

More free parking for shopping in towns

One of the reasons some town centres are struggling is the difficulty and cost of parking. People can buy on the internet without stirring from their armchair. They can drive to the out of town retail park and park for free outside the shop door. Shopping in many town centres can require a difficult journey, can pose difficulties sometimes in finding a car park space, and results in a charge. It's an important part of the background to the decline of many a town shopping centre.

What can be done?

The first thing is to get the most out of the car parks we have. You can get more cars into a piece of land and it is easier to park if the spaces are marked out at 45 degrees to the access and not at 90 degrees as most currently are. Private and public car park owners could sort this out and benefit from doing so. Convention should dictate you park front in. A one way access and exit route then minimises loss of parking spaces.

Councils could increase the ratio of parking spaces to shops when authorising new developments or improving their centres. There is often spare public land near a centre that can be used. In Council car parks they could allow a charge free period to encourage shoppers. Where this represented unfair competition to private car parks the Council could pay the private car park to make free time available on a similar basis as public car parks from its town centre promotion budget.

You can't easily go food shopping or shopping for larger items by bus or train as you need to get the goods back to your home. Councils need to place sufficient spaces near to the shops. They also need to improve the main routes into the cities and towns so people can drive to these car parks more easily.

Getting business rates and rents down on more shops will be helpful to assisting town centres, but the thing they need most is more customers. One of the most important ways of boosting numbers is to help people get to shops, restaurants and coffee bars in the towns. Shoppers resent time lost in traffic jams and money spent on car parks.