

PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER:P06/2178

Type of approval sought	Full Planning Permission
Ward	Brierley Hill
Applicant	Westfield Shoppingtowns Ltd
Location:	MERRY HILL CENTRE AND THE WATERFRONT, MERRY HILL, BRIERLEY HILL, WEST MIDLANDS
Proposal	INTRODUCTION OF A CAR PARK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO INCLUDE ENTRANCE AND EXIT BARRIERS, ENHANCED ENTRANCE LIGHTING GENERAL CAR PARK MODIFICATIONS, VMS ROAD SIGNS AND EXTERNAL PAY STATIONS. ALSO THE PERMANENT USE OF ENGINE LANE AND FORMER RMC SITE FOR STAFF CAR PARKING TO INCLUDE RESURFACING, LIGHTING AND CCTV COVERAGE.
Recommendation Summary:	APPROVE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

1. This application relates to all car parks open to the public and staff at both the Merry Hill Centre and the Waterfront at Brierley Hill.

PROPOSAL

2. This application relates to the physical works related to the introduction of a car parking management system at the above locations. Such works will include the installation of entrance and exit barriers, enhanced entrance lighting, alterations to car park layouts, variable message systems (VMS) on road signs and external pay stations. This application will lead to the introduction of car parking charges at the centres.
3. In detail this application will result in:

- The introduction of 34 new entrance and exit barriers to all existing surface and multi-storey car parks.
 - 31 new VMS road traffic signs, both new and replacement of existing road signs located on internal private roads and adjacent public highways. Such signs will be electronically updated to indicate to drivers when car parks are full and directions to take to alternative car parks and to give more general highway information.
 - 11 new VMS car park entry signs indicating locally at entrances that car parks are full or have spaces.
 - 29 external pay station locations.
 - 15 internal pay station locations.
 - Extension to existing Purple 4 car park to accommodate displaced public car parking due to the provision of entrance and exit barriers. (No net increase in parking numbers).
 - Extension to Waterfront East car park to accommodate displaced office car parking due to the provision of entrance and exit barriers. (No net increase in parking numbers).
4. As a consequence of these operational changes, provision is to be made for staff car parking outside of the existing dedicated car parks. Permission is also therefore sought for the permanent use of sites for staff car parking on land off Engine Lane and the former RMC site off Level Street. These sites will be surfaced, have new lighting and CCTV coverage.
5. Car parking charging levels will be set for comparability with surrounding centres.

HISTORY

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6. There is not considered to be any planning history of relevance to this application.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

7. Following the despatch of direct notification of nearby occupiers, statutory publicity and display of site notices, eleven letters of objections from businesses or their representatives occupying the Merry Hill Centre have been received. Such objections are based upon the following grounds:

- Damage to the vitality and viability of the centre and occupiers businesses.
- No guarantee that the owners would not maximise income streams from public and staff parking charges.
- That there is no proven need for car park charging.
- The centre would not be comparable with other regional shopping centres which have free car parking.
- The motives for charging relate to designation as a town centre.

OTHER CONSULTATION

8. The Head of Public Protection and the Group Engineer – Development have no objection to the development, the latter, subject to condition.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

9. RSS 11 Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands, June 2004
PPG 13 Transport
Regional Spatial Strategy – Phase 1 Revision,
The Black Country Study – Policy PA11A
The Local Transport Plan
The Dudley Parking Strategy 2006
UDP Policy AM1 An Integrated, Safe Sustainable and Accessible Transport strategy

ASSESSMENT

10. In the absence of direct development plan policies for Brierley Hill, which were removed from the draft plan as a result of Regional Planning Guidance in 2004 (RSS11), this application must be considered in the light of National, regional and local planning guidance.
11. PPG 13 Transport recognises that the availability of car parking has a major influence on the means of transport people choose for their journeys. Paragraph 50 states ' policies on parking should be co-ordinated with parking controls and charging set out in the local transport plan, and should compliment planning policies on the location of development'. And paragraph 57 'car parking charges should be used to encourage the use of alternative modes of transport'.
12. The Local Transport Plan and The Dudley Parking Strategy, 2006, recognises that car parking at the Merry Hill Centre and the Waterfront is free to use whereas car parking in town and city centres elsewhere is charged. The Action Plan for the Supply and Management of parking in centres' on page 6 of the Parking Strategy includes the intention to work with Westfield to introduce a charging mechanism for use of public car parks at Merry Hill Centre and employee parking at the waterfront.
13. Most importantly from a planning perspective, Regional Spatial Strategy – Phase 1 Revision – The Black Country Study, Policy PA11A, Brierley Hill / Merry Hill and Dudley recommends the introduction of a car parking management regime at Brierley Hill / Merry Hill, including the use of parking charges, compatible with those in the Regions network of major centres.
14. This application has been submitted with a detailed Transport Assessment that has tested the impacts of barrier systems on traffic flows and the highway network. Such information has been audited by the Group Engineer – Development who has confirmed that the assessment is robust and that no adverse impacts will arise, but that benefits to the free flow of traffic on the local highway network may accrue.

15. The main thrust of business objections to this application relate to commercial interests and judgements which must be made by operators of the site. For a number of years it has been apparent that the location has enjoyed a perceived unfair advantage over other local centres where car parking is charged and it is clear that planning policy at all levels seeks to redress this balance and encourage the use of alternative traffic modes to the private motor car. To this end, currently and in the future, the operators of the sites will contribute significantly to enhanced public transport facilities to and from the site.

CONCLUSION

16. The introduction of the comprehensive Car Park Management System will have no adverse impacts on the highway network and may enable improvement to the free flow of traffic as a result of variable message signs. The proposals comply with national Regional and Local Planning Policies by encouraging restraint in the use of the private motor car and increase in the use of alternative means of transport whilst providing comparability with local and major centres to give balanced vitality and viability in accordance with PPG 13 Transport, RSS11 Regional Planning Guidance, The Black Country Study , Dudley Parking Strategy 2006 and UDP Policy AM1.

RECOMMENDATION

17. Approval subject to the following conditions:

Reason for Approval

The introduction of the comprehensive Car Park Management System will have no adverse impacts on the highway network and may enable improvement to the free flow of traffic as a result of variable message signs. The proposals comply with national Regional and Local Planning Policies by encouraging restraint in the use of the private motor car and increase in the use of alternative means of transport whilst providing comparability with local and major centres to give balanced vitality and

viability in accordance with PPG 13 Transport, RSS11 Regional Planning Guidance, The Black Country Study , Dudley Parking Strategy 2006 and UDP Policy AM1.

Conditions and/or reasons:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
2. No car parking charges shall be introduced prior to the completion of variable message signing works which shall first have been provided through a S278 agreement.
3. Car parking charges shall not commence until details of the regime have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority as being comparable with existing centres. Such charges shall thereafter be received annually on a similar basis unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority to remain comparable with such centres.

