

**CABINET  
15TH JULY 2014**

**DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNITY  
AND ENVIRONMENT  
HEAD OF COMMUNITY'S  
REPORT NO. COMM1413**

## **BLUE BADGE PARKING - REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- This paper seeks approval to charge all Blue Badge holders using Council car parks and to add an additional 100% to the time shown on their ticket when displayed with the Blue Badge. It is also proposed that the 65 plus parking concession is retained.

### **BACKGROUND**

- In December 2012, Cabinet agreed to keep our Blue Badge parking scheme under review as part of the wider review of parking services and in light of any further Government changes to the welfare benefits system.
- Whilst the welfare reform is still ongoing, the Systems Thinking review of parking including the Blue Badges scheme has been completed. The DVLA are also abolishing tax discs for all vehicles during October 2014, which means we have to make an initial decision as automatic Blue Badge customers will be unable to comply with our current conditions for parking by displaying their exempt tax disc.
- To help free up disabled bays by reducing abuse and ensure financial concessions funded by Council tax payers are targeted to those in most need, the Council reviewed its Blue Badge parking in its car parks through a cross party Task and Finish Group.
- In April 2012, the Council introduced a new scheme for Blue Badge holders, which allows automatic Blue Badge holders to continue to park free in our car parks, provided they display their Blue Badge along with a free tax disc issued due to the occupant's disability, or a permit that can be obtained from the Council. The permit can also be used when travelling in other people's cars provided the Blue Badge is displayed at the same time.
- A further addition to the scheme was introduced in May 2013, which provided free parking to non-automatic Blue Badge holders that demonstrated they were on the higher rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance.

- All other Blue Badge holders must pay the parking charge. Recognising the additional time required by disabled people to carry out their activities, they can apply to the Council for a free smartcard, which will add 50% additional time to their ticket. If they already have a smartcard, the Council transfers any credit on this card to the new one.
- There are around 1,000 people in Rushmoor receiving automatic entitlement to a Blue Badge due to severe disabilities and receive financial support from the Government through the higher rate component of the disability living allowance or the war pensioners Mobility supplement. They are also entitled to a free vehicle tax disc. Evidence showed that these people are more likely to be unemployed and face financial hardship, and should make their case to the government for an increased allowance.
- Around 2,000 non-automatic Blue Badge holders have some form of moderate walking difficulties or were over 65 years when assessed by their GP. These people do not receive any Government financial support related to mobility. Those under 65 are more likely to be in work with those over 65 having had a working career and are less likely to be financially disadvantaged.
- There is no evidence to suggest that non-automatic Blue Badge holders should receive any financial concessions when compared to other residents who have the similar expense of running a car and paying for parking.
- The proposals were subject to public consultation prior to introduction and received general support from the majority of respondents including disabled and senior citizen groups.
- Since the introduction of the scheme, 1,044 automatic Blue Badge holders obtained free Council permits (estimated at 600 individuals) and 1,052 non-automatic Blue Badge holders (estimated at 600 individuals) purchased a Rushmoor smartcard, allowing them additional time on their paid for ticket. Both the permit and smartcard are linked to the renewal times for their Blue Badge (every 3 years) and therefore the above take-up figures include repeat visits, with an estimate of actual number of individuals given in brackets.
- The trial period proved successful in that Blue Badge holders are still using our car parks in preference to free on street parking, with the levels and perceptions of abuse reducing. However, the additional work with the focus groups has shown there still needs to be further improvement.

## **BLUE BADGE REVIEW**

- As part of the systems thinking review in Parking, the above scheme for Blue Badge holders to access disabled parking was mapped (Appendix 1). When seen from the customer's perspective the scheme seems complex and with different payment requirements applying to automatic and non-automatic Blue Badge holders, gives rise to some confusion.

