

PARKING UP

INCREASING CAR SPACES IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS



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INTRODUCTION

Car parking is one of the most contentious and emotive issues when considering new development¹. With space on local streets at a premium, existing residents and future occupiers are often concerned about ensuring that there will be sufficient parking spaces to accommodate the additional cars.

In London, limits are set in the London Plan as to the amount of car parking that can be provided in new developments. When developers apply for planning permission they must meet these limits and often they are required to reduce parking levels even further.

In outer London in particular, there is a continuing need for people to own and use a car, although not necessarily at peak times. Outer London typically has higher levels of car ownership, and lower levels of public transport provision, compared with the rest of London. It is therefore important to continue to find ways to meet the demand for increased parking provision.

With the current – and very welcome – review by the Mayor and the Outer London Commission into parking standards in outer London, this presents an ideal opportunity to ensure, once and for all, that the correct approach is taken on parking standards.

This report will therefore propose that all maximum car parking standards for outer London are removed from the London Plan, that outer London boroughs are given the flexibility to set their own minimum or maximum car parking levels as appropriate to local conditions, and that Transport for London should amend its approach when commenting on planning applications.

This report uses the current London Plan and Outer London Commission definition of outer London, which comprises the 19 boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames, Sutton and Waltham Forest.

CURRENT PARKING STANDARDS

Policy 6.13 of the London Plan sets out a series of maximum car 'parking standards' for different types of new development, including residential and commercial uses, as well as requirements for disabled parking and electric vehicle provision².

For residential developments with one or two bedrooms, the maximum parking level is under 1 parking space per residential unit, for three-bed properties it is 1.5 spaces per unit, and for four-bed homes the limit is 2 spaces per unit. Additionally, all developments in areas that are well served by public transport are expected to aim for 'significantly less' than one space per unit³.

Retail developments have many different levels, ranging from one parking space per 15 sq. m of floor space to 1 space per 75 sq. m. For office developments, the range is from 1 space per 50 sq. m to 600 sq. m for outer London, up to 1000 sq. m for inner London and up to 1500 sq. m for central London⁴.

Maximum car parking standards were first introduced in 2001 through national planning policy. In London, the original 2004 London Plan had a policy that car parking provision in new developments

