:

Market and affordable dwellings	Zone A (maximum)	Zone B (minimum)
1 & 2 bed	1.25	1.25
3 & 4 bed	2.25	2.25

- 5.8 The provision of 0.25 space per unit is intended to be an unallocated provision for visitors although in the case of 2 bed units, will also provide additional parking for the higher levels of car ownership compared with 1 bed units. Unsolicited comments from the questionnaires reveal that the lack or shortage of visitor parking on new developments can be a significant issue for residents (see Appendix 5).
- 5.9 It is also proposed that the same ratio of parking provision should be made for general market and affordable dwellings, particularly within Zone A where reduced parking provision below the maximum standard may be provided, unless otherwise agreed with a selected affordable housing provider. Representations made by members of the HARI (Housing and Regeneration Initiative) partnership to the Council's Housing Strategy, Development and Implementation Group have expressed concern that social tenants often feel like second class citizens or feel disadvantaged in developments where the affordable housing units have no or only limited parking provision compared with general market units.
- 5.10 The survey results for Question 7 (use of parking spaces) and Questions 10 and 11 (use of garages) were very informative. They revealed a very high usage of parking spaces (93.6%) but a low usage of garages (37.4%). Whilst it is very difficult to prevent the use of garages for storage (in some cases the reason given for this was that there was no need to use the garage for parking as adequate parking space existed on the driveway), a significant proportion (35.9%) of respondents stated the reason was due to the garage being too small. In order to ensure all garages (and parking spaces) are of adequate size to be useable for parking, minimum dimensions are proposed.

5.11 All external and integral garages should have minimum internal dimensions of 3m wide by 5.5m long with a minimum area 7m deep in front of the garage to allow for manoeuvring in and out of the garage. All parking spaces should have minimum dimensions of 2.4m wide by 4.8m long with a minimum area 6m deep in front of the space to allow for manoeuvring in and out of the space. Any garages or parking spaces that do not meet these minimum dimensions should not be considered acceptable as parking accommodation.