- The original work of the Environment Panel Task and Finish Group has recently been supplemented with further work carried out with car park customers on what matters to them about Parking (Appendix 3), with availability of spaces, good value, wider bays and convenience of most importance.
- Information gathered on how many of our customers' requests for services were related to Blue Badge enquiries between April and September 2012, when the scheme was first introduced, shows that around 600 were looking for clarification on how the scheme operates and whether they qualify (Appendix 4).
- Reviewing both the mapped flow and the data indicated that if all Blue Badge holders were charged for parking with a concession of additional time provided, the system could be improved.
- The review team re-designed the flow (Appendix 2), to make it more straightforward and equitable for customers. Rather than placing Blue Badge holders in a special 'scheme', the team recognised that people who need to use disabled parking facilities are still customers but with different requirements regarding access and mobility and should pay for the service regardless of disability.
- The principles used during the re-design were:
  - Ensure it is centred around the needs of the customer
  - Ensure there is fairness for all customers
  - Give the customer what matters to them e.g. greater accessibility and availability of bays
- The value steps of the re-design were:
  - Customer parks their car
  - Sees the clear signs
  - Pays for parking (with cash, a pre-payment card or by phone when available)
  - Displays their ticket (disabled customers will also display their Blue Badge)
  - When enforcing, the CEO will add on extra time to the face value of the ticket or the pay by phone notification of a Blue Badge customer – there is no onus on the Blue Badge customer to do anything different to other customers
- The advantages to such a scheme means that any customer, whether able-bodied or disabled (apart from exceptional circumstances), residents or visitors, could access our facilities at any time and comply with our conditions of parking, with Blue Badge holders receiving any additional time benefits provided by the Council.
- It removes the need for permits and smartcards to be issued and for additional special tariffs to be installed within the machines. The scheme would also apply as part of the pay by phone trial.

- The re-design proposed that all Blue Badge holders now pay for parking but that these customers would be given 100% additional time to carry out their activity.
- The rationale for this re-design is:
  - The key issue for Blue Badge holders is availability of disabled bays (which are wider than the standard bays). At the moment, there are 67 disabled bays throughout our 18 Farnborough car parks, which comprises 3% of the total (2,498 bays) and 27 disabled bays throughout our 7 Aldershot car parks, which comprises 2% of the total (1,098 bays).
  - We have recently completed a survey of all our car parks with the view to enhancing the disabled facilities and preparation is now underway in making the necessary alterations to ensure greater availability. Initially this will result in an increase from 94 to 110 disabled bays.
  - If everyone pays for parking, the financial incentive to abuse the scheme and use disabled bays is reduced, thus keeping them free for those to whom the extra width of bay is most valuable. However, this will not deter those mis-using the bays for convenience, as they are often closer to the service they want to access or who feel there is less likelihood of their car being damaged. This will need to be tackled by increased visits from Civil Enforcement Officers.
  - The extra time allowed takes into account the additional time it takes for Blue Badge holders to carry out their activities due to their mobility issues.
  - The tariffs used by Blue Badge customers using smartcards were also assessed to better understand their requirements, with the majority (95%) purchasing just one or two hour tickets.
  - Charging all Blue Badge holders applies a fairness to all, which includes able-bodied customers, removing concerns of discrimination.
  - Consideration has been given to the economic impact on the town centres, mindful that shopkeepers could suggest that charging has the potential to discourage trade. However, Blue Badge customers will continue to receive concessions on street, which remains free of charge, and are more accessible than car parks. They also receive free parking in the nearby private supermarket car parks.

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

- To test the proposal of charging all Blue Badge holders, the review team held three focus groups in October 2013, comprising a mixture of 45 able-bodied and disabled customers (both automatic and non-automatic) and carers. The team asked them to consider parking for Blue Badge holders and three possible options, noting that none of these options would affect their right to free parking on-street:

- Continue with the current system
- All Blue Badge holders receive free parking in car parks
- All Blue Badge holders pay for parking in car parks but with 100% extra free time, to take account of mobility issues
- There were a mixture of views during the discussions (Appendix 5), however, the focus groups raised most concerns regarding the key issues that mattered to them i.e. availability and accessibility, and requested:
  - An increased number of disabled bays in accessible locations
  - Easier access to Pay & Display machines
  - Regular monitoring of disabled bays to ensure availability (whilst acknowledging that payment by all would reduce abuse of disabled bays)
  - Clearer signage in the car parks.
- As mentioned above, a car park survey was recently carried out to address some of these issues and we are now close to implementing many of the changes.

## OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Given the above information, the Environment Panel considered the following options:
  - **Option one** - Revert to free parking for Blue Badge holders
    - ❖ This would provide free parking for all Blue Badge holders in our Council car parks on displaying their Blue Badge, without needing to contact the Council.
    - ❖ However the views of Blue Badge holders is that the pilot of charging non-automatic Blue Badge holders has been successful in terms of reducing perceived abuse (estimated that nationally, 20% of Blue Badges are abused) and freeing up wide bays.
    - ❖ It would also not be equitable in that all customers who can afford to run a car should pay for their parking particularly as this has not been shown to be a priority for Blue Badge holders in either national or local surveys..
  - **Option two** - continue with the current scheme with the following changes:
    - ❖ Automatic Blue Badge holders would need to obtain a permit from the Council in lieu of the free tax disc to continue to receive free parking. The majority have already visited the Council offices to obtain a permit.

- ❖ Non-automatic Badge holders would no longer be required to obtain a smartcard to receive the additional 50% time added to the ticket by the machine. The Civil Enforcement Officer would add the additional time to the ticket when a Blue Badge is displayed. The survey work has shown that increasing the additional time to 100% is unlikely to impact on the Councils income but could increase dwell time particularly in our town Centre's.
  - ❖ This approach will significantly reduce the need for Blue Badge holders to contact the Council offices and enable non-automatic Blue Badge holders using the car parks for the first time and paying with cash to immediately benefit from the added time.
- **Option three** - charge all Blue Badge holders but apply double the time.
- ❖ A concession of double the time (100%) would be added, which the Civil Enforcement Officers would do when they view a Blue Badge alongside the purchased ticket. The majority of the focus groups supported this approach in that it was more equitable with all customers that can afford to run a car being required to pay, with the added time concession taking account of mobility issues.
  - ❖ The scheme would be fairer and accessible to first time users, easier to understand, significantly reduce administration for both customers and our customer's service unit, and continue to help reduce fraud and abuse by reducing the financial incentive linked to Blue Badge parking in our car parks.
  - ❖ Whilst Blue Badge holders would still have the option of parking free on street, as has been shown by the pilot this scheme is unlikely to increase Blue Badge on street parking as Blue Badge holders prefer to use the car parks which provide the wider bays and are safer than on street parking.

## **65 PLUS CONCESSION**

- Consideration was also given to continuing the 65 plus concession,, which was linked to the concessionary fare scheme now operated by Hampshire County Council. The scheme was retained to encourage visits to the town centres and is not advertised. Around 500 people each year take up the concession of a £50 smartcard for £25.

## **TIMETABLE**

- With the removal of tax discs, this Council need to introduce a new scheme during October 2014 which will include amending the traffic regulation order and promoting the new scheme.

## **PROPOSAL**

- The Environment Panel considered the previous work and that of the parking systems thinking review team, which included feedback from both Blue Badge and non-Blue Badge holders using our car parks.
- They concluded that it should be recommended to Cabinet that the Council charge all Blue Badge holders using Council owned car parks but provide 100% additional time on the parking ticket when displayed with the Blue Badge.
- The scheme would be more equitable in that all those that can afford to run a car are required to pay. The 100% added time recognises that those with mobility issues can take longer to carry out their activity. It will be simple to understand only requiring the customer to purchase a ticket and display it with their Blue Badge in whichever car they are travelling.
- The Panel recommended a range of additional improvements including:
  - Signage in car parks is made clearer
  - The new scheme is well promoted
  - More regular monitoring of Blue Badge bays is carried out to further reduce abuse
  - The Council provide as many additional Blue Badge bays as is practical and keep this under review
  - Ticket machines are easy to access
  - Pay by phone is introduced as soon as possible to provide customers with payment options.
- The Panel also recommended that the 65 plus concession should continue along with better promotion of the scheme.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (NET OF VAT)**

- As car park income is currently susceptible to downward pressure from economic conditions and due to the low take up of smartcards (which activates the disabled tariff), we are unable to identify an upward trend in income that might be attributable to Blue Badge charging.
- Based on the income generated from Blue Badge holders using smartcards it is estimated that the income for either of the payment options (retain current scheme or charge all Blue Badge holders) will generate around £35,000 pa.
- The continuation of the 65 plus concession is with the current take being subsidised by this Council at around £10,000 pa. However there is no guarantee that if, it is withdrawn, that this Council would achieve additional income, as customers may choose to park elsewhere, which could even result in the current income being reduced by up to £10,000.

