



BRIEFING PAPER

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Pavement and on-street parking in England

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Summary

This paper outlines the general legal position on what is colloquially called ‘pavement parking’ and the measures available to the police and local authorities to tackle it.

The term ‘pavement parking’ can be confusing as it can be used to describe a range of practices – from on-street parking at the side of the road, to parking either partially or entirely on the pavement. For the purposes of this paper, ‘pavement’ parking is used to describe parking where one or more wheels of a vehicle are on the pavement; other parking at the side of the road is described as ‘on-street’ parking.

There is no national prohibition against either on-street or pavement parking except in the latter case in London and more widely in relation to heavy commercial vehicles.

However, it is an offence to *drive onto the pavement*, whether with intention to park or not. Because this is a criminal offence, as opposed to the vast majority of civil parking offences, it is enforceable by the police, not the local authority. There have long been concerns about the extent to which this is enforced.

Local authorities and the police may act to tackle on-street and pavement parking in various ways, such as under legislation governing obstruction and dangerous parking; designating limited areas of ‘no pavement parking’ through a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO); or establishing a special parking area.

Recently there have been campaigns to introduce a complete civil ban on pavement parking, enforceable by local authorities. Pavement parking causes an obstruction to pedestrians and particular difficulties for blind and partially-sighted people, wheelchair and mobility scooter users and those with pushchairs and prams. This has led to a number of Private Members’ Bills being introduced in Parliament to provide to some degree wider control over pavement parking. The most recent of these was Simon Hoare’s [*Pavement Parking \(Protection of Vulnerable Pedestrians\) Bill 2015-16*](#), which was debated in the House of Commons on 4 December 2015.

Information on other parking-related matters can be found on the [Roads Topical Page](#) of the Parliament website.

1. Are on-street and pavement parking legal?

The general principle is that it is legal to park *at the side of* the road (on-street parking) everywhere except where there are local authority restrictions in place.

Driving onto the pavement to park is illegal (see section 1.3, below), but there is an issue about how widely this is enforced as it is a criminal offence (i.e. enforced by the police) rather than a civil offence (enforced by the local authority). Almost all other parking offences are now civil ones.

There is separate legislation banning pavement parking in London and more widely for heavy commercial vehicles.

Some on-street and pavement parking will be seen as causing an obstruction and can be dealt with by the police or traffic wardens. However, most enforcement will be by local authorities who have assumed control for decriminalised/civil parking enforcement under Part 6 of the [Traffic Management Act 2004](#). As part of this process they can designate 'Special Parking Areas' (SPAs) in which vehicles parked on street or on the pavement can be ticketed for contravening parking regulations (e.g. parking on a yellow line), rather than for causing an obstruction.¹ Some local authorities, i.e. [Exeter](#), took their own Private Act powers to ban pavement parking within their areas.

Government guidance is available for all local authorities on alternative, non-legislative measures to discourage pavement parking. This includes suggestions such as guardrails, the planting of trees and the placement of bollards on pavements. Such physical measures, whilst perhaps costly in the first instance, have the advantage of being self-policing and self-enforcing.²

1.1 London

Pavement parking is banned in London, under section 15 of the [Greater London Council \(General Powers\) Act 1974](#), as amended. It is defined as parking a vehicle so that "one or more of its wheels" is resting on:

- (a) any footway;
- (b) any land (not being a footway) which is situated between two carriageways in any such road; or
- (c) any grass verge, garden or space not falling within the foregoing paragraph (a) or (b)

The maximum fine is £100 (level 1 on the standard scale).

It is a defence under section 15(3) if one can prove that a vehicle was parked:

- in accordance with permission given by a constable in uniform; or

¹ for full details of the parking policy framework, see HC Library briefing paper [SN2235](#)

² DfT, [Pavement parking](#) (Traffic Advisory Leaflet TAL 04/93), 1993

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- for the purpose of saving life or extinguishing a fire or meeting any other emergency; or
- for the purpose of rendering assistance at the scene of an accident or a bona fide breakdown involving one or more vehicles, and such assistance could not have been safely or satisfactorily rendered if the vehicle had not been so parked; and the vehicle was not left unattended at any time while it was so parked; or
- for the purpose of loading or unloading goods, and the loading or unloading of the vehicle could not have been satisfactorily performed if it had not been so parked; and the vehicle was not left unattended at any time while it was so parked.

