

Car Parking Ticket Machine Survey

Report for Uttlesford District Council

January 2022



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Executive Summary

Plumb Associates were commissioned by Uttlesford District Council to undertake public consultation on new card only payment car park ticket machines during December 2021.

Uttlesford District Council are responsible for the management of 10 car parks that charge tariffs, four in Saffron Walden, four in Great Dunmow and two in Stansted Mountfitchet.

The Council has planned for some time to upgrade the ticket machine in the car parks, replacing the current old stock with new machines that would offer cash and card payment options. Unfortunately, a spate of damage to and theft from the ticket machines during the summer and autumn of 2021 resulted in many ticket machines being left out of order. It was agreed that these would be upgraded with a card payment only option in light of the risk of future cash thefts from the machines. It was agreed to trial the upgraded machines and to then provide a comprehensive report to the Council's Cabinet setting out the feedback from users of the machines, ticket sales, comments and complaints and possible future options.

This report presents the results of the public consultation held in the car parks in December 2021. A key aim of the consultation was to identify the opinions of people in the car parks who have just used the new upgraded ticket machines and to report on any problems arising from the upgraded ticket machine.

A survey of users was undertaken in those car parks that only provide a card payment option during 6 sessions across 3 dates in December 2021. Three short main questions were agreed for the survey with Uttlesford District Council, to encourage more and quicker participation for busy individuals using the car parks, with further detailed answer options if participants were willing/able to answer. Everyone was asked to self-identify their age range for demographic purposes.

A key aim of the consultation was to review the use of the new ticket machines after a 3 month trial period, to see how people got on with card only payment machines and to ascertain whether there are problems with the new system.

The questions were:

- Q1.** How Easy was it to use the card payment ticket machine?
Very Easy Ok Difficult
- Q1 a.** If Difficult: What was the problem?
- Difficulty reading the screen
 - Took long time to process the card
 - Wouldn't read the card – I needed to insert before it would work
 - Ticket flew out of the slot onto the ground
- Q1b.** Is this the first time you have used the ticket machine?
Yes No
- Q2.** Do you have any concerns about using your card at the ticket machine?
Yes No
- If Yes what are your concerns?
- Age Brackets** 18-30 31-50 51-70 71+years

The survey data gathered shows a good mix across the age ranges.

Appendix 1 shows a summary of all results, which are discussed in further detail in Section 3 of this report.

1.0 Introduction & Remit

Uttlesford Council had planned to upgrade all the ticket machines in the car parks during the autumn of 2021 and were intending to upgrade them so that the machines took cash or card payments. On the 22nd of April there was an attempt to break into one of the Council's car park ticket machines. On the 22nd of June there was a successful break in, with money inside one Swan Meadows car park ticket machine stolen. Over the next few weeks the culprits returned often until had targeted all the Dunmow car parks and many ticket machines in Saffron Walden, followed by incidents in Stansted Mountfitchet. At the same time ticket machines across North Essex car parks were being repeatedly targeted.

Uttlesford Council lost income totalling thousands of pounds through these thefts (approximately £40,000 including loss of revenue from having to offer free parking whilst machines were out of order) and decided to change the machines to 'card payment only' as the only way to stop repeat thefts from the machines. The first of these new machines were installed in September 2021.

Three consultation sessions were agreed with Plumb Associates, three 3 hour morning sessions when car parks were busiest.

- Swan Meadow in Saffron Walden on 8/12/21
- Crafton Green in Stansted Mountfitchet on 9/12/21
- White Street in Great Dunmow on 13/12/21

With Uttlesford Council Economic Development team staff undertaking additional surveys at:

- Angel Lane in Great Dunmow on 8/12/21
- The Rose and Crown in Saffron Walden on 13/12/21
- Chequers Lane, Great Dunmow on 13/12/21

Surveys were conducted by Julia Plumb, director of Plumb Associates, assisted on the first morning by Linda Howells, Economic Development Officer for Uttlesford District Council and Linda Steer, Business Support Officer. Resulting data was captured and input/presented electronically in the graphs which can be seen at **Appendix 1**, and which is discussed in **Section 3** of this report.

2.0 Methodology

Uttlesford District Council (UDC) provides a total of 10 secure public car parks that charge tariffs within the district, providing parking for 1400 cars. The service provides almost 800 spaces for short stay visitors and more than 600 spaces for long stay commuters.

