

Maximum Parking Standards in UK Local Plans & Policies: Case studies March 2025

Background

Availability of car-parking is a major determinant of travel mode and over-provision undermines the financial viability and attractiveness of public transport and active travel. Too much parking, especially low-cost parking, starts a negative feedback loop, reducing demand for public transport as more people drive, but also as bus service reliability and attractiveness falls due to rising traffic. This causes cuts to public transport, further undermining services, creating more traffic and pressure for more car-parking space. Those without access to a car have their opportunities reduced as their mobility is curtailed. Therefore, managing car-parking is essential to creating equitable places.

There are two main ways local authorities can (and do) promote better transport via action on parking. First, they can reduce access to destination car parking while also improving public transport as part of an overarching transport strategy. Second, they can future car-dependency by specifying 'car parking standards' for new development. Essentially this means limiting the number of car-parking spaces provided per new home.

Maximum parking standards are planning policies which limit the number of parking spaces that are allowed to be built with new developments. Instead of requiring a minimum number of parking spaces (which ensures a certain level of provision), maximum parking standards set a fixed upper limit - such as 0.5 spaces per dwelling, meaning only one parking space is provided for every two dwellings.

***Parking maximum* policies would usually sit alongside policies which ensure new development is located appropriately near to amenities like shops; and is built at high enough density to support local shops and fare income for public transport.** Towns are now beginning to adopt 'car-free' development policies where dwellings in town centres are built without any car parking (apart from disabled) or with car-club (car share) parking only.

It is important to remember that a large proportion of the population does not have access to a car. Older and young people, and those on low incomes, are less likely to own a car.

By capping the amount of car parking available (a major determinant of travel mode), the main objective of *parking maximums* is to encourage a shift towards sustainable modes of transport (public transport, walking, cycling, wheeling). In the UK, maximum parking standards became widespread in the late 1990s and early 2000s and remained a feature of

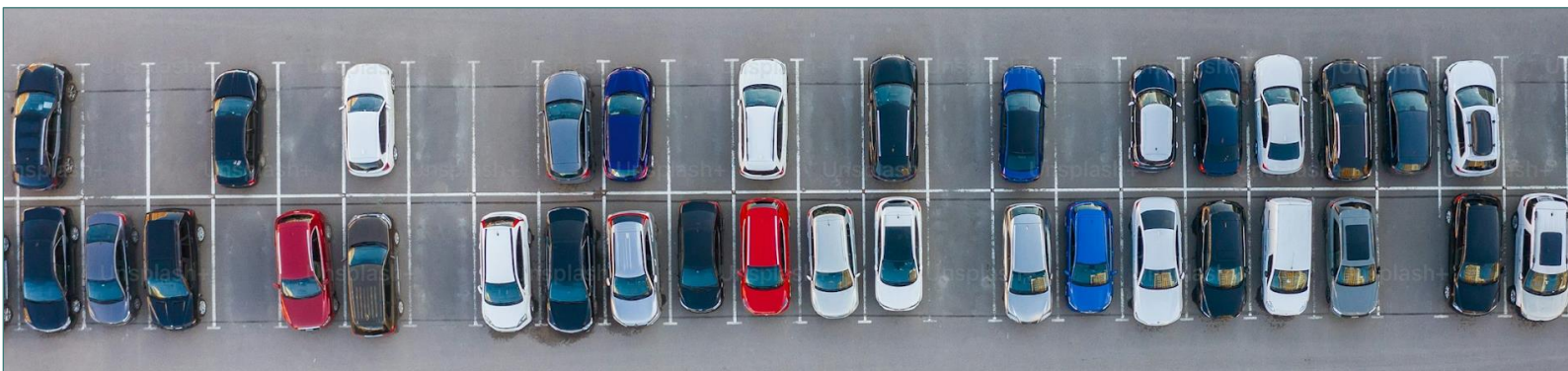
national planning policy until the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012. Until that point, Maximum Parking Standards had been enforced through Planning Policy Guidance 13 (PPG13) and Planning Policy Guidance 3 (PPG3) - both of which set nationally-applicable (and legally binding) maximum standards.

These policies were removed and the NPPF now states there needs to be a clear and compelling case to set a parking maximum. Paragraph 113, NPPF:

“Maximum parking standards for residential and non-residential development should only be set where there is a clear and compelling justification that they are necessary for managing the local road network, or for optimising the density of development in city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport. In town centres, local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking so that it is convenient, safe and secure, alongside measures to promote accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.”

Local Plan parking policies across England have diverged significantly over the past 13 years, in the wake of the 2012 changes to the NPPF. Some cities – such as London – put in place strict maximums, with justification that the Mayor’s Transport Strategy needed to deliver reduce car trips from 40% to 20% of all trips. Other councils, mainly those in rural areas, have relaxed or removed maximums entirely.

