



Parking behaviour and attitude

within retail parks and
shopping centres



The retail industry in the past few years has become increasingly challenging, impacting the shopping centres and retail parks which are the focus of this research paper. As income growth has stagnated, household debt has grown and inflation continues to rise, consumer spending power and ability to shop has declined considerably.

At the same time, footfall across shopping centres continues to fall due to a significant rise in shoppers moving online as they embrace the digital age.

This is resulting in retailers reducing the number of physical stores they have, putting downward pressure on rents at shopping centres and retail parks squeezing their revenue even further.

As such, there's never been a more important time to create an "experience" at such venues to attract customers. From food and drink options to personal shopping services and cinemas, shopping centres are increasingly looking to ensure they're providing more than just a shopping trip.

It's as part of this experience that parking plays an important role. The car park, after all, is the first and last part of many customers journeys and this can have a significant impact on how an individual remembers their visit. Parking can also provide marketable customer data, behavioural analytics and a potential direct revenue stream for the landlord and/or manager of the site.

In order to better understand consumers' attitudes towards parking as part of their shopping experience, and in doing so highlight to the industry the significant impact parking can have on their customer's behaviour, we've surveyed 2,000 people from across the UK for this report.

Chapter one

Customer behaviour





Our results clearly show the true value of parking as a critical part of consumers' retail experiences. Concerns over parking facilities – whether real or perceived – have a direct impact on customer behaviour, deterring them from making repeat visits to shopping centres and retail parks. This can of course be detrimental to the retailers themselves and thus there is a real commercial reason for them to address this area.