- The cost of revising the signage, promotion of the new scheme and additional improvements will be met from existing budgets.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- In line with the views of the Environment Panel, the Cabinet is recommended to approve that:
  - (i) all Blue Badge holders using Council car parks are charged from October 2014, with 100% additional time added to any ticket displayed alongside a Blue Badge and that the additional improvements shown above are actioned; and
  - (ii) the 65 Plus concession continue and is better promoted.

**Peter Amies**  
**Head of Community**

# Appendix 1

## BLUE BADGE HOLDERS EXPERIENCE IN OUR CAR PARKS:

(RESIDENTS + VISITORS)

**READS SIGNS:**

- UNDERSTANDS & IS ABLE TO COMPLY

↓

DISPLAYS BLUE BADGE ALONGSIDE:

- 1) FREE TAPE DISC
- 2) PERMIT
- 3) TICKET

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

**READ SIGNS:**

- UNDERSTANDS BUT NOT ABLE TO COMPLY \*
- DON'T UNDERSTAND, THEREFORE ABILITY TO COMPLY IS UNKNOWN

↓

OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- 1) BUY TICKET
- 2) DISPLAY BLUE BADGE ONLY
- 3) CALL CSU (WORKING HRS ONLY)
- 4) WEBSITE
- 5) LEAVE CAR PARK

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

**DIDN'T READ SIGNS & ASSUMED FREE PARKING**

↓

DISPLAYS BLUE BADGE ONLY

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

↓

RISKS INCORPORATE PCN.

**NON BLUE BADGE HOLDER EXPERIENCE IN OUR CAR PARKS:**

READS SIGNS

↓

BUYS & DISPLAYS TICKET

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

**\* WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?**



Parking charges for Blue Badge holders

From 1 April 2012

You can park free if you display:

- a valid Blue Badge (any category vehicle subject to the usual Blue Badge restrictions)
- a valid Blue Badge (any category vehicle subject to the usual Blue Badge restrictions)
- a valid Blue Badge (any category vehicle subject to the usual Blue Badge restrictions)

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## WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?

PHONE (OFFICE HRS)

↓

ADVISED TO BEING IN DOC OR SCAN

F2F (OFFICE HRS)

↓

ADVICE GIVEN MAY NEED TO COME BACK WITH DOC.

EMAIL (OFFICE HRS)

↓

ADVISED TO BRING IN DOC. OR SCAN

WEBSITE

↓

INFORMATION ONLY

↓

ELIGIBLE FOR FREE PARKING

↓

ISSUE A PERMIT

↓

BACK TO OUR CAR PARK

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FREE PARKING BUT YOU CAN GET:

DISABLED SMART CARD ISSUED

↓

ADVICE ON A VOUCHER GIVEN & TOP UP

↓

BACK TO OUR CAR PARK

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

DISABLED SMARTCARD & GET CONCESSION ISSUED

↓

ADVICE ON A VOUCHER GIVEN & TOP UP

↓

BACK TO OUR CAR PARK

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

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## INTRODUCTION OF ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE CHANGES

MARCH TO MAY 2013

FREE PARKING FOR DISC. BLUE BADGE HOLDERS WHO GET AA.

NON BLUE BADGE HOLDER EXPERIENCE IN OUR CAR PARKS:

READS SIGNS

↓

BUYS & DISPLAYS TICKET

↓

GOES ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS

IDENTIFY CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE BEEN ISSUED A DISABLED SMARTCARD.

↓

WRITE TO CUSTOMERS TO ADVISE OF CHANGES + HOW TO APPLY

SMARTCARD HOLDERS

↓

TWO SEPARATE LETTERS

SMARTCARD HOLDERS + CLAIMED CONCESSION

↓

RELEVANT REFUND GIVEN + PERMIT ISSUED

PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT (PIP) TO BE INTRODUCED IN JUNE 2013.