Some towns and cities have, however, set parking maximums and are using these as part of an integrated transport strategy aimed at delivering mode shift. The example of Brighton and Oxford are set out below. The London Plan policy is also included and is likely to be relevant for other UK cities and larger towns.



Examples of where low parking maximums have been adopted

Oxford City Council - Policy M3: Motor Vehicle Parking

Local Plan 2036 (adopted June 2020). A PDF of the Local Plan is available [here](#); see pages 108 - 110 re parking. Relevant section: “Limiting the opportunities for parking within the city helps to reduce car use leading to reductions in air pollution, congestion and the creation of a more attractive environment for walking and cyclists. In reducing the availability of public and private parking there will be fewer car trips as people shift mode to a more sustainable form of transport. Furthermore, parking across the city is not an efficient use of land, a key consideration in Oxford, where land is so constrained.” (7.23)

Residential Developments: “In Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) or employer-linked housing areas (where occupants do not have an operational need for a car) where development is located within a 400m walk to frequent (15 minute) public transport services and within 800m walk to a local supermarket or equivalent facilities (measured from the mid-point of the proposed development) planning permission will only be granted for residential development* that is car-free. In all other locations, planning permission will only be granted where the relevant maximum standards (see below) are complied with.”

Vehicular parking standards:

Policy M3 sets out Oxford City Council’s policy on providing parking for new residential developments which would be car free. The standards below should be read alongside Policy M3 and its supporting text.

Dwellings of any size*	1 space per dwellings (to be provided within the development site, where feasible) and car club parking up to 0.2 per dwellings
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)	Parking standards to be decided case by case on their merit.
Wheelchair accessible or adaptable houses and flats	1 space per dwelling, to be provided within the curtilage of the dwelling (must be designed in accordance with Part M of Building Regulations)
Retirement homes	1 space per 2 residents’ rooms
Sheltered/extra care homes	1 space per 2 homes plus 1 space per 2 staff
Nursing homes	1 space per 3 residents’ rooms plus 1 space per 2 staff
Student Accommodation	0 spaces per resident room. Operational parking and disabled parking to be considered on a case by case basis in accordance with Policy H8.

*Any parking provided on plot to be excluded from a permit for any future CPZ and only 1 permit to be provided per dwelling on street where not provided on plot.

Non-residential Developments: “The parking requirements for all non-residential development [...] will be determined in the light of the submitted Transport Assessment or Travel Plan, which must take into account the objectives of this Plan to promote and achieve a shift towards sustainable modes of travel. The presumption will be that vehicle parking will be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure the successful functioning of the development. [...] In the case of the redevelopment of an existing or previously cleared site, there should be no net increase in parking on the site from the previous level and the Council will seek a reduction where there is good accessibility to a range of facilities.”

Brighton & Hove City Council

Supplementary Planning Document 14: ‘Parking Standards’ (adopted October 2016), Policy **CP9** of the **Brighton & Hove City Plan** (Pt 1) states: “[Brighton & Hove City Council] will promote and provide measures that will help to manage and improve mobility and lead to a transfer of people and freight onto sustainable forms of transport to reduce the impact of traffic and congestion, increase physical activity and therefore improve people’s health, safety and quality of life.” These include the adoption of maximum car parking standards, the details of which are set out in SPD 14.

Parking Standard			
Parking Type	Central Area	Key Public Transport Corridors	Outer Areas
Car	0.4 spaces per dwelling	1 space per dwelling plus 1 space per 2 dwellings for visitors	1 space per dwelling plus 1 space per 2 dwellings for visitors
	On-street residents permits restricted in CPZ areas based on consideration of the relevant factors	On-street residents permits restricted in CPZ areas based on consideration of the relevant factors	
Car	0.25 spaces per dwelling	0.5 spaces per dwelling plus 1 space per 2 dwellings for visitors	1 space per dwelling plus 1 space per 2 dwellings for visitors
	On-street residents permits restricted in CPZ areas based on consideration of the relevant factors	On-street residents permits restricted in CPZ areas based on consideration of the relevant factors	

London

London adopted a 'car free development' policy, stating that 'car-free development should be the starting point for all development. [Detail here.](#)

Policy T6 Car parking

Policy T6 Car parking

A Car parking should be restricted in line with levels of existing and future public transport accessibility and connectivity.

B Car-free development should be the starting point for all development proposals in places that are (or are planned to be) well-connected by public transport, with developments elsewhere designed to provide the minimum necessary parking ('car-lite'). Car-free development has no general parking but should still provide disabled persons parking in line with Part E of this policy.

C An absence of local on-street parking controls should not be a barrier to new development, and boroughs should look to implement these controls wherever necessary to allow existing residents to maintain safe and efficient use of their streets.

Please contact alice@cprelondon.org.uk if you can tell us about any other examples of where Local Planning Authorities have adopted parking maximums.

CPRE London

@cprelondon

Contact alice@cprelondon.org.uk

With thanks to volunteer Tristan Strzelczyk

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