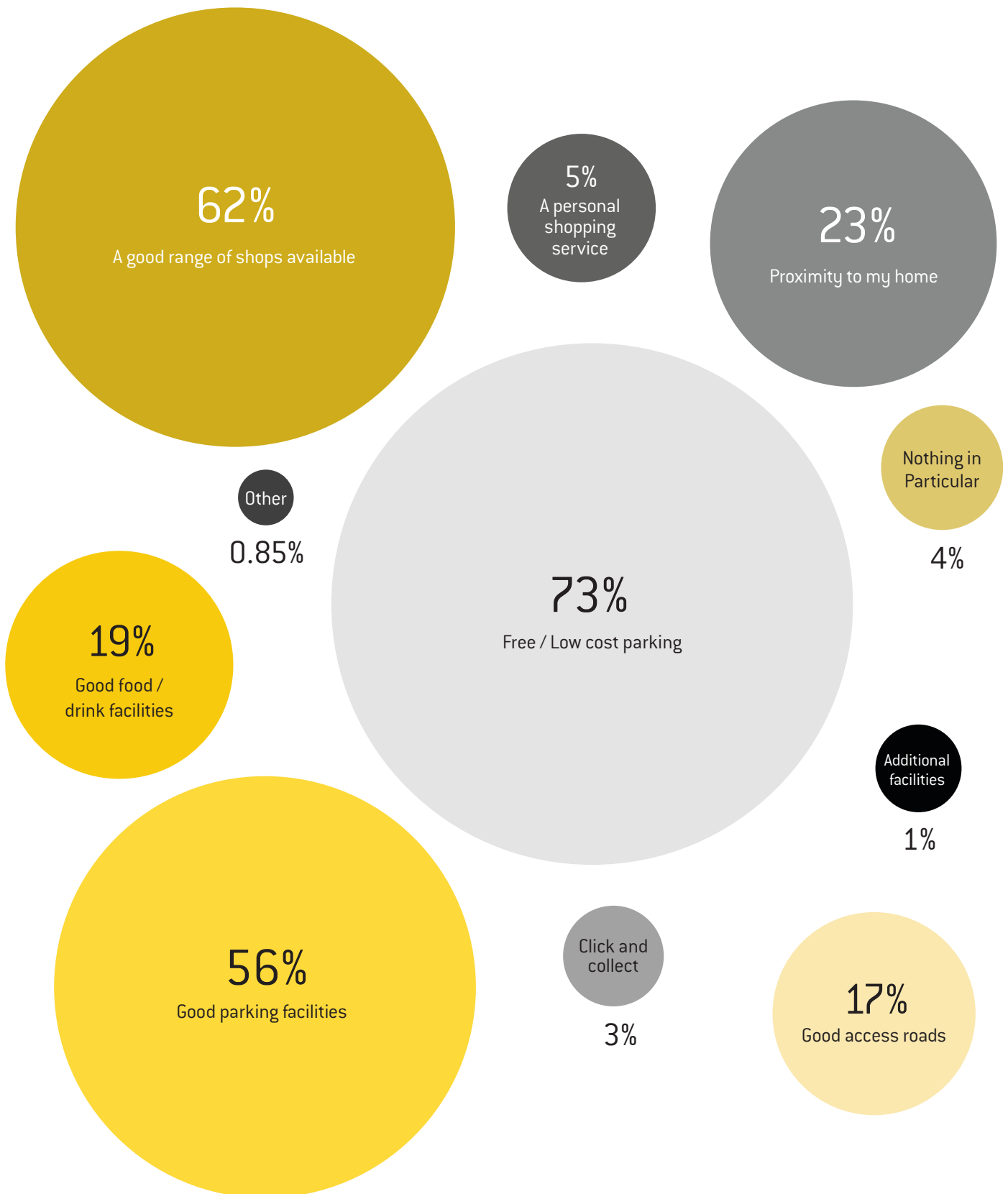


Max Crane-Robinson, NCP Commercial Director



With shopping centres and retail parks largely located outside city centres, parking is a fundamental service. In fact, two of the three most important factors for consumers when visiting either a shopping centre or retail park are parking related: **low cost parking (72%)**, **a good range of shops (61%)** and **good parking facilities (55%)**. Not only that, but the services provided outside the physical retail spaces are prioritised by consumers over shopping-related services, with **personal shopping (4%)** and **click and collect services (2%)** seen as of little importance to people during their visit.

With regards to visiting retail parks or shopping centres, what's most important to you?



From this, it stands to reason that the experience customers have in the car park greatly impacts their future behaviour. In fact:

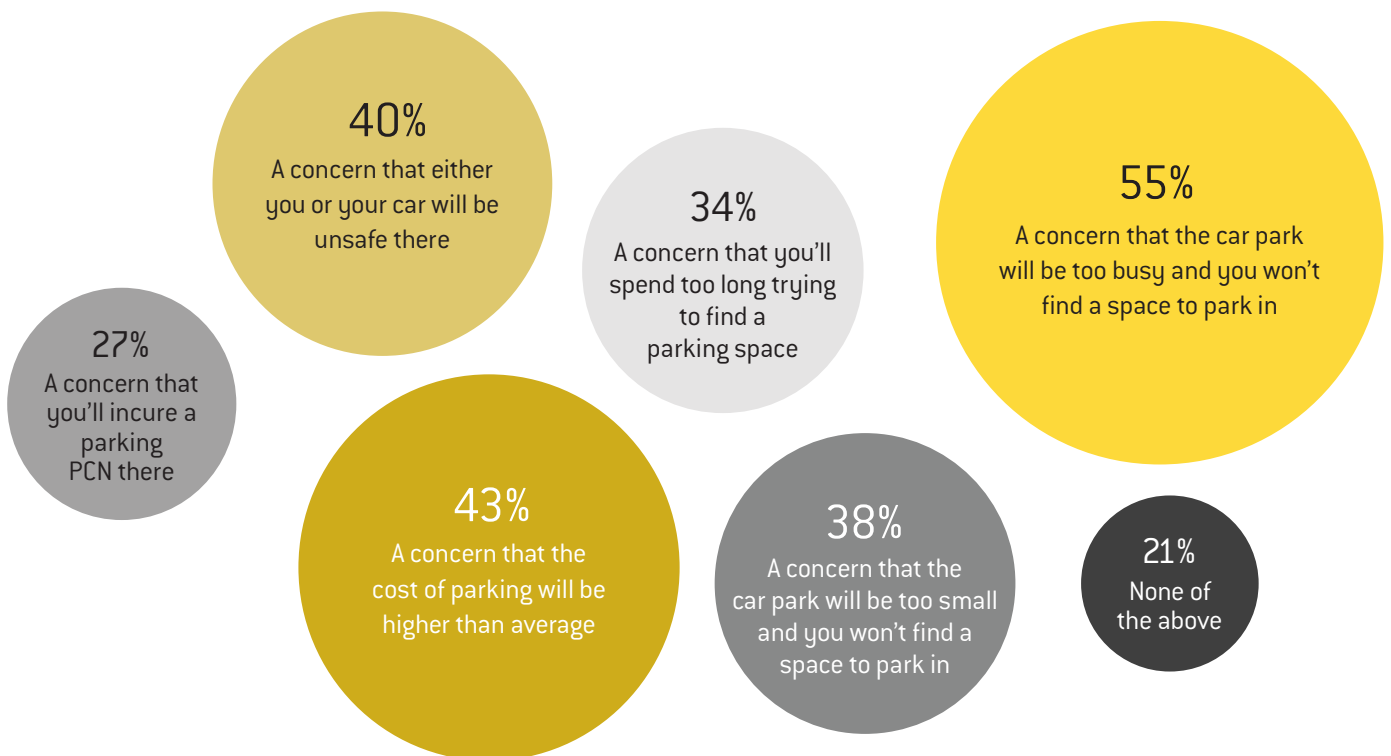
55%

of adults admitted they would never return to a retail park if they'd had a poor parking experience

50%

admit to avoiding particular retail parks or shopping centres because they think they're likely to encounter parking issues there

Which of the following reasons would ever cause you to postpone or cancel a trip to a retail park or shopping centre?

