

**Gordon Massey**  
**Chairman Barnet Residents Association**

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We have read your piece on the website and the petition for one hour's free parking in council car parks and the High St. Whilst we understand why there is a superficial attraction for such a measure, we strongly suggest there are considerations which make it a far less appealing proposition than you indicate.

The case has been supported with some strongly worded statements saying that visitors and potential shoppers are being driven away and we need "drastic action to ease parking controls". Such claims suggest a serious problem with people being deterred from coming here by the council parking regime. So surely the logic follows that there must be lots of unused council parking space that need to be filled. Where is the evidence for this? Last Thursday morning we checked occupancy levels. The results were: Fitzjohn Ave and Stapleton Rd car parks, the south end and the centre of the High St - ALL FULL. Moxon St car park - 80% full (9 spaces). Top of the High St - 80% full (5 spaces left). These results are typical of our observations. It is the case that on earlier weekday's occupancy is lower, but still usually exceeding the council's optimum target figure of 85%. By contrast The Spires was 65% full - a not unusual figure.

For the parking that we might consider as suitable for short-term shoppers, with Moxon St already having one hour free the only 'shopper' spaces for which you are seeking a further concession are those in Stapylton Rd car park and along the High St - a total of 130 out of nearly 700 shopper spaces in town. These 130 happen to be those most in demand. So there are two difficulties with your campaign - you are trying to develop a comprehensive argument when the reality is that you are only targeting a small proportion of town spaces, and any changes to pricing in those spaces cannot make any meaningful difference to the number of people parking there.

We have been closely monitoring Moxon St since the concession was introduced a year ago and it is progressing well - usage has gone up from under 50% to typically 70 to 75%. More importantly, turnover is high with most of the people heading for the High St. These are visitors who were just not there when Moxon St was previously filled with all-day commuters. On Hadley Green the first couple of bays now regularly fill when they were previously empty or nearly so, but we do believe there is a limit to what can be achieved there as most people appear willing to only walk so far.

Many councils have variable pricing and variable permitted hours designed to spread parking around the town aimed at reducing congestion in the prime areas and improving usage of parking spaces in more marginal areas. This is precisely how the parking in High Barnet was restructured two years ago. All the short term pricing is cheaper than The Spires, even the prime spots in the centre of the High St. So is it really "expensive, extensive and inordinately complicated" as the campaign is telling people? Of course, as we discussed at the BRA meeting with Theresa Villiers on Friday last, and reported on your website, it is not pricing but better information that was seen as being the essential problem. We are well aware that Moxon St/Hadley Green need better signage and we have previously pressed the council on this, so far without result.

But despite signage problems the evidence suggests that far from being a mess, council parking is actually functioning well - perhaps too well - to the point that there is almost certainly an element of unmet demand on some days, something that could indeed be discouraging some people from coming here. And this brings us to the nub of our concerns - running a negative campaign that essentially tells the public that parking in High Barnet is a major problem could become self-fulfilling by putting people off coming here. Conversely, given that the free parking we have is the only place in the Borough where the council has introduced such a concession, should this be something we are promoting, not denigrating? Has it been considered that giving the impression the free parking we have is of marginal value this may be just the wrong way to persuade the council to make further concessions? We are also concerned that if the council is on the receiving end of what it perceives as an unreasonable campaign this might prejudice the council's willingness to engage on other important issues concerning the High St.

A couple of further observations: second to blue badge holders, many of those seeking to park in the centre of the High St are visiting the banks, often just to use the ATMs. Turnover is quite rapid, but there is a danger that with one hour free different shoppers who park there will stay longer. This would reduce overall turnover, which in itself would be counter-productive, and potentially could crowd out bank users. With seven banks, a money exchange and the Post Office, financial services are one of our town's few remaining strengths. Given that 2000 bank branches have closed in the past ten years and networks are constantly under review. We are nervous of any measures that might reduce bank usage. Also, introducing one free hour everywhere is an incentive to first seek to park in the most desirable area - namely the centre of the High St. Not only would a lot of people be frustrated by the shortage of spaces, but traffic congestion and the associated noise and fumes could be exacerbated. The town needs traffic reduction measures in the High St, not measures that may make it worse.

We are aware that the idea of additional free parking has previously been raised with Town Team and with councillors on at least two other occasions, and has not made any progress. On those occasions the absence of a well-constructed proposal was almost certainly the problem. Seeking change in the public sector usually requires robust analysis, reasoned argument and rational solutions, and our observations above indicating that the evidence does not support the proposal need to be addressed.

We would like to see the Barnet Society bringing its considerable campaigning resources to tackle what we consider to be by far the key issue for shopper parking in High Barnet, namely what happens at The Spires car park, where some two-thirds of potential shopper space in town is located. We have had some robust exchanges with both the owners and operators Legion Parking over the continuing price rises. That the charges are now higher than the council's should be THE cause for concern that does indeed warrant campaigning effort. One hour free at The Spires, which would be comparable to many other private car parks adjoining supermarkets or shopping malls, is one outcome that certainly could bring immense benefits.

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Chairman

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