

Windermere Town Council



A review of parking problems in Windermere and Bownessin 2017

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Outline

It is generally recognised that Windermere and Bowness is a significant part of the Lake District National Park in Cumbria. As such it is one of the most important destinations for the majority of visitors to the Lakes. The town represents the beauty and splendour of the Lake District in all its glory. It has historical buildings, quaint shopping areas, welcoming cafes and bars, beautiful scenery and walks and of course the largest natural lake in the country on its doorstep - Windermere Lake.

Recently the Lake District was awarded World Heritage Status. The effort put into obtaining this accolade was considerable. Windermere and Bowness rely on tourism to prosper and an increase in visitor numbers is anticipated. The attractiveness of the town, its heritage, distinctiveness and appearance are its assets. These must be cared for if the true benefits of this accolade are to be realised.

Even now during busy periods, severe congestion and visitors' inability to find parking spaces causes distress to the visitors and causes problems for residents and local businesses. Increasing traffic volumes during peak season could result in a gridlock as the streets of Windermere and Bowness become choked with cars and coaches searching for parking spaces.

Residential streets are increasingly being used as free car parks. Vehicles are parked illegally on yellow lines, parked on pavements and residents only parking bays are ignored. Over-staying in timed parking zones is frequent with vehicles often left for hours blocking access to the shops for others. Car parks appear full and some roads are made so narrow by parking abuse that emergency vehicles cannot get through. Tourists often cannot find somewhere to park in the town. Local businesses suffer with lack of access because of parked vehicles and residents returning from work cannot park near their homes.

Importantly the attractiveness of the town to both residents and tourists is being seriously eroded, a factor likely to impact on our economic sustainability and growth.

A study carried out in 2007 by Cumbria Tourism showed that Windermere was ranked as the 4th worst town for repeat visits out of 13 Cumbrian towns surveyed. Of those tourists asked, a third were not likely to come again. Out of 17 specific weaknesses quoted for the town, apart from the weather, parking and traffic were the top reasons quoted that spoilt their visit, and that was ten years ago. There has been no improvement in this situation during the intervening years.



Many now believe the town is in real danger of turning from a picturesque historic attraction and a wonderful place to live, into a suburban car park with continuous rows of parked vehicles littering the streets.

Traffic congestion and parking problems could seriously impact on the future of the entire tourist industry for Windermere and Bowness. As visitors find entry into the town blocked by queues and realise that the chances of easily finding suitable parking are remote, their perception of Windermere and Bowness as a valued holiday destination will diminish rapidly. The current difficulties will get worse unless action is taken over the next few years to alleviate the problems for tourists, residents and local businesses.

The problems of parking in the town are many and varied and include:

- A destruction of the overall historic appearance of the conservation areas in town.
- Parked vehicles spoil the appeal of the environment for tourists and residents.
- Obstruction of pedestrian pathways and pavements especially for the disabled.
- Parking charges are perceived as too expensive for residents to use for shopping.
- Little or no enforcement of on-street parking time restrictions reduces shop access.
- Residents often have nowhere to park outside their own homes.
- Car parks are often full in peak holiday periods with overflow onto residential streets.
- Some town car parks are very poorly signed reducing use.
- There is no indication of spaces available in car parks.
- Access to residential and business driveways are often blocked
- Emergency vehicle or utility vehicle access can be blocked or seriously hampered.
- Many employers and local businesses do not, or cannot, provide parking for workers.
- Parking in local car parks is perceived as expensive for workers in the town
- Overflow parking onto residential roads often causes severe problems for residents.
- Coaches often park in inappropriate areas causing blockage or nuisance.
- There are not enough taxi ranks so taxis often park unsociably.
- Delivery vehicles have few areas to park or load/unload easily.
- Very few locations exist to park motorcycles or bicycles in the towns. .
- Motorhomes have nowhere to park overnight so often use residential areas.

In view of the above Windermere Town Council decided to instigate a parking review and appointed a sub-group of Councillors to carry this out. A full report of over 140 pages has been produced of which this is a brief summary.

Several aims and objectives were identified

Reduce tourists' perception of a town clogged with traffic, on-street parked cars and no parking spaces available.

Improve and enhance the appearance of the town to all residents by reducing traffic congestion and enabling pop and shop access.

Provide inexpensive flexible parking for residents to access town.

Provide inexpensive flexible day parking for workers.

Provide reasonably priced and flexible parking for B&B and hotel users.

Provide easy to find town centre parking for tourists.

Reduce traffic entry into the town by providing park and ride facilities.

Return the town to its former attractive and historic character enhancing social wellbeing and a feeling of community by introducing workable parking restrictions and enforcement.

Considerably increase the prosperity and appeal of the town by providing adequate and appropriate off-street car parking for all.

In order to examine ways to achieve these objectives, a review of previous studies and statistics on parking in the town was carried out. In addition, several new surveys were performed and models constructed to try and estimate present and future parking requirements. The social and economic impacts of providing more car parks were examined as well as the operation, charging regimes and overall acceptability for residents, workers, businesses and tourists.