Uttlesford District Council chose the sites for the consultation exercise, the preferred methods of consultation (face-to-face), and the questions contained in the survey, which allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data to be recorded. This was informed partly by some public comments which had come into the council following the introduction of the new machines at the start of the 3 month trial. The survey was short and specific to:

- Reach a higher number of participants
- Avoid delaying people unnecessarily
- Focus solely on the impact of new 'Card Only' machine usage

2.1 Main Sites and Times Chosen

Sites were chosen by UDC for several reasons:

- The car parks were only offering card payment option at the ticket machines

- Early to mid-December would catch pre-Christmas shoppers, with the hope of speaking to a wide range of ages and experience of using the card only payment option.

2.1.1 White Street, Great Dunmow (Long Stay car park 172 spaces)

At the time of the consultation there were two ticket machines at either end of the car park. For the first morning of the survey Linda Steer (UDC) and Julia Plumb (Plumb Associates) manned an area near to one ticket machine each.

2.1.2 Crafton Green, Stansted Mountfitchet (Long Stay car park with 52 spaces)

There is one ticket machine at this location. The car park is close to a community centre (which was hosting a Christmas lunch on the day of surveying) and was used by people for easy access to Cambridge Road.

2.1.3 Swan Meadows, Saffron Walden (Long stay car park with 394 spaces)

There are 9 ticket machines throughout the car park. Surveying took place at the path adjacent to Park Lane, out of the car park towards the High Street. This afforded excellent access to a regular stream of people arriving and leaving the car park.

Additional Survey sites:

Uttlesford Council staff manned the following car parks for periods between 1 to 3 hours for additional surveying.

2.1.4 Angel Lane, Great Dunmow (Short Stay car park with 31 spaces)

There is one ticket machine at this location. Although small, it is located near a doctors' surgery making this a well used car park.

2.1.5 Rose and Crown, Saffron Walden (Short Stay Car Park with 27 spaces)

There is one ticket machine at this location. It is centrally located for access to the Market Square.

2.1.6 Chequers Lane, Great Dunmow 13th December (Short Stay Car Park with 67 spaces)

There are two ticket machines at this location, which serves a Day Centre, a local primary school and the High Street. Only one ticket machine is working and this is only offering a card payment option.

2.2 On Site Signage and Instructions

In early December 2021 the news had broken about the new Omicron COVID variant and there was concern throughout the country about the potential for increased COVID restrictions. Fortunately, there was a steady stream of visitors to the larger car parks, while the smaller car parks were much quieter with limited footfall.

For some this was the first time of using the new machines, although many people had been made aware through local news reports about the reasons and the change to 'card only' payment. Other people surveyed were regular car park users. This gave a good spread of opinion on ease of use of the new machines, and opinions on going cashless.

The machines themselves all had notices about the 'card only' payment methods.

Large signs are visible on the sides of machines, and the front of the machine has a coin graphic circled in red with a line through to indicate that coins cannot be used.

See Figures 1 and 2.



Figures 1 and 2 - Ticket Machine signage indicating card only and coins not accepted

2.2.1 Ticket Machine instructions

Uttlesford Council have been refining the on screen instructions during the trial to make them as simple to follow as possible.

Many respondents to the surveys found the instructions simple and intuitive, especially compared with other car parks which require car registration details to be entered as well as payment details. Those who were nervous about using the new system were talked through them by survey staff and found them to be easy enough to navigate. It was clear that some respondents were wary of any changes however simple, but most users were confident having used machines once that they would be able to follow the instructions again on their own.

3.0 Survey Results – Overall

All sessions saw a good flow of motorists using the chosen car parks, and the vast majority were happy to participate in the survey when approached. People on mobile phones or in conversations with others were not interrupted.

Only demographic information regarding the (self-identified) age of respondents was recorded as part of the survey; however, it was noted that there was a good mix in terms of gender at all sessions.