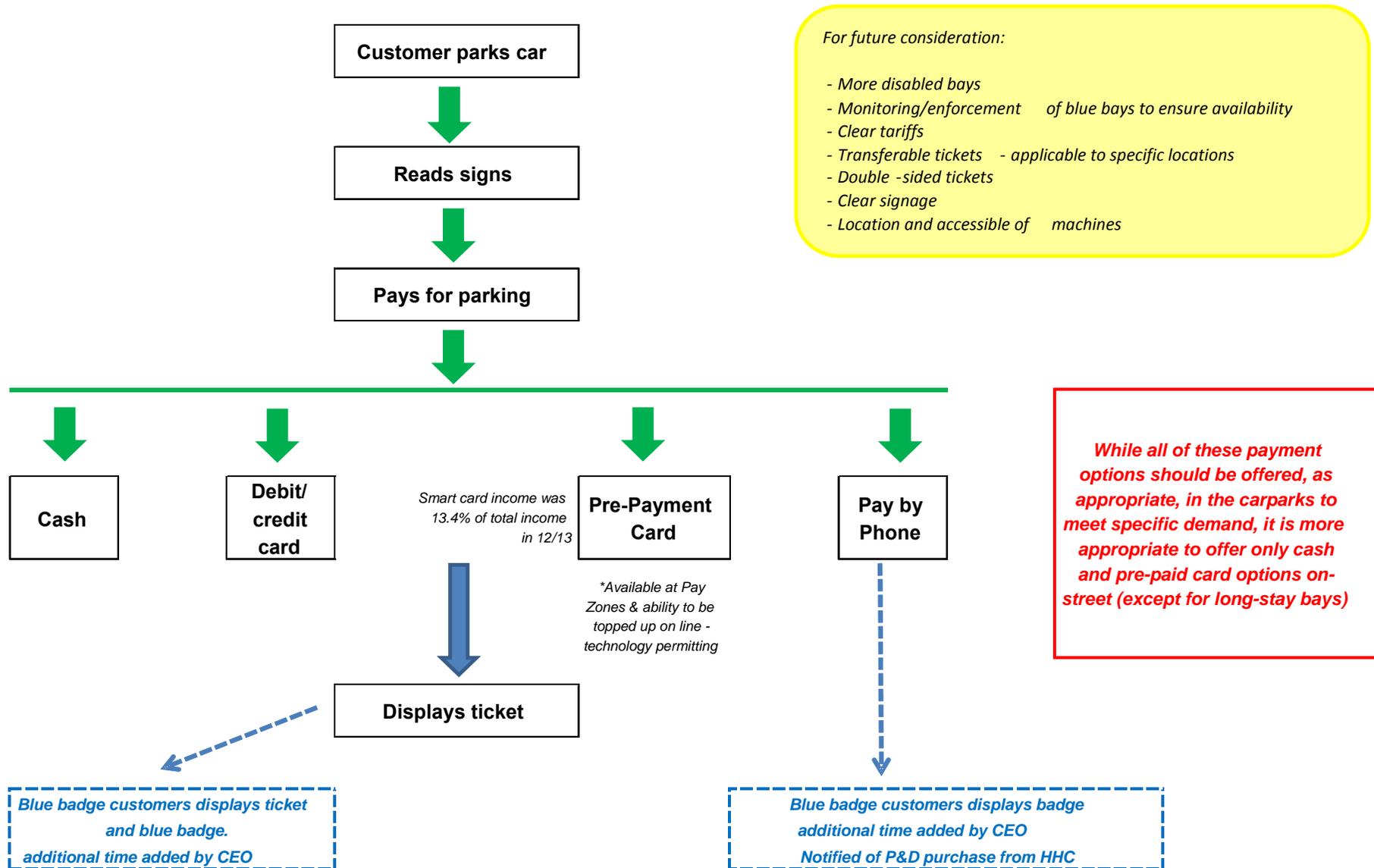
UNCLEAR AS TO IMPACT ON CUSTOMERS. EITHER: - NEGLIGIBLE CHANGE OR

- ALL BB HOLDERS TO PAY - ALL WILL THEN NEED TO APPLY FOR SMART CARD

NOTE: ENV. PANEL RECOMMENDED TO BE REVIEWED WHEN CABINET SYSTEM THINKING REVIEW IS COMPLETE.