Ward Surveys

A survey was carried out in June 2017 of the worst parking problems in each Council Ward. This showed there were about 50 streets where action was needed to reduce parking problems. These were ranked 1-10 where 10 was critical. A list of all the streets identified with problems and possible solutions can be found in the main report. Conclusions from the Ward surveys suggested the following...

- a) There is a wide variety of different parking restrictions throughout the town each of which is tailored to cope with a specific problem.
- b) Resident only and yellow line parking restrictions show no specific pattern of implementation around the centre of the town.
- c) Where on-street parking is permitted with restrictions these often fail to show consistency.
- d) Lack of enforcement of existing rules is one of the most common causes of parking abuse in the town.
- e) Several roads have parking on both sides of the carriageway causing problems of access.
- f) There appears to be significant abuse of time restricted parking.
- g) Parking on pavements is common and often causes serious obstructions especially for wheelchair or pushchair users.
- h) Coach parking in the town is causing difficulty and inconvenience.
- i) Parking specifically for motorcycles and bicycles is limited.
- j) Loading and unloading of vehicles often takes place during the day leading to congestion.
- k) Parking in resident only areas is often abused by non-permit holders.

- l) In Windermere town, whilst the only car park had spaces, the surrounding roads were full of on-street parked cars
- m) Signage to car parks is often very poor, especially in Windermere.

Existing car park use

A detailed survey was carried out for a full week in August (peak season) and a second week in October (mid season) of existing car parks to determine how full they were. Results showed the following...

- a) It is evident from the August survey reported here, that almost all of the car parks have plenty of spaces available before 10.30am and after 4:00 pm on virtually every day of the week surveyed. This allows residents to shop and workers arriving early to park. The car parks fill up gradually during the morning and appear to peak in use in the early afternoon, before use drops off again.
- b) However it also appears that over lunch time from about 11.00am-3.00pm the Bowness town car parks are completely full on almost every day of the week during high season. They are also often full or reaching their practical capacity on most days during mid season (Oct). This makes it very difficult for tourists to park and spend money in the town during these periods.
- c) The Bowness "out of town" car park, Braithwaite Fold, is obviously being used as a second choice "overflow" car park by tourists when there is nowhere else to park.
- d) When Bowness town car parks were full, Windermere town car park (Broad Street) always had empty spaces, suggesting Windermere is being by-passed.
- e) In Windermere whilst Broad Street car park had spaces, on street parking spaces were full, suggesting that the Broad Street car park goes unnoticed by tourists.
- f) The Windermere out of town car park at Rayrigg Meadow was hardly used at all.
- g) Signage to all car parks needs improvement. In particular Broad Street is badly signed. The introduction of "Empty spaces" electronic signs should be considered.

Estimates of Traffic Volumes

Knowing the number of cars that require parking is essential. Equally if the car parks become full, knowing the number of tourists entering the town by car and being unable to park could indicate how much revenue the town may be losing by failing to provide adequate car parks. To determine this estimates were made based on tourism figures and Department for Transport traffic counts. These showed that of all the tourists entering the Lake District National Park in a single day during the peak holiday season an estimated 44% drive into or through Windermere and Bowness.

This represents around 15,000 tourists' cars coming into Windermere and Bowness in a single day carrying over 32,000 tourists.

Existing Parking facilities in the town

The report next attempted to estimate the total number of parking spaces that currently exist, to gauge if it could cope with the number of cars entering the town. The results showed...

Council & LDNPA run car park spaces	1,239
On-street town centre car parking spaces	206
Total	1,439

In addition there are a series of private car parks throughout the town in hotels, pubs, B&B's, attractions etc. which have been estimated to add a further 1,115 spaces for parking by tourists entering the town. Please note: Parking spaces well beyond the town centre, used primarily by residents, are not being included.

Total parking spaces	<u>2,560</u>
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Most of the tourists' cars arrive after 10.00am and leave before 4.00pm, this gives a 6 hour parking period. They park on average for 2 hours which gives a total of around 7,500 parking slots a day for the 15,000 cars that come to the Town. This means 7,500 tourist cars have nowhere to park when they arrive. This ignores spaces already occupied by residents and workers which makes this figure even higher.

Town centre car parks and potential economic gain

Accepting 7,500 tourists' cars a day cannot park and therefore pass through or ignore Windermere and Bowness, then what is the potential loss of revenue to the town. Tourist spend in the town centres will only occur if existing town centre car parks can be expanded or tourists are "brought" into the town centres by other means. A town centre car park is defined as one within 400m of the centre of the town eg: Broad Street, Quarry Mount, Rayrigg Road and Glebe Road.

In the report projections based on survey figures showed that expanding the existing town centre car parks by 263 spaces could have a significant beneficial effect. It could reduce congestion and add almost £1.5m to the annual income of the town.