Site	Date	Number	Weather	Notes
White Street Great Dunmow	Wednesday 8 th Dec 2021 9am - 12 noon	121	Very Cold Windy	JP surveying Assisted P/T by LS (Uttlesford Council)
Angel Street Great Dunmow	Wednesday 8 th Dec 2021 10 -11am	9	Very Cold Windy	LH Uttlesford Council
Crafton Green Stansted Mountfitchet	Thursday 9 th December 9am – 12 noon	11	Very Cold	JP surveying Community Centre in use
Swan Meadow, Saffron Walden	Monday 13 th December 9am – 12 noon	52	Very Cold Damp	JP surveying Assisted P/T by LH
Rose and Crown, Saffron Waldden	Monday 13 th December 10 -11.30am	14	Very Cold Damp	LH Uttlesford Council
Chequers Lane, Great Dunmow	Monday 13 th December	33	Very Cold Damp	LS Uttlesford Council

	9.30am -12 noon			
Totals	Hours?	240 responses		

Table 1: Survey numbers overall by location

Despite allowing for a short turnaround time, additional comments were often given during the survey and where relevant these were captured and annotated into the electronic data survey records to provide additional context for responses. Responses of less than 1% of the response rate have not been commented on in this report, but the full details of all responses can be seen at **Appendix 1** and findings are discussed further from **Section 3.1 in Overall findings**.

Despite the prevailing cold weather conditions, and ongoing Covid pandemic the seasonal impact of pre-Christmas shopping was noted on the visitor rate for December.

3.1 Overall Survey Findings Summary

In reading the following statistics, please note % will be rounded up or down and may not always add to 100%.

3.1.1 Question

How easy was it to use the card ticket machine?

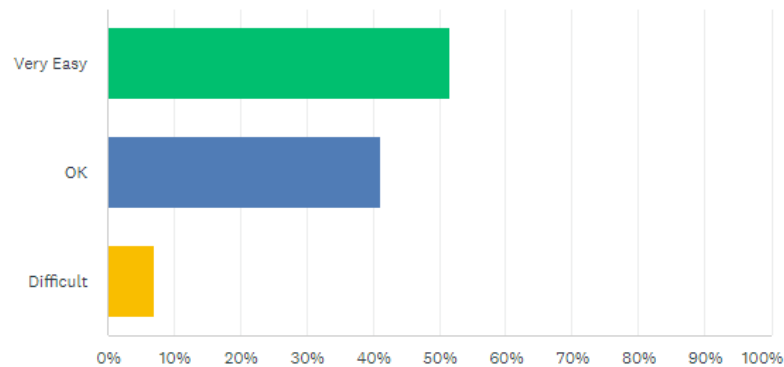
- 51% (123 of 238 of respondents to this question) found the card machines very easy to use.
- 41 % (98 of 238 respondents to this question) found them 'ok' to use
- 7% (17 of 238 respondents to this question) found them difficult to use

This gives a generally positive **92%** (221 of the 238 respondents) who **did not** find the machines difficult to use.

Considering the age of respondents included a high proportion of those in the 71+ age bracket this is encouraging feedback.

How easy was it to use the card payment ticket machine?

Answered: 238 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Easy	51.68%	123
OK	41.18%	98
Difficult	7.14%	17
TOTAL		238

Table 3: Survey Graph for Question 1

3.1.2 Optional additional question

If it was Difficult (using the ticket machines) what was the problem?

Through general conversation during surveys there was also feedback from respondents who hadn't found using the machines difficult. Their qualitative responses are also included here as useful anecdotal data and includes comments from 100 people.

44% (44 of the 100 people) who responded to this question found the time taken by machines to read connect to banks and process the card was too long. This also felt longer by people in the cold windy weather conditions.

9% (9 of the 100 people) who responded to this question found the windy weather caused the ticket they had purchased to fly away before being taken from the machine. This may be an issue with the ticket gripping mechanism of the machine, but for many respondents particularly in the 71+ age bracket did cause some concern having paid that they would be unable to retrieve their ticket, causing them to either pay again or risk getting a parking fine for not displaying a ticket on their dashboard.

