

Submission by Councillor Robert Ward concerning free parking bays in Selsdon High Street and elsewhere



22nd January 2021

Summary

The proposal by Croydon Council to remove the one hour free parking bays from Selsdon High Street is without merit:-

- It will not achieve the Council's aims.
- It will damage local businesses.
- It will make the situation for the struggling High Street worse.
- It is not supported by shopkeepers or residents.

Evidence based policy making and the need for local solutions supported by residents lead to the inescapable conclusion that the current arrangement should be retained.

Context

Croydon Council recently made several Key Decisions regarding parking charges which entail moving to an emissions-based charging model and the removal of all 30- and 60-minute free parking bays. One of those Key Decisions was Called In to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 7th January 2021 at which the Committee decided to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration. This submission is to contribute to the renewed deliberations of the Cabinet on this matter.

Selsdon High Street

The High Street in Selsdon is a relatively long compared to other district centres, straddling around three hundred metres of the Addington Road. It runs roughly from the Selsdon clock situated on the Selsdon triangle outside Sainsbury's, down to Aldi. The Addington Road is busy most of the day, especially around rush hours, with traffic lights controlling the junction of Addington Road and the Farley/Old Farleigh Roads exhibiting significant queues at peak times.

The current mix of businesses is relatively strong. Although small restaurants offering takeaway are common, there is a well-attended Wetherspoons pub (the Sir Julian Huxley), an Indian restaurant, a micro-brewery, ladies' and gents' hairdressers, dry cleaners, betting shop, estate agent, vape shop, funeral directors, pharmacies, charity shops, tattoo shop, hardware and more. As well as the two supermarkets already mentioned bracketing the High Street, we also have a branch of Iceland.

The changes in High Streets elsewhere are reflected in Selsdon. Although historically vacancy rates have been low the pandemic has seen a significant increase. The last two bank branches have recently closed, and a popular restaurant is not expected to reopen.

More optimistically, prior to the pandemic we saw a microbrewery, a tanning salon, a dentist, a pie and mash restaurant and a branch of Coughlan's the baker opening for business. A local group formed from the Selsdon Community Plan is investigating the possibility of taking over the former Barclays Bank branch as a community hub.

Parking in the High Street

The High Street is a busy through road with no viable alternative routes. The one-hour free parking bays extend the length of the Southern side of the High Street with just half a dozen spaces on the Northern side towards the centre. The Sainsbury's at the Western end has a large, two hours free car park. Aldi to the East has a much smaller and shorter-stay car park.

There is no realistic option for drivers to repeatedly drive round and round looking for a parking space nor indeed a need, given the availability of Sainsbury's. A long loop is possible, but it is

circuitous, and not wide enough for continuous traffic flow, although the latter is partly due to those who know the area well using these roads as free long-stay parking.

The upshot is that the majority of motorists coming to shop in Selston have one pass to find a parking space on the High Street, failing which they either park in one of the supermarket car parks or continue through to shop elsewhere or not at all.

Council proposal

The current situation and the council’s proposal are summarised below. Should the proposal go ahead, existing machines will be reconfigured to charge the Band 3 rate of 50p per half hour. The discounted rates can be achieved either with the mobile phone App or by telephone, otherwise the full rate will apply.

District CPZs, 1-hour max stay free display ticket parking bays – to be replaced by two-hour max stay bays with charges as shown.			New emission-based charge		
Tariff	Duration	Existing	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
Mon – Sat 9am - 5pm	30min	£0.00	£0.05	£0.38	£0.50
	1hr	£0.00	£0.10	£0.75	£1.00
	1hr 30min	n/a	£0.15	£1.13	£1.50
	2hrs	n/a	£0.20	£1.50	£2.00
Sunday	All day	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

Council justification

The Council’s documentation shows that the high-level intention is that parking charges contribute towards the aims of the Corporate Plan for a cleaner and more sustainable environment, and happy, healthy and independent lives. The following policies are mentioned:

- Croydon's Air Quality Action Plan 2017-22
- Council Parking Policy incorporating elements of the National Clean Air Strategy 2019
- The London Mayor's Transport Strategy 2018, which prioritises public health and aims to reduce car dependency and promote sustainable modes.
- The national government’s commitment to achieve “net zero” carbon emissions by 2050 and cessation of the sale of internal combustion vehicles from 2030.
- Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022
- Croydon Local Plan
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Local Implementation Plan (LIP3)
- Croydon Cycling Strategy 2018-23

That is a long list of weighty documents. They address global, national, and local issues of great importance. The facts are not in dispute, for example that there is a causal relationship between exposure to air pollution and health. However, the fundamental question of whether there is any evidence that the proposed changes will make any difference to any of the issues is not addressed.

Local solutions

The Council's justification for removing free parking bays treats the whole borough as a single entity. This submission puts forward the case for Selsdon, other High Streets will share some of its characteristics but not others. Indeed, the need for local plans to reflect local circumstances is fundamental.

The word local appears 140 times in the Mayor of London Transport Strategy March 2018, for example "including local people in local decisions to provide the greatest benefit for everyone". Or Public Health England's *Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health* from 2017 which emphasises the need to understand local conditions. Local does not mean Croydon with its around 400,000 residents and many High Streets. Local means solutions for areas like Selsdon. Local means solutions that have the consent of residents, local means taking into account local circumstances, local means policies that work, local means policies that do more good than harm.

The evidence

The broad assertions by the Council are that:-

1. The increased cost will cause people to use public transport, walk or cycle.
2. Some people will be influenced to give up their cars.
3. That air pollution will be reduced.

