**RECENT CAR PARK SURVEY WAS FLAWED – IGNORING ITS USE DURING THE EVENING AND SUNDAYS**

**Assessing parking need on non-peak demand is like**

**removing most of the ski lifts at Val d’Isère because they’re not used in summer**

The night-time economy is extremely valuable to Chiswick’s bars, pubs and restaurants. Yet a recent survey of Chiswick’s car park excluded its use after 7pm. It also excluded its use on the fourth Sunday, or any non-market Sunday, presenting an even more skewed view of its value to Chiswick.

Funded by Hounslow council, the flower market team and Birchgrove (which now has planning approval to develop the former police station which overlooks the car park) the survey selected hours during which parking fees are paid to the council, including hours of very low use (from 7am to 9am when most shops aren’t open) and excluding evening hours when the car park is free to use and therefore of no value to the council, but has a significant value to the local economy.

All three funders of the survey have their own reasons for reducing the use of the car park. Birchgrove wants a better entrance and outlook. The flower market team wants flexible space in the car park for seating and performances seven days a week. The council is profoundly anti-car with Cllr Katherine Dunne wanting to reduce traffic in the borough by 50 per cent, without any assessment of the effect it would have on Hounslow’s local economies – its four town centres, of which Chiswick is the borough’s second largest, and the smaller parades that support its residents’ needs.

Having been lobbied about the importance of the car park by Chiswick businesses whose customers need to drive, Cllr Joanna Biddolph (Chiswick Gunnersbury ward) carried out a second snapshot survey on a Friday evening (26th January 2024) to assess its value during hours excluded from the flawed co-commissioned survey. She asked drivers how much they had spent while parked in the car park.

* the survey lasted from 19.50 to 21.50 on Friday, 26th January 2024
* the weather was very cold but dry
* 38 drivers stopped to be surveyed
* 15 drivers refused to be surveyed
* five drivers were passing through including to check out the town slowly for another visit
* three changed their minds as they couldn’t find a space and were leaving for another destination (they refused directions to another parking area in Chiswick)
* two drivers left to find a space somewhere else (they knew Chiswick well)
* most cars were multi-occupied
* drivers came from Acton, Barnes, Brentford, Brook Green, Chiswick (mostly Grove Park or Southfields), Ealing, Greenford, Hounslow, Isleworth, Kew, Northfields, north-west London, Richmond, Shepherd’s Bush and Sheen with one from Derby and another from Essex
* from 18.30, vacated spaces were immediately filled; from 18.50 the car park was full, with cars hovering waiting for drivers to leave; several drivers left around 19.10 and all spaces were filled immediately which was then the pattern throughout the survey
* at 21.50 when the survey ended, 39 spaces were full, with drivers still arriving and parking
* it was a Headliners Comedy Club night at the George IV which was full at the end of the survey
* the two highest spends were £260 (food shopping, eating out, cinema tickets) and £150 (food shopping and eating out) and the two lowest spends were £4 (in a betting shop with a pay out of £12) and £1 (on chocolate after an emergency call-out to a store).
* drivers surveyed spent a total of £2,556; the total estimated spend by all cars parked was £6,188

Drivers parked to shop for food and wine, to eat out or to grab a takeaway. One was collecting her teenage daughter from the store where she worked but did not spend here; another parked while seeing her daughter in a show at ArtsEd and did not spend here. A delivery driver filled a van with deliveries from a food store to fulfil orders. There was a brisk turnaround of motorbike and bike delivery couriers.

The average spend was £67 per car. Assuming that the 15 drivers who refused to take part had spent similarly, and that the occupants of the 39 remaining cars also spent similarly, that would add another £3,632spent that evening, making a total of £6,188 spent in our night-time economy by drivers parked in the car park that night.

The results of the survey are below in full.

