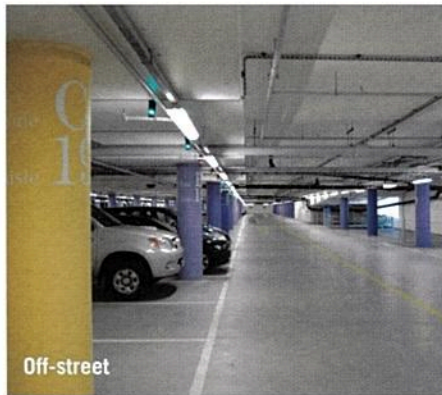


Clearing the way for development



On-street



Off-street

Transparency is a 21st century political watch-word.

Penny Winder talks about why consultations and surveys are vital tools for building public confidence

Gathering information about motorists' parking habits is a vital piece in the planning jigsaw. This is equally true for a local authority transport strategy to persuade drivers not to park in the city centre, a company's plan to develop land currently used by staff for parking, or a developer looking to turn a derelict building into residential apartments.

Public consultations that form a clear view of the local population's opinion are an important part of the development process. Transparency is a key word in the 21st century. Whether you are a local authority officer trying to manage a town's parking operation or a private company attempting to grow your business, it is imperative that you get as much support and buy-in as possible from the people affected.

The importance of consultation cannot be underestimated. With parking issues at the very heart of how urban society functions, getting parking right and obtaining buy-in from the local population is vitally important. From the creation of a residential parking zone in an area of high population to ensuring that a new development has sufficient parking spaces or analysing the need for a new multi-storey car park, avoiding a public relation nightmare and getting approval from affected parties is essential.

Providing quality information

One of the key factors in running a successful public consultation is the quality of information presented and collected. Scant, bitty and incomplete facts will help no-one and could lead to costly errors further down the line.

Imagine a multi-storey car park being demolished to accommodate residential flats but local businesses and residents then being

left with nowhere to park. The outcome may be that the reduction in public parking means a town centre gradually becomes a ghost town.

Another scenario worth imagining is the creation of a misplaced controlled parking zone. The provision of too few short-term parking spaces in the town centre or a lack of staff parking on a business premises could be avoided by a well constructed consultation, backed up by in-depth surveys.

Being legally sound

Then there is the legal side of things. The management and enforcement of parking is restricted by a complex set of government regulations, as is the building industry.

Ensuring that the transport policy a local authority is considering meets all legal requirements can be a lengthy and costly business, particularly if the council lack necessary expertise within its in-house team.

Getting an element of a consultation process wrong can lead to the whole process being challenged, which is both costly and can delay, or even derail, the implementation of a parking scheme or start of a building project.

Providing facts that back up a proposal is vitally important, which is where surveying services come in. It is all very well 'saying' that an area needs more on-street parking, but facts are needed to back up the argument. If a council is proposing a park & ride service for a town where motorists have been able to park in front of the row of shops for years, it will need solid, reliable evidence to give weight to your argument and persuade the local population of the need for change.

Penny Winder is a director of Alpha Parking
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Choose your survey...

This is a guide designed to help you choose the right survey for your needs

Parking stress surveys

A detailed knowledge of things, such as times of usage and areas where occupancy levels are above average, are factors that can influence and change parking patterns. This information helps architects, surveyors and developers to project manage a development cost-effectively. A 'parking stress survey' involves planning and carrying out the survey and then producing reports, maps and photographs to meet the clients' requirements.

Parking stress reflects the number of parked vehicles as a percentage of the amount of authorised available parking. The parking stress survey highlights any potential areas of concern and gives detailed feedback on the current situation on the street.

An additional feature of a parking stress survey is that it can assess compliance with the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSRGD), a piece of legislation that regulates the placement and quality of signs and lines on the roads.

Occupancy and duration surveys

These surveys are important as they help operators determine when car parks are at their busiest and when demand for space is low. Information gleaned from these surveys includes: how long people park for; what sections of the population use a car park; and local parking habits.