To take these in turn, the presence of the free Sainsbury's car park at the western end refutes this argument. For the motorist that is so highly sensitive to cost that a £2 parking charge is crucial, there is a free alternative just yards away. The proposal merely moves the less well-off motorists to Sainsbury's leaving the High Street parking bays for the better off.

On the second point, the evidence of many years is that car ownership and usage is rather insensitive to cost. Motorists do not in general price the costs of a journey to include the fixed costs of ownership. The Council may wish it were different, claiming that car drivers can save thousands of pounds by giving up their cars, but wishing it were different does not make it so. The idea that a motorist that has not responded to annual costs of thousands of pounds will respond to a £2 parking charge is fanciful, especially given the free alternative at Sainsbury's, or, for those who know the area well, adding to the crowded residential streets close by.

Lastly, the DEFRA report from 2016 "Exploring and appraising proposed measures to tackle air quality" assessed fourteen possible policy areas for their effectiveness in reducing nitrogen dioxide. Parking and traffic management came next to the bottom.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence report from the same year found no evidence on the impact of control measures relating to travel planning other than in travel to work. What studies there were did not assess economic consequences and there were warnings of unintended negative consequences.

Evidence of impact on emissions by changes to car running costs is that very large increases indeed are required to have any significant impact. It is even found that such policies can have unintended consequences and be undermined by, amongst other things, the availability of uncontrolled off-street parking. It is not an issue in Selsdon, the ability to cruise around is restricted and the simple park in Sainsbury's option makes it unnecessary, but it may well apply elsewhere in Croydon. Studies have found that air pollution was increased by up to 50% by vehicles cruising round looking for a low-cost parking space.

Economic impacts

The proposed change is claimed to offer some advantages. The examples of ladies' hairdressers and lunch time restaurants are quoted whose customers may require a parking period of greater than one hour. Whilst this may be so, the number of ladies' hairdressers is low and the sit-in lunch time trade for longer than an hour is small. Indeed, since the closure of the Spanish restaurant, it is smaller still. The existence of a free Sainsbury's car park offering two-hour parking so very close renders this argument irrelevant.

Any advantage to these businesses is more than outweighed by the damage to others. The restaurants and coffee shops, many offering take-away; dry cleaners; post office; hardware and others rely on a flow of customers whose stay on the High Street is short.

Discussion with these businesses on whether one hour is the right duration for a free period confirmed this was the case. In a response to the declining profitability of the High Street businesses have reduced staff, which has resulted in customers having to queue to be served. A typical customer visit is to two or three shops making a thirty-minute stay too short. A concern if the current proposal is implemented is that customers will underestimate the time required to shop, resulting in parking tickets, further discouraging people from using local businesses.

Removing the free period will not only discourage shoppers from Selsdon by driving on through, it will also drive more shoppers to the Sainsbury's supermarket. Failing to find a parking space on the South side of the High Street where the majority of spaces are, is simply remedied by parking in Sainsbury's. Thus, even though the customer may still shop in Selsdon, there is now a disincentive to buy from the local High Street retailer. More purchases for such as newspapers, and sandwiches will be driven to Sainsbury's accelerating the decline of the High Street. The big winner of the proposed change is likely to be Sainsbury's.

As an aside, a number of High Street businesses have already changed their way of operating to reduce the need for parking. A dry-cleaning business, the longest standing business in Selsdon High Street, now offers a home delivery. The Post Office offers a home pick-up for parcels. The High Street is adapting, in these cases to reduce the need for parking, but the many and various other challenges more than compensate. The High Street is struggling, taking away the free parking period is yet another burden which in Selsdon will have no positive and significant negative impact.

Current issues

The current arrangements are not without issues. In common, I suspect, with other High Streets, meter feeding - drivers returning every hour to 'renew' their ticket, whilst not commonplace, does occur. Double parking, especially at the Western end whilst not regular is far from unheard of.

Another feature of Selsdon is a raised slip road in front Selsdon Parade on the Northern side of the High Street. It is low-use but parking which blocks this entirely does occur. The small number of parking spaces on this side of the High Street can also result in illegal parking blocking the exit from the slip road.

There is also the already mentioned issues of some residential roads being clogged with parked cars. A parking review would be welcomed by residents.

What the residents think?

The recently completed [Selsdon Community Plan](#) shows the concerns of residents. The views of over a thousand people were gathered. The High Street and the shops were high on the list of things that were valued. Amongst concerns were the decline of the High Street, the mix of shops and need for parking enforcement.

Not only will the Council's proposal drive more business to Sainsbury's, accelerating the decline of the High Street, it will adversely affect the mix, shifting the High Street towards the offerings that Sainsbury's does not have – fast food. This is the opposite of the wishes expressed by residents.

What the shopkeepers think?

The shopkeepers that I have spoken to were unanimously in favour of retaining the current arrangement, even those businesses of a type that the Council's report claimed would be helped. Critical to the High Street's future success is encouraging footfall. The Council's proposal will do the opposite.

Conclusion

All the evidence points one way. The proposal by Croydon Council to remove the one hour free parking bays from Selsdon High Street is without merit:-

- It will not achieve the Council's aims.
- It will damage local businesses.
- It will make the situation for the struggling High Street worse.
- It is not supported by shopkeepers or residents.

The current arrangement should be retained.

Appendices – Illustrations of the Selsdon High Street



Selsdon High Street from the crossroads at the Western end. Note the slip road to the left



Selsdon clock outside Sainsbury's looking East, showing proximity to the High Street



Selsdon High Street from the Eastern end



Selsdon High Street on the Northern side looking West towards Sainsbury's