

Our ambassador Helen Dolphin MBE has been heavily involved in reforming the Blue Badge scheme for over 10 years. Here she provides some advice about where you can and can't park with a Blue Badges.

Through my role on the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), I worked with the government on the 2011 Blue Badge reforms when a national database of Blue Badge holders was introduced. More recently, I worked with the Department for Transport Blue Badge team on expanding the Blue Badge eligibility to accommodate more people with non-visible disabilities. I also run a parking accreditation called "People's Parking" which helps drive up standards in car parks and helps motorists find a car park with all the facilities they need. I am often contacted by Blue Badge holders who have been issued with a Parking ticket and have no idea why. I hope this article will help you to understand where you can and can't park with your badge.

Recently I was contacted by a very distressed lady who had been issued with a Parking Charge Notice (PCN) for overstaying in a private car park. She had done nothing about it as her husband was seriously ill and had completely forgotten about it. To her horror she had received a letter from a debt recovery company who the parking company were using to get their money.

There are a few things to learn from this. Firstly all parking tickets are called PCN's but the ones you get on the street or issued in a council run car park are called Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) and the ones issued by private parking company's such as NCP or Q-Park are called Parking Charge Notices (PCN). It is important to take note of which you have as they are appealed in different ways, although all the appeal information should be on the ticket. In this example the PCN was from a private parking company so in the first instance she should have appealed to them.

The mistake this lady made was she thought she could park for as long as she liked with a Blue Badge in any car park, but this is not the case. Whenever you park in a car park you need to check the signs as this will tell you if there are any concessions for Blue Badge holders or extra time given. Many car parks these days are monitored by ANPR so it is unlikely having a Blue Badge will give you any extra time, as these cameras only record people going in and out, and if you take longer then permitted you will automatically get a PCN in the post.

Many new Blue Badge holders seem to think that the rules for parking on-street, such as not having to pay, and parking for as long as you like where others have a restriction, apply in off-street car parks. This is absolutely not the case, and even council run car parks are likely to charge you. The best advice is to always read the signs as this will ensure you know what the rules are. If you do that you should avoid PCN's in off-street car parks.

Fortunately, in this lady's case I was able to get her ticket cancelled as the parking operator took her situation with her very ill husband into account. If she had appealed straight away, she would have avoided a lot of extra stress. I always recommend appealing a ticket, especially when it's a genuine mistake, as this will be taken into consideration.

Speaking to other Blue Badge holders, there is often some confusion over knowing if a road is a public road where you can use a Blue Badge to park on-street, or whether it is a private road, where you can't. For example, although the double yellow lines around a hospital may look like the perfect parking space for a Blue Badge holder, this is generally private land and so you cannot park here without the risk of getting a PCN. This is the same for roads within Universities and some other large sites. If you are in any doubt, it is always best to check, or find an actual marked out parking space instead.

If you park on the street with a Blue Badge you can park on double and single yellow lines for up to three hours, or as long as you like in Scotland. However, although this rule applies all over the UK there are exceptions, and these are; the London boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea, the City of Westminster, the City of London and part of the London Borough of Camden. In these areas you can not park on any yellow lines.

One of the most common reasons for people getting a ticket both on-street and in a car park is either forgetting to display the badge or displaying one that is out of date. I know I displayed mine several months after it had expired as I had not realised it was out of date. A tip I was given by another Blue Badge holder was to put the date in your diary when you need to renew your Blue Badge, as most local authorities don't send out a reminder. However, although putting a reminder in your diary is a great idea, check timescales with your local authority and make sure it's long enough in advance to accommodate this.

There are clearly numerous reasons why Blue Badge holders get issued with PCN's but I hope this information will help Blue Badge holders avoid some of the most common pitfalls.

10 Top tips for not getting a PCN

- 1) Check the signs in the car park for the terms and conditions**
- 2) Make sure you are parking on a public road**
- 3) Check your Blue Badge is valid**
- 4) Make sure you display your badge correctly with the photo facing downwards**
- 5) Set your time clock at the correct time**
- 6) Park inside the marked bay**
- 7) Don't park for longer than permitted**
- 8) Enter your number plate correctly if this is required**
- 9) Don't forget to pay**
- 10) Don't park in a loading bay (unless you're unloading)**