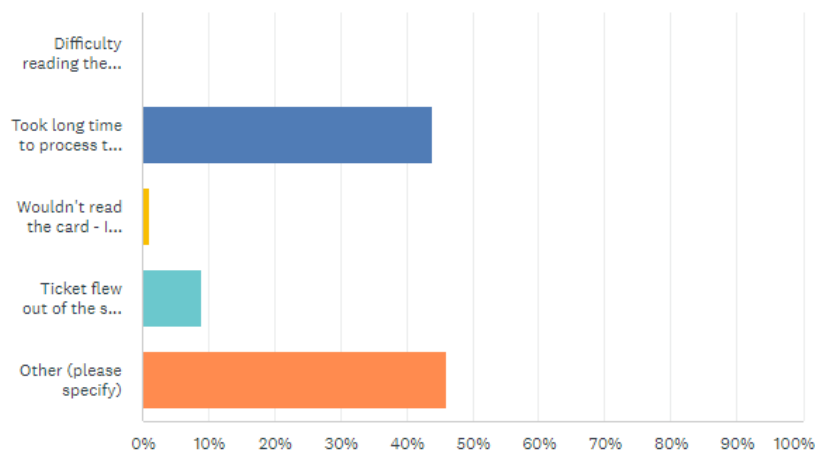
In the 'Other' responses section of this question there were predominately positive comments including

- 16 of 46 comments recorded (40%) mentioning being happy it was so easy, and saving worries about having cash for parking
- 6 of 46 comments recorded (13%) noting that ticket machines did not accept payment by digital wallet, including Apply Pay and Google pay. The rise in people moving to mobile only banking will increase in time so this needs to be addressed by the machine manufacturers.
- 5 of 46 comments noted (11%) had tried several cards or tried several times with one card before achieving payment success

Full details of the other additional comments can be seen at **Appendix 2**

If Answer is 'Difficult', what was the problem?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 141



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Difficulty reading the screen	0.00% 0
▼ Took long time to process the card	44.00% 44
▼ Wouldn't read the card - I needed to insert it before it would work	1.00% 1
▼ Ticket flew out of the slot on to the ground	9.00% 9
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 46.00% 46
TOTAL	100

Table 4: Survey Graph for Q1b

3.1.3 Question:

Is this the first time you have used the ticket machine?

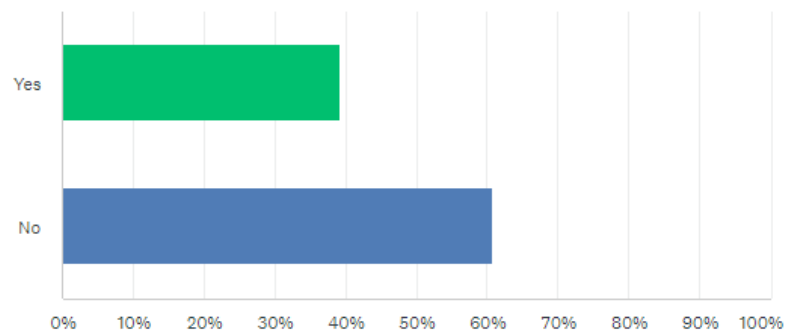
60% (119 of 196 people who responded to this question) had not used the ticket machines previously

- 39% (77 of 196 people who responded to this question) had used the machines.

Given that most people surveyed had not used the card machines before and noting the results to the previous question included only 7% of people finding machines difficult to use, this bodes well for further expansion of this method of payment.

Is this the first time that you have used the ticket machine?

Answered: 196 Skipped: 45



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	39.29% 77
No	60.71% 119
TOTAL	196

Figure 5: Survey Graph for Q2

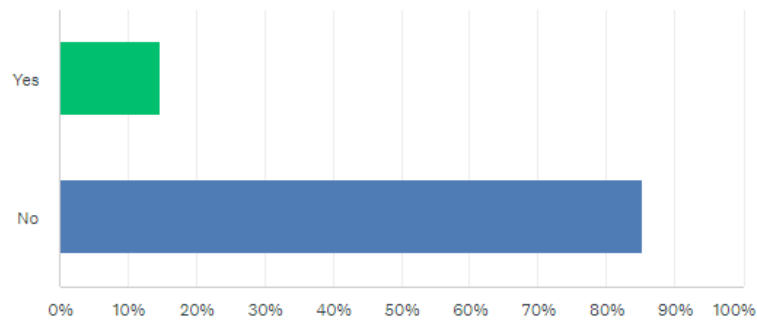
3.1.4 Question:

Do you have any concerns about using your card at the ticket machine?

- 85% (197 of the 231 people who responded to this question) had no concerns about using their card at the ticket machines
- 15% (34 of the 231 people who responded to this question) did have concerns about using their card at the ticket machine.

Do you have any concerns about using your card at the ticket machine?