Asset and condition surveys

Making sure that signs and lines are in the correct place and give accurate information is crucial for both local authorities and developers. An 'asset survey' will record the location, fixing and condition of traffic signs, lines and street furniture and make sure that they are complying with the TSRGD. A 'condition survey' will assess local parking signs and lines to ensure that they are in a good condition and compliant with the legislation that governs signage on the roads.

Inventory surveys

When private car park operators and local authorities are assessing the usage and demand for parking, they need basic information such as number and type of parking spaces available. For example, a local authority might need to prove it is already providing enough Blue Badge spaces while a supermarket might want to advertise its parent & child parking. An 'inventory survey' will provide a full picture on parking at a specific locale, providing information needed to understand the relationship between provision and demand.

Feasibility studies

A feasibility study will look at factors such as the current cost of parking, the demand for parking, seasonal or daily variations in demand, and trends that could impact on parking in the future. For example, if a car park currently charges 50p to park for two hours and the operator feels it is unlikely to change in the near future there is then no reason to upgrade its parking equipment to accept credit cards as investment outweighs returns.

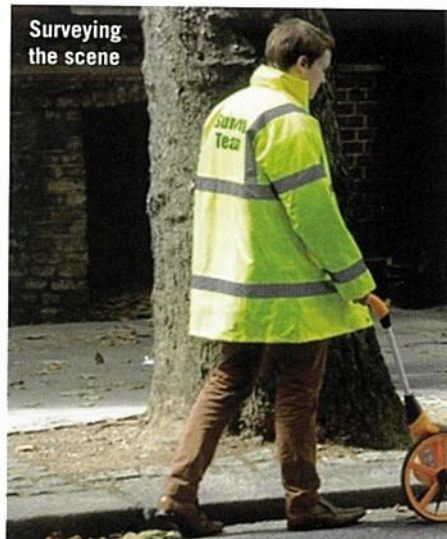
One stop shopping

Tim Winder looks at how consultations have evolved

When Alpha Parking opened its doors for business more than 10 years ago it was the founders' intention that it would be a one-stop shop for all things to do with parking. While training is the core of our business, Alpha offers two services vital for local authorities and private developers as they plan parking strategies – consultation and surveying. In the beginning our consultation work was largely to do with residents and businesses affected by proposed parking permit schemes, with survey work involving counting cars parked on-street or vehicles entering and leaving car parks.

Alpha's first series of consultations were for resident parking schemes for East Sussex County Council, starting in Eastbourne. These initial surveys were simple car counts and surveys of the numbers of cars parked in a street at various times of the day.

Parking surveys and consultations have traditionally been paper-generating exercises, but the evolution of computer and online systems over the past decade has transformed how this work is undertaken. The consultations and the surveys we undertake today are mainly web-based. We now conduct more online questionnaires, private car parking surveys and an increasing number of focussed,



smaller area surveys working a prescribed methodology like 'parking stress' surveys, which predict the potential impact of a development on a locality's parking.

The very detailed information gleaned from such surveys is vital to ensure the correct solution to a challenge is found – the wrong information, or an incomplete picture, could lead to a local authority spending thousands of taxpayer pounds on

what becomes a 'white elephant'.

The expertise a specialist consultant can provide is way beyond what most in-house local authority teams can deliver. Cuts to council budgets also mean councils have lost the necessary expertise within their ranks. Local authorities have had to cut resources, with more experienced staff usually first on the list to take early retirement, leaving a skills vacuum.

While our traditional customer base has been predominantly the local authority sector, we have recently seen an increase in work coming in from the private sector. We are receiving requests for parking stress surveys, not just from local authority urban regeneration departments but from developers and architects submitting schemes for planning permission.

Take this as an example: A company with a unit on a business park wishes to develop on land currently used for staff car parking. A survey of car park usage on a daily basis and then a survey of staff travel habits could reveal that a car-sharing scheme might work to mitigate a shortage of parking spaces. Alternatively, the survey might show that staff would just resort to parking on the roads outside.

Both the private and public sectors commission consultations and surveys in order to engage more with their public and their own clients. They want to have real figures with which to formulate a valid business case to back up proposals and decisions.

Tim Winder is a director of Alpha Parking

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