



# Cleaner, brighter, safer car parks

## Car park with cachet!



### Background

The shopping hub around Oxford Street and Regent Street is renowned for exclusive retail therapy; it has cachet!

Not so Oxford Street underground car park in 2011 when Q-Park took over responsibility for it and another 13 car parks in Westminster. But now they have cachet also! In the intervening years Q-Park has invested £10 million bringing the

car parks up to the highest standards and winning Park Mark awards in the process. These car parks are now safe and secure for shoppers and their vehicles. A quarter of the budget was spent on Oxford Street.

The car park is not on Oxford Street itself, but underneath Cavendish Square, a public space behind the flagship John Lewis store. This historic square was laid out in 1717 by the Earl of Oxford to provide homes for wealthy Londoners.

Famous people who have owned houses round the square include Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, George III's youngest daughter Princess Amelia and numerous dukes and earls. It also features in fiction: Dr Lanyon, one of the characters in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, lived in the square.

Unusually, the car park is in the shape of a double helix with one-way traffic flow. Cars enter in a continuous descending right-

hand helix and park on either side at three levels. At the bottom they cross the car park and travel upwards in a left-hand ascending helix, again with parking on either side.

### Combating crime



When Q-Park took over the car park it inherited some significant issues. While crime was similar to other car parks in the area it was too high to achieve the Park Mark award. The three biggest problems



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were theft from vehicles, vandalism and unwanted visitors including drug junkies, prostitutes and vagrants.

Refurbishment included gates across the entrance and exit that open with a ticket. Staff, known as hosts, at the entrance welcome customers and direct them to available parking spaces. Hosts are also visible across the car park, constantly patrolling to reassure customers.



Additionally energy efficient lighting has been installed to make parking floors far brighter and ensure there are no dark spaces for criminals to hide in. Lights are controlled by sensors and illuminate when motion is detected. This improves visibility significantly and saves the environment. Newly installed CCTV covers the whole car park and is monitored 24/7.

"Once we completed the full refurbishment and introduced safety features the car park was awarded a Park Mark award and no crimes have been reported since," said John Denton, head of marketing & sales, Q-Park.

## Larger bays

Back in 2011 the car park had 521 parking bays; both Q-Park and customers felt some were too tight for modern cars.

During refurbishment the company created 160 extra large bays and reduced the total number to 444. Each bay has its own parking pad to guide drivers as they drive in or reverse in their vehicle. It is quicker and easier for people to park.



Pedestrian access was also an issue in 2011. There were no lifts and so mothers with buggies and people with disabilities had to take the stairs. A lift will be installed

during the autumn 2014 – the final phase of the refurbishment – following planning permission from Westminster Council.

The glass-panelled lift will be built into the public park and have an external transparent shaft with an etched design of trees similar to those in Cavendish Square. It will be sympathetic to its surroundings and also open so users can see and be seen.

“We want our locations to be aesthetically pleasing and decluttered,” said John Denton. “We’ve created a feeling of open space in the car park by having minimal signs, no cones hanging around and coating the floors rather than leaving bare concrete.”



## Accreditation process

The accreditation process only takes a couple of hours. When each of Q-Park’s Westminster car parks is ready to join the scheme BPA area manager Antony Powell and the local police assessor visit to inspect the facilities.

They look at security, the user experience for drivers and pedestrians, environment including lighting and cleanliness and active management practices. Each award will stay in place for three years, with

interim annual self-assessments between the physical inspections.

“One of our core values is to keep customers and their vehicles safe at all times. Park Mark accreditation is a recognised award that informs customers our facilities have been approved by the police and are secure. Our customers can rest assured that our car parks are well equipped to keep them safe,” said John Denton.

## Benefits

John added that an additional benefit of the Park Mark scheme is getting the ear of the local police.

“They often have useful information about known criminal elements in the area and provide us with crime prevention material. The police also make recommendations



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around site security, CCTV and lighting, which are beneficial."

Q-Park managing director Adam Bidder commented: "Q-Park Oxford Street is the third car park to be fully refurbished in London and we are very pleased with the results.

We're working hard to introduce quality car parks to the area by upgrading them to the highest standards. We want customers to feel safe when using our facilities and we always strive to offer the best possible services to all customers who park with us."

Q-Park has 45 car parks with the Park Mark award. They're a mix of underground and multi-storey in busy city centres, hospitals, railway stations and universities.

Another of its Park Mark awarded car parks, Charles Street Sheffield, known

locally as the Cheesegrater, won third place in the global Coolest Car Park in the World Awards 2013.

## More information:

<http://www.britishparking.co.uk/Initiatives/Park-Mark>

[www.q-park.co.uk](http://www.q-park.co.uk)