Answered: 231 Skipped: 10



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	14.72%	34
No	85.28%	197
TOTAL		231

Figure 6: Survey Graph for Q2b

3.1.5 Option additional Question

If Yes (concerns about using a card at ticket machines) what are they?

Through general conversation during surveys there was also feedback from respondents who didn't have concerns about using cards at the ticket machines. Their qualitative responses are also included here as useful anecdotal data and includes comments from 68 people, (which includes 58 of whom making 'other' additional comments). Additional comments can be seen at Appendix 2

- 7% (5 of the 68 who responded to this question) did find using the card for a 40p parking ticket silly
- 6% (4 of the 68 who responded to this question) just preferred using cash
- 1% (1 of the 68 who responded to this question) was concerned about card cloning.

There were 58 responses where multiple comments were made covering several topics

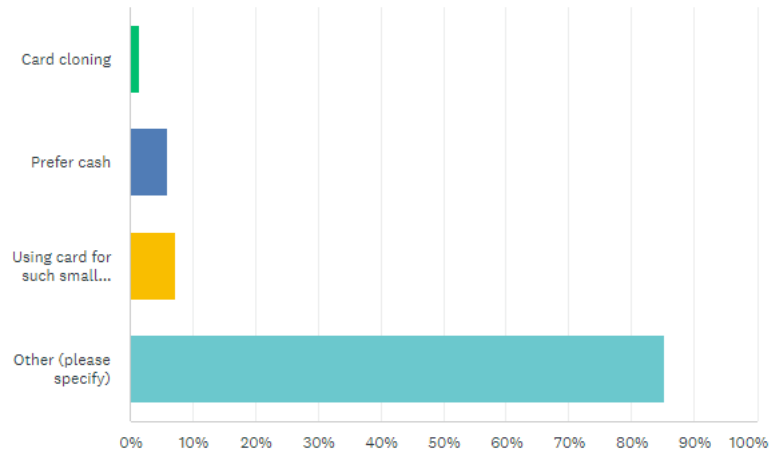
- 14% (8 of 58 people who responded to the 'other' element of this question) were worried about whether older people might have concerns or issues using a card at the ticket machines
- 11% (6 of the 58 people who responded to the 'other' element of this question) thought the new system was great/a step forward/ an improvement etc
- 9% (5 of the 58 people who responded to the 'other' element of this question) thought it was silly/pathetic/ridiculous to be using a debit or credit card for a 40p (per half hour) * transaction
- 7% (4 of the 58 people who responded to the 'other' element of this question) simply didn't like system changes or using debit/credit cards/or didn't often have cards with them.
- 3.5% (2 of the 58 people who responded to the 'other' element of this question) were concerned about possible bank charges for processing such a small amount. One person reported that his bank was charging him £1 to process a debit card payment in the car park.

(It was also noted that 1 respondent found the screen rather dark to read particularly in darker afternoons/evening. Street lighting was not close enough to light the screen and the machine apparently did not light up automatically when being used. This may be something for Uttlesford District Council to query with the machine manufacturers.)

*10 of the 68 people responding overall had issues with using cards for such a small amount of money,

If Yes, what are your concerns?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 173



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Card cloning	1.47%	1
▼ Prefer cash	5.88%	4
▼ Using card for such small amount	7.35%	5
▼ Other (please specify)	85.29%	58
TOTAL		68

Figure 7: Survey Graph 2c

3.1.6 Note: Parking Charges across the survey sites

- At White Street, Angel Lane and Chequers Lane in Great Dunmow there is a 0.40p per 30 minute minimum parking charge.
- At Stansted Mountfitchet, there is a 0.40p per 30 minute minimum parking charge.
- In Saffron Walden, The Rose & Crown charges 0.50p per 30 minutes or 70p per hour
- Swan Meadows charges a minimum 0.70p for up to an hour