1. Residential Parking Guidance Note, Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation

2. London Plan March 2015 (FALP), GLA, page 263

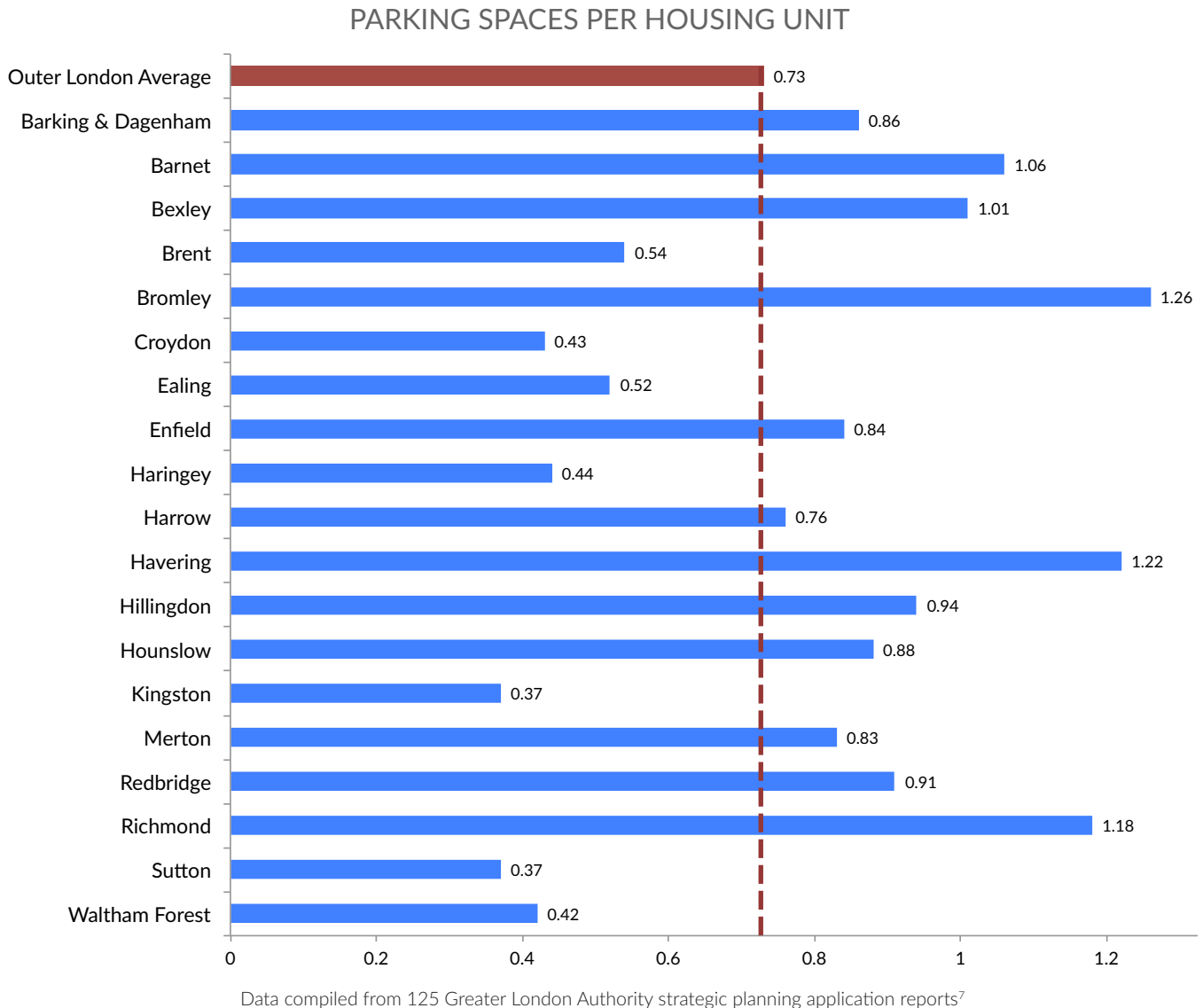
3. London Plan March 2015 (FALP), GLA, pages 268-269

4. London Plan March 2015 (FALP), GLA, pages 269-270

should be the 'minimum necessary'⁵.

Since that time the situation has certainly improved, with new flexibilities introduced to take account of local conditions, especially for areas with low public transport accessibility⁶.

However, even in recent years, planning policy has still been a restraint on new car parking provision. In outer London, of the major strategic planning applications granted planning permission since September 2011, the average parking provision was just 0.7 spaces per dwelling. This is fewer than three spaces for every four homes. Within this overall figure, there is considerable variation, ranging from averages of 0.37 in Sutton to 1.26 in Bromley – with some developments being designated as 'car free', and having no on-site parking provision at all.



Additionally, in the same time period, Transport for London requested a reduction in residential, office or retail parking provision on 96 occasions (out of 211 applications) in the 'Stage 1' GLA planning consultation response. This led directly to a reduction in car parking spaces on at least 13 occasions when planning permission was finally granted, with a total loss of 277 residential and 622 retail and office spaces. It is therefore clear that, despite the drive for greater flexibility, there remains strong pressure on developers to reduce parking provision in individual developments.

5. London Plan (consolidated with alterations since 2004), GLA, February 2008, page 154

6. Such as Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance, GLA, 2012, paragraph 1.3.51, page 43

7. <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/strategic-planning-applications/mayors-planning-decisions>

It is important to recognise the significant dependency on car usage that exists in outer London, which cannot simply be addressed by restricting car usage. Most outer London boroughs have by far the highest levels of car ownership, including 75% in Richmond, 74% in Bexley, and 73% in Hillingdon, compared to 26% in Islington and 36% in Westminster⁸. Outer London is typically not as well served by public transport, with lower public transport accessibility level (PTAL) ratings in many areas⁹. Even outer London areas with high PTAL ratings are more likely to be surrounded by areas with a lower provision, so people are still more likely to need a car for local journeys.