15:25 28/MAR/2013

## Re-Designed Flow for Payment Options, incl. Blue Badge Customers



### Appendix 3: What Matters to Customers about Parking

#### Speaking to Customers in October 2012: Key Concerns

Availability of Spaces:	46	29.9%
Getting good value for money:	33	21.6%
Accessibility & Width of Bays:	25	16.3%
Convenience:	21	13.6%
Safety:	8	5.1%
Blue Badge Issues:	7	4.5%
Other:	9	5.8%
No Issues:	5	3.2%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Appendix 4: Customers' Requests for Service

*(Value Demand: work that meets our purpose*

*Failure Demand: When we fail to do something, or something right, for a customer)*

### Customers' Requests: 11<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> October 2012

Access Channel	No. of Contacts	No. of BB Contacts	% of BB Contacts	No. of Value Demand	% of Value Demand	No. Failure Demand	% Failure Demand
Phone:	549	8	1.46%	1	12.50%	7	87.5%
F2F:	316	23	9.24%	16	69.57%	7	43.75%
Post:	249	3	1.20%	0	0%	3	100%
Web:	223	6	2.69%	0	0%	6	100%
Emails:	173	5	2.89%	1	20%	4	80%
Total:	1,510	45	2.98%	18	40%	27	60%

### Customers' Requests: 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Work Area	No. of Contacts	No. Value Demand	% Value Demand	No. Failure Demand	% Failure Demand
Total Overall:	34,200	12,847	37.5%	21,353	62.5%
<b>Blue Badge:</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>99.01%</b>
- F2F Enq:	470	0	0%	470	100%
- Phone Enq:	114	114	0%	114	100%
- Disabled Bays:	22	6	27.27%	16	72.73%

## **Appendix 5: Feedback from Focus Groups:**

### ***Continue with Current Two-Tier System:***

- 'It's vague and confusing'
- 'It's stressful, demanding and humiliating'
- 'Is it free or not free?'
- 'I wouldn't be able to read that while I'm driving'
- 'It's very complicated'
- 'How many types of Blue Badge holders are there?'
- 'What is a permit?'
- 'It's discriminatory and disrespectful'
- 'I'm completely confused by it'
- 'It doesn't make a lot of sense'
- 'I can't work out whether to pay or not'
- 'If people see a BB logo, they will automatically assume parking is free'
- 'You're assuming people want to read these signs'
- 'Are we not allowed to use the word disabled anymore?'
- 'There is too much to take in in one go'
- 'Scheme needs to be free or everyone pays – this half-way house is not helping'.

### ***All Blue Badge holders receive free parking in car parks:***

- 'There will be increased fraud'
- 'It gives you versatility to change'
- 'This isn't fair, we should all contribute'
- 'Why did you introduce charging in the first place?'
- 'Some BB holders can afford to pay for parking'
- 'If bus passes are free, then so should BB parking'
- 'BB has always meant free – you're already disadvantaged by needing to have a BB in the first place'
- 'Might increase abuse of current spaces'
- 'Seems fairer'
- 'It's expedient'
- 'Some people resent people with disabilities getting cheaper/free cars and parking'
- 'Good to give concessions as need to visit doctors, hospitals, etc. more frequently'
- 'Far too many people now have BBs – scheme is open to abuse'.

### ***All customers pay for parking, but Blue Badge holders get 100% extra free time to take account of mobility issues:***

- 'Everyone knows where they are'
- 'It's fair'
- 'Disabled people should not be automatically classed as poor'
- 'It's discriminatory'
- 'Why should able-bodied but poorer people subsidise BB holders?'
- 'You will be hitting a big mountain'
- 'Blue Badge holders are not necessarily poor'
- 'It's simpler'
- 'Convenience is more important than paying'
- 'It's fair and recognises mobility issues'
- 'I feel guilty that I don't pay, when others have to'
- 'If you do that, it will increase the amount of people parking on street or parking in Sainsbury's'
- 'Paying is sometimes an issue but having enough, accessible spaces is a bigger issue'
- 'I prefer to park in a car park than on the street because I feel safer – I don't care if on street is free'