3.1.7 Question

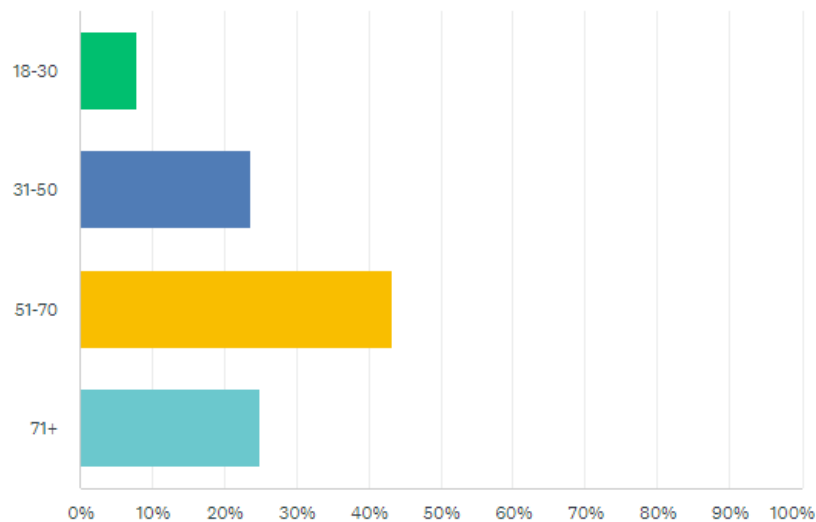
What age bracket do you fall into?

- 43% (104 of 240 responding to this question) were in the 51-70 age bracket
- 25% (60 of 240 responding to this question) were in the 71+ bracket
- 24% (57 of 240 responding to this question) were in the 31- 50 age bracket
- 8% (19 of 240 responding to this question) were in the 18-30 age bracket

No other demographic information was requested or given.

what age bracket do you fall into?

Answered: 240 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ 18-30	7.92% 19
▼ 31-50	23.75% 57
▼ 51-70	43.33% 104
▼ 71+	25.00% 60
TOTAL	240

Figure 8: Age breakdown of survey respondents

4. Conclusions

The public appear to have adapted well to changes in parking machines at the locations surveyed in Uttlesford, this includes those in the 71+ age bracket which was well represented, being a quarter of all respondents.

52% of all respondents found the machines very easy to use and only 5% of people found them difficult to use.

Some respondents stating the new machines were easier to use than many others, including specifically those at Bishops Stortford, Norfolk, Epping and Clacton. Other respondents were pleased machines did not also require car registration details as well as payment details.

The 41% that were simply 'ok' with using the machines often expressed that it would improve with more frequent use. Accounting for the 39% of first time users it would seem to indicate an improving response to the new machines being card only, over time.

More importantly 85% of those surveyed had no concerns about using a card at the machine and expressed in passing that 'everything is card now', with most people preferring it, often not having coins to hand.

The biggest issue for most of the respondents expressing opinions was on the time it took to process transactions. Where most transactions in store or online are virtually instantaneous, the lag in processing payments did feel rather slow. This was compounded in wet and windy weather. This is possibly more of a worry for nervous older people who do not wish to be standing around with a credit or debit card in hand for longer than necessary. But it also applies when respondents had tried to use several cards or one card several times to complete a transaction successfully.

(Amex card users were unsuccessful in their efforts despite machine stickers showing Amex as being accepted. This has been queried with the machine manufacturer by Council staff and they confirmed that AMEX is accepted.)

Some older people don't realise their cards are contactless until they try them, and this was tested in practice at some of the survey locations for first time users.

Some of the younger respondents did raise the issue of being unable to use Apple Pay and other Mobile Phone banking methods. The rise in people moving to mobile only banking will increase in time. Ticket machine manufacturers have confirmed to Council staff that they are progressing with Apple Pay and similar methods and hope that this will be operational by the end of March 2022.

The question of using a card for a 40p half hour ticket was commented on by 10 respondents, although this mainly applied in Great Dunmow where parking fees are lower. There were occasional comments that parking for up to 30 minutes should be

free, and others who queried if bank charges may apply for such small monetary transactions. This will depend on what kind of account people have and which banks they use but is worth bearing in mind.

Only one respondent commented in Great Dunmow that he was unable to use the new parking ticket (which doesn't have barcodes) at the Co-op self-scan machines to get his parking refunded. If this is the ongoing case, it would be prudent to update Co-op and other signage to reflect this change.

5. Recommendations

The slow response time of the ticket machines to processing bank cards should be reviewed with machine manufacturers, this was by far the greatest issue people had with the machines overall.



Figure 9: Existing Board Signage at Swan Meadows

The boards are partly obscured by new machine placement.