“The argument that parking should be removed to match the average or low level of use, ignoring peak use hours, is like removing most of the ski lifts at Val d’Isère because they’re not used in summer,” Jo said. “As the survey on a Friday evening showed, the night-time economy is extremely important to Chiswick. As photos taken that evening and on other evenings prove, the car park is similarly full. The car park was also full all day on the fourth Sunday in January when there was no market. All these hours were excluded from the co-commissioned survey. The measure shouldn’t be whether the car park has a value to Hounslow council from car park charges but the value it has to Chiswick’s retail, hospitality and service economy. The co-commissioned survey was flawed.

“As for directing people to spaces on side roads, which the co-commissioned survey sees as the solution, the Bond Street car park was full throughout the survey time and residents of several nearby roads are petitioning to extend their CPZ hours so spaces will become even scarcer. The fact is that parking must be easy, not a confusing set of signs and directions to out of sight roads which might not have empty spaces. If parking in the central car park is reduced as proposed, it will put off people who want to spend their money here. They will spend it in other retail areas, to Chiswick’s huge disadvantage. Chiswick has been a destination since Roman times. We should celebrate and support that, not deliberately damage its success and survival.”

Comments by drivers included:

* “We live near two Nando’s in Hounslow but the food at the Chiswick Nando’s is so much better; the service is also really good. That’s why we come here.”
* “I wouldn’t come if I couldn’t park.”
* “They’re deluded”, “That’s ridiculous”, “That’s the dumbest thing ever”, “That makes me livid” and “It’s already impossible to park on Sundays” drivers said in response to the explanation that there were proposals to reduce unrestricted spaces from 50 to 19.

**ENDS**

**Note to editors**

* Photo attached of the car park on the evening of Friday, 26th January 2024
* Photos attached of the car park on the evenings of 24th and 25th January 2024
* Cllr Joanna Biddolph’s previous survey about the value of the car park is here: https://www.chiswickgunnersburyconservatives.org.uk/news/parking-survey-shows-economic-value-chiswicks-central-car-park-and-where-customers-come

**THE VALUE OF CHISWICK’S CAR PARK TO ITS NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY**

Survey hours were 19.50 to 21.50 on Friday, 26th January 2024. The weather was very cold but dry.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Spend** | **On what** | **Where was the driver from** |
| £10 | Takeaway | Chiswick |
| £100 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £70 | Food shopping | Chiswick |
| £40 | Food shopping | Chiswick |
| £30 | Didn’t say | Isleworth |
| £1 | Chocolate | Outside the area |
| £11 | Takeaway supper | Brentford |
| £150 | Food shopping | Chiswick |
| £30 | Takeaway supper | Chiswick |
| £100 | Food shopping | Brook Green |
| £260 | Food shopping, wine shopping, drinks, cinema | Kew (former Chiswick resident) |
| £60 | Food shopping | Southfields |
| £30 | Takeaway supper | Chiswick |
| £150 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £100 | Food shopping | Acton |
| £30 | Coffee and drinks  | Ealing |
| £40 | Eating out | Derby |
| £150 | Eating out, food shopping | Chiswick |
| £12 | Eating out | Chiswick (Blue Badge driver) |
| £150 | Food shopping, eating out | Essex |
| £32 | Food shopping | Chiswick |
| £100 | Eating out | Hounslow |
| £60 | Eating out | Kew |
| £30 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £50 | Eating out | Northfields |
| £96 | Eating out | Beyond Chiswick |
| £100 | Eating out | Sheen |
| £100 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £60 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £100 | Eating out | Brentford |
| £30 | Eating out | Chiswick |
| £20 | Eating out | Barnes |
| £4 | Betting shop (£12 pay out) | Chiswick |
| £60 | Takeaway | Hounslow |
| £50 | Eating out | Ealing |
| £70 | Eating out | Greenford |
| £50 | Eating out | North-west London |
| £20 | Eating out | Shepherd’s Bush |
| **TOTAL SPENT: £2,556**  |
| **AVERAGE PER CAR £67.26** |
| **PLUS 39 CARS PLUS 15 DRIVERS WHO REFUSED = 54 x AVERAGE SPEND PER CAR = £3,632** |
| **TOTAL FOR ALL CARS SEEN PARKED (some left, others arrived, overall would be higher): £6,188** |