

Multistorey Car Park, Earls Way, Orpington

- Redevelopment by Tesco Plc (Application No. 03/04023/OUT)

Information on the Public Car Parking Provision and Objections Thereto

Prepared on behalf of O.C.P.A.G. by Roger Lawson 13/8/2004 (Revd 17/9/2004)
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1. Introduction. This note explains why the proposed redevelopment of the Orpington Multi-storey car park will result in inadequate public car parking (in fact well below the existing usage) and hence will have a deleterious effect on the vitality of the commercial and retail businesses in the vicinity.

2. Existing Car Park Usage. The car park consists of 834 parking spaces, but 283 of those are leased to adjacent office occupiers and allocated to individuals - as a result they tend not to be fully occupied because such individuals are sometimes on holiday or absent on business trips. The remaining 551 spaces are public spaces which are also used by employees in the adjacent offices (not all of who have sufficient leased spaces for their needs), by business visitors to those offices, by employees of retail establishments nearby, and by shoppers visiting the nearby Orpington High Street. There are also a few users who park there and walk up to Orpington station but these are relatively few in number. The public car parking is therefore occupied by a mix of longer term parkers and short term users and hence usage varies considerably through the day as you can see in Appendix A.

It is worth noting that buildings such as Central Court and Berwick House have not been fully occupied in the recent past, but occupancy is increasing. Demand for the public spaces would increase if these office blocks were fully let.

3. Is the Car Park Underused? This car park has been described as “underused” - for example in the Planning Brief prepared for the site, and in the draft Unitary Development Plan (UDP). It is true that there is normally some spare capacity in the public section. However, this is usually no more than one or two levels of the car park, and the author has known the public section to be completely full at certain times of the year. Note also that the use of the car park by shoppers has declined in the last few years, probably exacerbated by the cost of parking being increased at a much faster rate than inflation - for example one hours parking now costs 40p which deters short term parking and shoppers may well go to other local centres where parking is cheaper or costs nothing. Long term parkers also have been deterred and many have moved to on-street parking in areas such as those to the east of Sevenoaks Road thus resulting in inconvenience and complaints from local residents.

4. Actual Car Park Usage Data. Appendix A shows the actual usage of the car park in a survey which I understand was taken by council staff in September 2003. Appendix B shows data from a survey taken by BBRAG in January 2002 which is in general agreement. Therefore it is clear that the maximum public usage typically reaches about 390 spaces at mid morning and declines thereafter.

5. The “Combined Trips” Issue. Note also that it is clear that the car park fills up rapidly before 9.30 with as many as 350 spaces being occupied by that time and 300 by 9.00 so it is clear that the vast majority of users are not short term shoppers. The likelihood of many of those users therefore combining their trips with a visit to the Tesco store (and hence moving into the store car park) is relatively low.

6. Loss of Parking in Augustus Lane. The proposed development would also apparently mean the loss of many of the 34 parking spaces in Augustus Lane which would become an access route into the store. These spaces are currently unrestricted and are typically used by residents of flats above shops on the High Street. They would require provision of spaces in the new development as there are no other practical alternative locations. Although it is not currently totally clear how many such spaces would be lost, it is suggested that these 34 must be added to the existing public demand of 390, making 424.

7. Other Possible Requirements. Other possible demands on the public spaces are from residents of the new development. There are 34 private apartments and 30 “affordable” apartments for which the proposed total of 39 “residential” parking spaces seems grossly inadequate. There is also the question of parking by employees of the new store, who may well occupy some of the public spaces. Taking into account some extra demand also if the surrounding offices were more fully let, the above figure of 424 seems to be a very conservative estimate of future demand and 450 to 500 might be more appropriate.

8. Required Usage Provision. To summarise, if the provision of new car park spaces is to be adequate to cope with existing demand on a typical day, without even allowing for some spare capacity to cope with peak demand, and other likely increases in demand, then it needs to provide as a minimum 450 public car parking spaces and 283 leased spaces.

