

Candidate D evidence

Should There Be Dedicated Parking Spaces For The Elderly?

Older Adults encounter many difficulties as they age, from isolation to bereavement of spouses, so the issue they don't need is having to walk a considerable distance to the front door of their local Supermarket. The sad reality is, this is what is happening. It's a given that as you get older, you develop certain problems like arthritis that will inhibit your ability to walk distances, so what can we do about this? To me the answer is clear, remove some of the masses of disabled spaces and introduce a brown badge system for Older Adults.

I understand the need for disabled spaces, however I personally feel that there are too many of them in certain shops. Take Tesco Port Glasgow as an example, most of the spaces closest to the door are disabled. This leaves Older Adults to find a space that will be further away from even footpaths and the main entrance. Older Adults need most of the facilities a Disabled bay offers, like access to an even walkway, wider spaces and proximity to doors. Without an even walkway, Older Adults become more likely to fall. This may not seem like much, however, 1 in 3 Adults over 50 die within 12 months of fracturing a hip, and this increased death risk stays with the person for 10 years. They are also 5 to 8 times more likely to die within 3 months of the fracture.¹ Older Adults also require the additional width that disabled bays have in order to allow them to get walking sticks or Zimmer Frames in and out of cars.

I know that some people think that older adults should just apply for a disabled badge if it is that much of a hassle, but then that comes with being branded as disabled for something that is purely age related. If you have a badge system that is given to you when you reach a certain age, it will help Britain's older adults stay mobile, and most importantly, stay connected. Most of our Older Adults who have suffered a fall, whether at home or outside, have a fear of going anywhere in case they fall again. Providing access to a safe, level walkway reduces this fear. Isolation is also a killer of Older Adults in Britain. So how could we implement a badge system like this? There are two ways I can think of: The first being remove some Blue Badge Spaces and replace them with a Brown Badge Space, the second way being, allow Disabled Spaces to also be used by someone who is a Brown Badge holder. One thing I feel we shouldn't do, however, is tell the Older Adult to get a disabled badge. Growing old shouldn't be a disability, however we should make it easier for the person.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/why-hip-fractures-in-the-elderly-are-often-a-death-sentence-95784>

There is a way to make these ideas simpler, by re-organizing the layout of the car park we can easily fit these spaces in. By moving Parent and Child spaces to the rear of the car park, we can fit in the “Brown Badge” spaces, while keeping the larger bays so that parents can get their kids into and out of prams.

There are only a few places where this system is in use. In the London Borough of Hillingdon, “Residents over 65 with a Brown Badge can use dedicated Brown Badge bays located in council owned car parks, on street and in some privately-operated car parks in Hillingdon.” This information I sourced from the Hillingdon Council website². On this website, they address that these bays are “located close to car park exit points and, where possible near to the pay and display points.” We can see that Hillingdon Council have been able to implement this successfully, with the British Parking Association citing over 7000 users of the scheme.³ Enfield Council also have a similar system but have set the age limit at 70 years and up.⁴ I have been unable to find of any similar system north of the border. Both of these systems work well and have a considerable amount of users, so it begs the question, “Why hasn’t this been implemented nationwide?”

Unfortunately, I was unable to find a clear answer to this, however, I feel it is because Older Adults with difficulty walking will ask to be assessed for a Disabled Badge so the requirement for another type of badge would be redundant. My Auntie has a Disabled Badge, not due to any real disability, but because she can’t walk long distances, something which comes naturally with ageing. I don’t think it’s fair to hand a Disability card to someone whose issue is purely age related. With an ageing population, more older people will develop a disability, such as a heart condition, and will take up Disabled Spaces, so by introducing spaces for able bodied elderly persons, this will relieve some of the stress from the Blue Badge system. I feel that this is a simple solution that will help our older adults to keep connected with family and friends, as by knowing they won’t have to walk far to get to the front door of their local coffee shop, the hairdresser or a restaurant will help make them want to leave the house as they aren’t put off by the distances from the spaces. Isolation is a serious issue in the UK with “Hundreds of thousands”⁵ of older adults dealing with isolation, a condition that can lead to depression which is a growing factor of dementia.

² <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/brownbadge>

³ <https://www.britishparking.co.uk/News/brown-badges-go-on-street>

⁴ <https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/parking/parking-permits/elderly-persons-parking-permits/>

⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/loneliness-in-older-people/>

So although the elderly not being able to park may seem like a minor problem at first glance, you can clearly see that it can cause more severe problems than sore legs when having to walk to get to the door of Tesco.