1.2 Heavy commercial vehicles

Goods vehicles with an operating weight exceeding 7.5 tonnes, are prohibited from parking on verges, footpaths or the central reservations of roads under section 19 of the [Road Traffic Act 1988](#), as amended.

The maximum penalty for committing an offence under section 19 is a £1,000 fine (level 3 on the standard scale). Parking in breach of section 19 is also a non-endorseable Fixed Penalty offence, for which the fine is £30 (£40 in London).³

It is a defence under section 19(2) and (3) if one can prove that a vehicle was parked:

- in accordance with permission given by a constable in uniform; or
- that it was parked in contravention of this section for the purpose of saving life or extinguishing fire or meeting any other like emergency; or
- that the vehicle was parked on the verge of a road or on a footway for the purpose of loading or unloading, and that the loading or unloading of the vehicle could not have been satisfactorily performed if it had not been parked on the footway or verge, and that the vehicle was not left unattended at any time while it was so parked.

1.3 Driving on the pavement with intention to park

Although parking is generally permitted at the side of the road, except where there are restrictions or a specific offence has been committed, driving actually *onto* the pavement or footway (to park or otherwise) is an offence under section 72 of the [Highways Act 1835](#) (see also section 28 of the *Town Police Clauses Act 1847* under 'obstruction', below).

Wilkinson's Road Traffic Offences explains:

Under the Highways Act 1835, s.72, it is an offence wilfully to ride or drive on the footway, even though the driving may last only for a few seconds (*McArthur v Jack* 1950 S.C.(J.) 29). The

³ Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) are effectively temporary stays of prosecution and allow an individual to agree to a Fixed Penalty and subsequent immunity from prosecution for the offence [offences listed in Schedule 3 to the [Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988](#), as amended; fine amounts in Schedule 1 to the *Fixed Penalty Order 2000* (SI 2000/2792), as amended]

offence will apply to pedal and motor cyclists. Driving across the footway to get to a private park was held to be an offence in the absence of proof of long use or of its being a way of necessity (*Curtis v Geeves* (1930) 94 J.P. 71) but in *Vestry of St Mary, Newington v Jacobs* (1871) L.R. 7 Q.B. 47 the owner of land adjoining the highway was held to be entitled to convey machinery on trolleys over the pavement into his premises.⁴

However, *Wilkinson's* also cautions that:

Not all police forces take active steps to enforce [this law], but many more are now doing so in order to prevent subsequent parking on the pavement. Quare whether there is a common law right to divert onto the pavement in cases on necessity when the carriageway is blocked.⁵

⁴ *Wilkinson's Road Traffic Offences*, 27th ed., 2015, para 6.252

⁵ *ibid.*, para 6.252

2. Remedies

2.1 Obstruction

Local authorities and the police have the power to remove a vehicle if it is illegally parked, causing an obstruction or has been abandoned.

The power to remove vehicles is given to the police by sections 99-102 of the [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#), as amended, and by the [Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986](#) (SI 1986/183), as amended, made under sections 99 and 101 of the 1984 Act. The powers of removal under section 99 include vehicles which are parked illegally, have broken down and those which cause obstruction, danger or potential danger. If therefore it can be shown that a vehicle is illegally parked, causing an obstruction or is abandoned, the local authority and the police may remove it under this legislation. It should be pointed out, however, that they do not *have* to remove a vehicle in any of these three cases, merely that they *may* do so.

A vehicle can only be illegally parked if there are parking restrictions operating in the area. In other cases one would have to show a vehicle was causing an obstruction. The police can remove vehicles which are causing an obstruction and there are a number of statutes and regulations which allow proceedings to be brought for obstructing the highway. These include:

- Section 137 of the [Highways Act 1980](#), as amended (wilfully obstructing the free passage of a highway);
- Section 28 of the [Town Police Clauses Act 1847](#), as amended (wilfully causing an obstruction in any public footpath or public thoroughfare); and
- Regulation 103 of the [Road Vehicles \(Construction and Use\) Regulations 1986](#) (SI 1986/1078), as amended (causing or permitting a motor vehicle or trailer to stand on a road so as to cause any unnecessary obstruction of the road).