9. The Proposals From Tesco. The report to the Development Control Committee prior to the meeting on the 20th April 2004 and based on the latest submissions by Tesco supplies a figure of 917 parking spaces in total in the development. The breakdown between different purposes was verbally reported at the meeting to be as follows (taking into account the latest changes to the development plans):

Store parking: 440
Medical centre: 2
Public parking: 195
Residential: 39
Offices: 241
Total: 917

Clearly there is a major shortfall in public parking provision in that 195 are provided when 450 is the minimum required to cope with prospective demand, ie. a shortfall of 255.

It is also not at all clear how the demand for leased spaces can be reduced from the existing 283 to 241 (this reduction has been used to boost the public spaces). These spaces are leased by office occupiers of adjacent buildings and are fairly fully used - in reality there is usually more demand for such spaces than spaces available when the offices are fully let. Even if Tesco was to buy out some of the leases, the likely result would be that people who previously had leased spaces would simply migrate into the public spaces.

10. The Question of Parking by Tesco Staff. One aspect of public car parking usage that has not been considered in the application is the issue of usage of public car parking spaces by Tesco staff. The number of staff to be employed at the site is given as 400 which probably implies approximately 100 at peak times. Although a “Travel Plan” to encourage alternative transport modes will no doubt be implemented, it is quite likely that a substantial number of those staff will choose to travel to work via car and as Tesco will probably discourage them from using the shoppers car park, they will occupy the public car parking spaces. This will make the shortage of public spaces even more acute.

11. The Question of Spare Capacity Elsewhere. It has been suggested that the shortfall could be taken up by existing spare capacity in the Walnuts car park. However there are three problems with this:

a - The spare capacity of the Walnuts is typically only 150 spaces whereas the shortfall is at least 255 and could be 297 taking account of the leased space reduction which has not been explained.

b - The Walnuts is not a practical solution for employees of the adjacent offices who are using their vehicles on business trips throughout the day. The Walnuts car park is too far away and it takes as long as 15 minutes to walk from there to the offices adjacent to the Earls Way car park. This distance would also deter visitors.

c - The parking charges are considerably higher in the Walnuts car park as it is focussed on short term shoppers, and not long term parking. This makes it impractical for use by employees for long term parking.

12. The Impact of Inadequate Parking Provision. Several businesses in the adjacent offices have made objections to the proposals and have pointed out the negative impact that this would have on their own businesses. For example Calford Seaden, ECA and the Orpington Promotions Group representing a number of local businesses are some of the objectors. Inadequate parking for employees would make it exceedingly difficult to attract staff in future as this is one of the main reasons for occupying the offices in that location. In addition it would inconvenience existing business operations to a considerable degree (staff often leave and return to their offices during the day). One of the few reasons for businesses to locate in that part of Orpington is the good road links to the M25, giving access to a wide area, and at the same time having good rail links from Orpington station and good bus services to local areas for local employees. This was one of the few attractions of Orpington as a business location. Some of these businesses have already threatened to move elsewhere if this development goes ahead, and that is likely to be out of the borough. Others have halted proposed capital investment in the area pending the outcome of the parking issue.

In addition, organisations such as Clarkson, Wright and Jakes in Berwick House and Calford Seaden in St. Johns House have a large number of visitors who stay from between one and 4 hours. Convenient parking for those visitors is essential to their businesses.

If this was a new development on a previously undeveloped site then the restricted provision of public parking might have no deleterious effects, and indeed might be in accordance with current planning policies in PPG13. However, this is a replacement of an existing facility and as such it would create major problems for existing businesses and their employees if provision was to be reduced below the existing demand level.