A NEW APPROACH

Since 2010, the Government has consistently sought to encourage a more flexible approach to car parking provision through national planning guidance. It amended Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 13 to remove the previous requirement for local authorities to set maximum parking standards in their development plans¹⁰, and this approach was carried over into the new National Planning Policy Framework. Since that time, on various occasions, ministers have urged local authorities to introduce more flexible parking policies to meet local needs¹¹.

As a result of this increasing flexibility on the national level, in the latest edition of the London Plan published in March 2015 the Mayor of London committed to an 'early review of parking standards in outer London'¹² and asked the Outer London Commission to look into the matter further. It is therefore appropriate at this time to consider a more flexible approach to parking standards that would better meet the needs of development in outer London.

One of the main justifications given for restricting car parking is the objective of reducing the traffic impacts of new development. It is often argued that reducing the number of parking spaces will reduce the number of cars owned by occupants, which will reduce the number of car journeys and traffic – especially at peak times – and promote modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling.

However, these assumptions, whilst understandable, are not necessarily correct. Having a secure place to store a car at home does not mean that it will be used at peak times of the day – especially if the person commutes to work. This was borne out by a 2011 study, published by the Berkeley Group¹³, which found no direct link between levels of car ownership and car use, with typically just 1 in 32 cars used during peak hours.

According to the Berkeley Group study, even at an outer London site with high parking levels, only a third of residents used their car to travel to work. Moreover, at the same site, bus patronage increased almost fivefold when the local bus service was improved, demonstrating that modal shift can be encouraged through better services rather than parking restrictions.

Whilst measures to reduce off-street car parking will not necessarily reduce car usage, it will often have the disadvantage of encouraging parking to spill over onto neighbouring streets, potentially causing even greater congestion, as well as increasing the risk of vehicle crime and other problems.

Indeed, one of the most common causes of opposition to a local development is a lack of sufficient off-street car parking, especially in residential developments¹⁴. Therefore, addressing this fundamental concern would create better opportunities to increase public support for new housing

8. Technical note 12: How many cars are there in London?, Transport for London

9. Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance, GLA, 2012, paragraph 1.3.51, page 43

10. *Pickles and Hammond end the war on motorists*, January 2011

11. For example: http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/general/news/stories/2014/september14/040914/040914_1

12. London Plan March 2015 (FALP), GLA, page 18

13. Does car ownership increase car use?, Berkeley Group, 2011

14. Residential Parking Guidance Note, Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation

developments.

With ever-increasing demand for new homes in London, and the need to build at least 42,000 new homes per year¹⁵, anything which can reduce the length and uncertainty of the planning process is certainly a worthwhile goal.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore clear that local planning authorities and developers need to be given increased flexibility to meet the realistic car parking demands of future occupants. This report proposes the following recommendations to help achieve these aims:

RECOMMENDATION #1 - The Mayor should amend Policy 6.13 of the London Plan to remove all maximum car parking standards for outer London.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - Outer London boroughs should be free to set their own minimum or maximum car parking levels as appropriate to local conditions.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - Transport for London should refrain from seeking reductions to car parking levels in outer London developments, at the pre-planning and planning stages, unless there are very strong transport reasons for doing so.

15. London Plan March 2015 (FALP), GLA, page 110

APPENDIX

Borough	Spaces per Housing Unit
Barking & Dagenham	0.86
Barnet	1.06
Bexley	1.01
Brent	0.54
Bromley	1.26
Croydon	0.43
Ealing	0.52
Enfield	0.84
Haringey	0.44
Harrow	0.76
Havering	1.22
Hillingdon	0.94
Hounslow	0.88
Kingston	0.37
Merton	0.83
Redbridge	0.91
Richmond	1.18
Sutton	0.37
Waltham Forest	0.42
Outer London Average	0.73

Data compiled from 125 Greater London Authority strategic planning application reports, available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/strategic-planning-applications/mayors-planning-decisions>



FEEDBACK

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