Not all previous signage is visible, if charges still apply Monday to Saturday

The top line of 'Conditions of Use' can be confusing to first time card only machine users which still refers to the situation 'if you do not have change'. Council staff

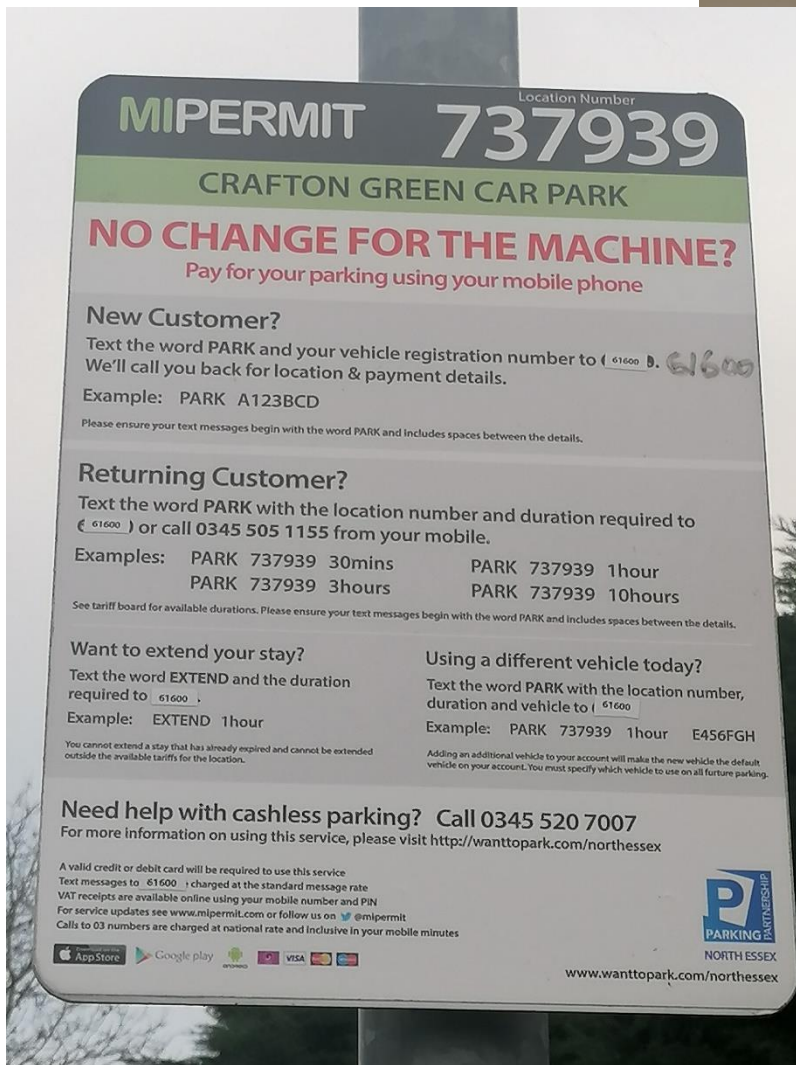
anticipate that signage will be updated/renewed once a decision has been made how to proceed with parking payments for the future.

The issue with the ticket gripping mechanism which did not seem sufficiently strong to hold on to tickets until purchasers had taken hold of them has been looked into according to Council staff, and is being addressed.

If it is a genuine intention to move more people to use parking apps then it would be prudent to also include those details on screens or machines as well as on isolated signage around the car park. And additional Mi-permit signage in the car parks to promote the payment option is also required.



Figure 10 + 11: Mi Permit signage and App instructions



As surveys were conducted in daylight hours it was not possible to check comments about the screen not being illuminated in poor light or evenings.

As the transactions take a while to process in daylight hours this could become much longer if screens cannot be easily read in darker conditions, and streetlights would not appear to be close enough for better visibility.



Figure 12 – Street lighting near ticket machines at Stansted Mountfitchet

Where survey respondents were making very short trips and required 30 minutes parking or less, there were comments about the need for free parking for visits to the doctor's surgery or library book drop offs. It may be worth considering a limited number of 'free for less than 30 minute' bays especially in White Street car park which is near to the doctor's surgery where people appear to visit for short periods of time.

This may also go some way to appeasing members of the public who were vociferous about using a bank card for a 40p transaction.

If parking charges are due to be revised in future, there may be less of a need for this.