A Park and Ride outside of Windermere and Bowness

The introduction of a large "Park and Ride" facility on the A591 before you reach Windermere would provide tourists with easy parking and have the added advantage of offering bus or bike ride transport

directly into the centre of Windermere (Ellerthwaite Square) and then on down to Bowness (Quarry Rigg) then the Glebe and back. As well as concluding it was the only sensible way to alleviate the parking and congestion problems the report examined the economic viability of such a venture. It concluded that the total economic benefit to the area could be in excess of £6m per year. It will also provide tourists with a known parking area they can access from which to explore the Lakes by bike or bus. It will make the tourist experience more attractive with considerably less time spent in traffic queues searching for a parking space.

Recommendations and required Actions

Overall the report identified the following required actions for implementation: Several of these were also recommended in the 2007 SLDT survey ^[1] but have not been implemented.

Improve enforcement

Enforce existing parking restrictions. At present enforcement is only occasional. More effort needs to be devoted to this area in both on and off-street parking to ensure traffic flow, reduce congestion and remove unsightly parked vehicles. **Action CCC / SLDC / WTC**

Improve signage

Improve car park signage so that drivers are made aware of the location of a car park before they pass it. Use electronic signs to show how many spaces are available and where they are on entry into the town. **Action CCC Highways / SLDC**

Introduce on street parking controls

Introduce controls to solve the problems of parking in the 50 individual streets identified in the Ward street surveys detailed in the report. This will require the introduction of yellow lines, both double and single, as well as the restriction of many areas to resident only parking and time limited parking.

Action CCC Highways

Improve coach parking and drop-off points

Coach parking is now a severe problem in the town. Set up coach drop off and pick up points in Ellerthwaite Square, Quarry Rigg and the Glebe promenade. Also provide managed coach parking in Rayrigg Meadow, Braithwaite Fold or Ferry Nab car parks. **Action CCC Highways and SLDC.**

Introduce disc parking

Introduce a disc parking system for areas of time-limited on-street parking in Windermere and Bowness town centres. Disc parking is cheap and simple to introduce and makes parking

enforcement much easier and cost effective as a warden is provided with the 'arrival time' by the disc. This will dramatically improve access to the shops for locals. **Action CCC Highways.**

Reduce car park charges for residents and workers

Car park charging for residents and workers should be significantly lower than the standard charges for tourists. Cumbria has amongst the highest Council Tax and lowest average income in the country.

Action SLDC

Cheap out of town car parks

Make peripheral car parks cheaper during off season (Nov-March) as most of the year they are hardly used. Both Braithwaite Fold and Rayrigg Meadow should be £0.50 per hour or £2.50 per day during the off peak season. **Action SLDC**

Hourly parking for residents:

Residents' hourly parking should be available for car parks at defined quieter times in the mornings and afternoons for £1.00 per hour. For example, 9.00-11.00am and 3.00-6.00pm. This would increase car park use early in the morning and late in the afternoon increasing access to local shops.

Action SLDC.

Early bird and daily parking units for workers

Workers arriving before 8.30am should be able to park in car parks for £1.00 per day and should be able to buy "early bird" cards or phone units with day parking-units of say 10, 20, 30 etc units at a time. **Action SLDC.**

Free overnight parking between 6pm and 9am

Overnight parking in all Windermere and Bowness car parks should be free after 6pm (NOT 8.00pm) to assist tourists staying overnight in B&Bs etc. **Action SLDC**

Use technology to introduce parking flexibility

Use of mobile phone technology to allow specific categories of users, such as residents and workers in the town, to purchase parking "Units". Each unit would have a defined cost and could be purchased on line to allow qualified residents and workers in the town to access the car parks at discounted rates. The use of such "Units" should be flexible and the number needed for a specific period be determined by the time arriving in the car park. **Action SLDC**

Reduce on street parking

Reduce on-street parking in side streets either in or near the town centres. Tourists have already identified congestion and parking problems as one of the major disadvantages of coming to Windermere and Bowness. On entry into and through the town, the perception is of a continual background of parked cars and traffic congestion. The entire vista of an historic attractive town with open spaces is destroyed immediately. Changing this is essential to give a perception of “open spaces” and a countryside village. This will require difficult decisions about parking restrictions and traffic flow - but these must be faced to ensure the future of the town. **Action CCC Highways.**

Expand existing town centre car parks

Expand existing car parks as much as practical to increase income into the town as well as increasing parking income to the Council. This could add almost £1.5m to the local economy. **Action SLDC.**

Build a Park and Ride

Build an out of town “park and ride” on the A591 with a regular shuttle bus service into the town centre every 15mins and provide cycle hire as appropriate. This will not only alleviate congestion by reducing through traffic, but will “capture” far more tourists entering the Lake District and bring them into Windermere and Bowness. Once completed it the report estimated it could add over £6m per year to the local economy. **Action CCC / SLDC / WTC/ NT/ LDNPA**

Many of the measures discussed in this summary will require significant expenditure and various potential sources of funding have been considered by the parking sub-group. Copies of the full 144 page report, providing full details on the Ward street and car park surveys, as well as other information relevant to parking in the town, are available on the Windermere Town Council Website at www.windermere-tc.gov.uk