There is a good deal of case law on the general issue of 'obstruction' and 'unnecessary obstruction'. Extracts provided below demonstrate the breadth of the offence and reinforce the importance of individual circumstances in any case:

Obstruction can be caused by actual physical obstruction of an essential line of traffic ... or it may be unreasonable use of the right of stopping even though there is plenty of room for other traffic to pass [...]

While there is obviously an offence if there is a serious obstruction in fact, unreasonable use of the highway calculated to obstruct and whereby persons might be obstructed may suffice for a conviction without evidence that anyone has actually been obstructed (*Gill v Carson* (1917) 81 J.P. 250, a case under the Town and Police Clauses Act 1848, s.28). In *Nagy v Weston* [1965] 1 All E.R. 78 parking a van for five minutes in a wide, busy street near a bus stop and refusing to move was held to be an obstruction under what is now s.137 of the Highways Act 1980 [...]

It was again emphasised in *Wade v Grange* [1977] R.T.R. 417 that what amounts to obstruction is primarily a question of fact and that the Divisional Court is only concerned with correcting mistaken applications of the law [...]

Whether particular facts amount to an unreasonable use would depend very much on the magistrates' local knowledge of the importance of the particular road; a long stay may not be out of order in a quiet residential side road, but it would be otherwise in a busy shopping street. An obstruction only comes into existence if there is an unreasonable use of the right of stopping (*Nagy v Weston* above), and it is a matter of degree (*Dunn v Holt* (1904) 68 J.P. 271) [...] In *Absalom v Martin*, where the nearest public car park was several hundred yards away, the defendant parked partly on the carriageway and partly on the footpath and was endeavouring to carry on his business of bill posting in such a way as to cause the least inconvenience to pedestrians and other road users. A defendant who sold fruit from a barrow for 15 minutes, the barrow taking up 5ft in a 24ft road and customers causing further obstruction, was held to have been rightly convicted, as continuous selling does not mean that the barrow was not standing longer than was necessary (*Whiteseide v Watson* 1952 S.L.T. 367). In *Bego v Gardner* 1933 S.L.T. 110 the conviction was upheld of a man who sold ices from his van parked in a cul-de-sac frequented by the public.

Leaving a car unattended for three hours, which was found to cause danger to the public and annoyance to the residents but which was not specifically found to cause an obstruction, was held to constitute the offence of leaving a car unattended for longer than was necessary to load or unload it (*Henderson v Gray* [1927] S.C.(J.) 43). A motorist parked his car in a line of cars in a street and left it there for five hours. He argued that, as he parked in a line of cars, he was not causing an unnecessary obstruction. The High Court held that he clearly caused one (*Solomon v Durbridge* (1956) 120 J.P. 231) ... Parking for five hours on a grass verge between the footpath and the wall was held to cause an unnecessary obstruction in *Worth v Brooks* [1959] Crim. L.R. 885, but in *Police v O'Connor* [1957] Crim. L.R. 478, quarter sessions held that it was not an unreasonable use of the highway to park a large vehicle outside the driver's own house in a cul-de-sac [...]

In *Seekings v Clarke* (1961) 59 L.G. 268, a case under what is now s.137 not involving a motor vehicle, it was said that anything which substantially prevented the public from passing over the whole of the highway (including the footway) and which was not purely temporary was an unlawful obstruction, subject to an exception on the de minimis principle. This case is discussed in *Wolverton UDC v Willis* [1962] 1 All E.R. 243.⁶

2.2 Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

A highway authority can ban parking in a specific area by way of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) made under Parts I and IV of the [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#), as amended.

⁶ op cit., *Wilkinson's Road Traffic Offences*, paras 6.204-6.211

Section 2 of the 1984 Act sets out what TROs may be used for and it includes almost anything prohibiting, restricting or regulating the use of a road by traffic or pedestrians, including parking.