13. Proposals Contrary to PPG1. Planning Policy Guidance 1 (General Policy and Principles) states in Para 46: **“Economic considerations in development plans: In preparing development plans, authorities should take account of economic considerations, such as revitalising and broadening the local economy and stimulating employment opportunities.”**

I would argue that in this case these proposals have not paid attention to that overriding principle. Orpington is not exactly a vibrant commercial or retail centre at present, and it is known that Bromley as a whole has been losing full time jobs to central London. Many of the professional organisations who occupy the offices in Orpington need to attract staff from a wide area if they are to recruit the skills they require. They cannot do that in Orpington if

they need to rely on staff travelling by public transport, whether it is simply getting to work in the first place or business trips while working. Unfortunately public transport in Bromley is simply not good enough, particularly the main line rail routes, to use for most journeys which is why people are so reliant on private cars for business purposes.

Although PPG 6 suggests that there should be a preference for short term parking provision over long term provision it also states: **“Much of this will need to be achieved through management and pricing policies and conditions or planning agreements, which should be carefully designed to meet local circumstances”**. In this case, little notice seems to have been taken of the local circumstances and surrounding business and retail operations, or the consequences for the future commercial vitality of Orpington.

14. Proposals Contrary to PPG13. Planning Policy Guidance 13 (Transport) states in Para 51, that **“In developing and implementing policies on parking, local authorities should: 3. encourage the shared use of parking, particularly in town centres and as part of major proposals: for example offices and leisure uses (such as cinemas) might share parking because the peak levels of use do not coincide, provided adequate attention is given at the design stage;”**.

The proposed application contradicts this principle as there are totally separate areas reserved for shoppers parking versus public parking, much of which is used by adjacent offices. Indeed there are even separate entrances which are wasteful of space and complicates access routes. In practice the peak usage of the facilities by shoppers, which would be on a Saturday, occurs when usage of the proposed public space might be relatively low.

15. Difficulties that Will Arise During Development. In addition, no practical proposals have yet been put forward as to how to cope with the shortage of parking while the site is being redeveloped. This will take at least eighteen months and probably considerably longer. Where are the current 600 cars (see Appendix A) to be parked during that period? The Walnuts car park only has space for 150, and there are no sizeable alternative parking facilities within a reasonable distance.

16. Requirement for Another Parking Survey. It is also necessary to point out that the managing agents for one of the adjacent office blocks believes that the previous surveys of usage of the existing car park were taken some time ago and they believe that the usage has increased now that properties such as Berwick House are now more fully let. We therefore suggest that a more up-to-date survey of car park usage is required, and OCPAG intends to provide such a survey.

17. Conclusions. To summarise, on parking provision grounds alone, this development should be rejected as it will have negative impact on the vitality of the business and retail environment in Orpington.

Appendix A - Car Park Usage September 2003

Floor	Times Capacity	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12noon	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm
		1A	72	9	35	70	72	72	72	72	72	72	69
1B	56	5	31	47	50	50	51	51	49	47	47	45	21
2A	71	1	6	66	69	71	69	70	67	64	63	55	21
2B	70	-	4	58	66	67	67	65	64	59	55	39	13
3A	71	-	1	33	59	61	60	59	53	52	39	22	4
3B	70	-	1	20	42	45	41	40	37	35	33	22	4
4A	71	-	-	-	4	15	13	5	4	3	1	-	-
4B	70	-	-	2	8	11	12	10	9	7	6	6	5
5A	71	-	20	54	61	62	61	61	58	55	53	46	24
5B	70	-	14	59	63	62	62	63	64	61	61	44	19
6A	71	-	5	41	43	43	43	42	41	38	36	18	9
6B	71	1	11	38	40	39	38	39	40	40	39	20	3
Total	834	16	128	488	577	598	589	577	558	533	502	375	138
Occupancy		2%	15%	59%	69%	72%	71%	69%	67%	64%	60%	45%	17%

↑
Max Public = 392
Usage

Public
Usage

Appendix A - Car Park Usage January 2002

Friday 4/1/02 @ 09.30: 290
Saturday 5/1/02 @ 11:00: 290
Monday 7/1/02 @ 9.45: 350
Monday 7/1/02 @ 12.00: 390
Tuesday 8/1/02 @ 09.30: 350

The above numbers are rounded to approximate counts because only the number of occupied levels were counted.