There are three types of TRO: permanent, experimental and temporary. While permanent TROs require a lengthy consultation process, experimental orders, as precursors to permanent orders, can be implemented more easily and quickly.

Full details on the procedure for making TROs can be found in HC Library briefing paper [SN6013](#).

2.3 Parking restrictions

There are two types of on-street parking controls:

- 'Prohibited' parking is where there are yellow lines or clearway restrictions in operation and it is an offence to park on the adjacent pavement or verge; and
- 'Permitted' parking is where there are meter bays or resident bays.

Decriminalised parking enforcement (DPE) was introduced in England (outside London) in 1995. Under this system parking offences became civil rather than criminal offences and local authorities took responsibility for parking in their areas.

On 31 March 2008 this was renamed civil parking enforcement (CPE) and some changes were made to the enforcement and appeals process.

In areas where local authorities have taken over responsibility for parking, cars parked on the pavement can be ticketed as contravening the parking regulations imposed by the local authority rather than for causing an obstruction.

A general outline of the decriminalised/civil parking regime is given in HC Library briefing paper [SN2235](#)

2.4 Selling or repairing vehicles

Part 2 of the [Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005](#) introduced two new offences:

- to prevent individuals parking vehicles on the street in order to sell them; and
- to prevent individuals parking vehicles on the street in order to carry out repairs in the course of a business.

Under section 3 it is an offence for a person to park motor vehicles on a street, where the vehicles are parked merely in order to be sold. There must be two or more vehicles on the same street, no more than 500 metres apart, for the offence to be committed. The provision is not aimed at an individual selling a car privately; he has to be acting as part of a business.

Under section 4 it is an offence to carry out 'restricted works' to vehicles on a road.⁷ Again, it does not apply to someone who can show he was not repairing the vehicle in the course of a business – although this is so only as long as it does not cause annoyance to persons in the area. A second exception is where the repairs arose from a breakdown or accident and are carried out promptly.

The maximum penalty for both offences is a fine of £2,500 (level 4 on the standard scale); fixed penalties also apply.

⁷ 'restricted works' are works for "the repair, maintenance, servicing, improvement or dismantling of a motor vehicle" or "the installation, replacement or renewal of any such part or accessory"

3. Legislating for 'a total ban'

3.1 Pre-1991

Prior to 1991 successive governments and individual Members of Parliament sought ways of combating pavement parking.

In 1974 Parliament provided for a national ban on pavement parking in urban areas in section 7 of the [Road Traffic Act 1974](#). If implemented, this would have prohibited all parking on verges, central reservations and footways on 'urban roads'. The Secretary of State could have exempted certain classes of vehicles and individual local authorities could have made Orders within their own areas to exempt from the national ban certain streets at all times or during certain periods.

However, full implementation required that the ban had to be brought in by secondary legislation and this never occurred. Successive transport ministers argued that there were difficulties for local authorities and the police in finding the resources to carry out the necessary policing and enforcement work. In 1979 the then Government decided to defer implementation indefinitely.⁸

In December 1986 the Department of Transport sought comments on a discussion paper, *Pavement Parking - Curbing an Abuse*. The paper looked at the reasons for pavement parking and the problems it caused. It put forward four options to tackle the problem involving a mixture of bringing the 1974 Act into force, providing more scope for TROs and making time for more Private Acts from individual authorities. However, nothing further happened.

When the 1972 Act was repealed in 1988, section 36B (the 'national ban' mentioned above) became, without any amendment, section 19A of the *Road Traffic Act 1988* and the matter rested there. Regulations to put into effect the national ban were not brought forward because of the potentially enormous costs to local authorities and police of securing proper policing and enforcement for the ban. It was finally repealed by section 83 and Schedule 8 of the [Road Traffic Act 1991](#).

3.2 2014-

As explained above, the current arrangements essentially give local authorities the powers to ban on-street and pavement parking by introducing parking measures and prohibitions in their areas. Successive governments have taken the view that it should be for local authorities to take these decisions based on specific local needs.

The most recent government action came in 2011 when the DfT wrote to councils "prompting them to use their powers to prevent parking on the pavement where it is a problem", and giving all councils in England permission to use signs to indicate a local on-street/pavement parking ban without the need for special signs authorisation from the

⁸ [HC Deb 27 July 1979, cc631-2W](#)

Department each time they wanted to put a pavement parking ban in place.⁹

There has since been a renewed push to reintroduce a nationwide 'blanket ban'. This has been led by charities such as [Guide Dogs for the Blind](#), and [Living Streets](#) and has garnered widespread support. They argue that:

Pavement parking affects people across the country. For many people — including those who have sight loss, parents with babies or toddlers in buggies, and wheelchair users — this is a serious problem. For someone who is blind, having to step off the pavement into the road because of a badly parked car can be extremely frightening.¹⁰

Research commissioned for Guide Dogs for the Blind in 2014 found that of 407 local councillors from England and Wales questioned,

- 89% agreed that pavement parking creates safety risks for pedestrians;
- 61% said that pavement parking was a problem in their area; and
- 48% did not think that existing measures available to local authorities (such as parking restrictions and physical barriers) were sufficient to prevent pavement parking.¹¹

There were two bills seeking to address this issue in the 2014-15 Parliamentary session: one by the former MP Mark Lazarowicz to devolve powers to introduce a pavement parking ban to the Scottish Government and one by former MP Martin Horwood to introduce a blanket pavement parking ban in England and Wales.¹²

Mr Lazarowicz's Bill was instigated by problems Scottish MSPs have had introducing their own legislation in this area (see, e.g. Sandra White MSP's proposed [Responsible Parking \(Scotland\) Bill](#)). The Bill received Second Reading in the House of Commons in September 2014, but progressed no further.¹³

Mr Horwood's Bill did not proceed past First Reading and was not debated in the House.

Simon Hoare MP sponsored the [Pavement Parking \(Protection of Vulnerable Pedestrians\) Bill 2015-16](#), which received Second Reading on 4 December 2015. The Bill provided a framework for local authorities in England and Wales to consult on and subsequently to ban pavement parking across wide areas, subject to certain exemptions to be set out by the Secretary of State in secondary legislation and guidance. Mr Hoare explained how his Bill would work as follows:

This will not be a blanket ban for pavement parking. In medieval or older town and city centres with Victorian terraces and the like, popular ownership of the motorcar was never envisaged. To make the carriageways wide enough for emergency vehicles, bin lorries

⁹ DfT press notice, "[Freeing pedestrians from pavement parking blight](#)", 21 February 2011

¹⁰ Letter to *The Times*, 12 September 2014 [from campaign groups, charities, politicians and others]

¹¹ Guide Dogs for the Blind, *Guide Dogs survey of Councillors*, February 2014

¹² [Responsible Parking \(Scotland\) Bill 2014-15](#) and [Pavement Parking Bill 2014-15](#)

¹³ [HC Deb 5 September 2014, cc612-24](#)

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and other large vehicles, it is important to ensure a balance is struck between allowing the free movement of vehicles and securing the free movement of pedestrians.

The major difference in the Bill is that clause 3 sets aside specific provision for the Secretary of State for Transport to provide regulations and guidance to local authorities about who to consult—who are statutory consultees—and how to consult before it is introduced. It is not a blanket ban and nor is it an automatic obligation for local authorities to make use of the purposes set out. It will be up to the local authority, working in concert with local councillors, communities, freight transport associations, road haulage associations and the emergency services, to decide precisely where it is either appropriate or inappropriate to permit or to prohibit the parking of motorcars on pavements. This is not the dead hand of the state. This is not a licence for pettifogging officialdom, and nor is it a cash cow for local authorities to try to get in a bit of extra revenue. It will be proportionate and it will be sensible.¹⁴

However, at the end of the debate Mr Hoare withdrew his Bill, having secured from the Minister a commitment to convene a round table in 2016 to discuss footway parking issues, and to undertake some work to “examine more closely the legal and financial implications of an alternative regime, and the likely impacts on local authorities”.¹⁵

¹⁴ [HC Deb 4 December 2015, c648](#)

¹⁵ [ibid., cc659-60](#)

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