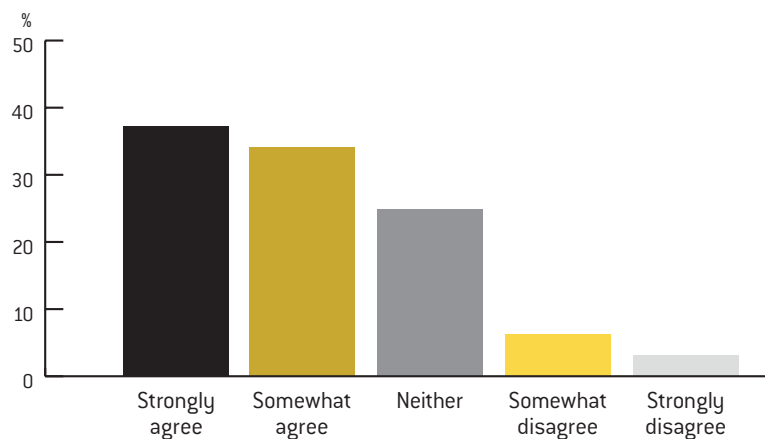


A concern around the car park being too busy and therefore preventing someone from finding a space was found to be the biggest concern for visitors to shopping centres and retail Sites, with over half of adults **(55%) admitting this would cause them to cancel or postpone a trip.**

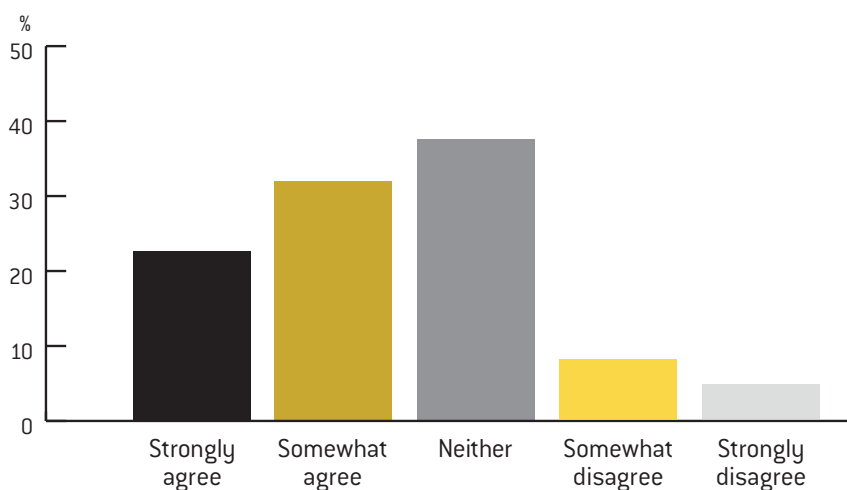
A concern that the parking will cost more than elsewhere also had a significant impact on potential customers with **42% postponing or cancelling a trip** for this reason, while **concerns around safety (39%)**, that there **won't be a space to park in (37%)**, and the **length of time it will take to find a space (34%)** also played on consumers' minds.

Interestingly, however, a majority of consumers **(70%) believed themselves to be more loyal to retail centres where parking is easy**, while 52% agreed they visited a retail or shopping centre site because the parking rules are clear – compelling incentives for shopping centre and retail park management to invest in the parking facilities provided.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I am more loyal to retail parks or shopping centres where the parking experience is easy while 52% agreed they visited a retail or shopping centre site because the parking rules are clear



How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I have visited a particular retail park or shopping centre because I know the parking rules there are clear



Chapter two

Parking rules and Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)



Chapter two: Parking rules and PCNs



A considerate enforcement policy and clear rules can help to improve customer relationships and the parking experience. Acting and rectifying legitimate errors made by the driver or the enforcement system can improve repeat business for a retail park or shopping centre and is more profitable in the long term.

Max Crane-Robinson, NCP Commercial Director



For retailers the elimination of friction in the customer experience is all-important. The research carried out by NCP found that this philosophy has to extend beyond the retailer's (or shopping centre's) front door and into its parking operation.

Two critical areas where friction occurs frequently are in payment and enforcement.



Enforcement

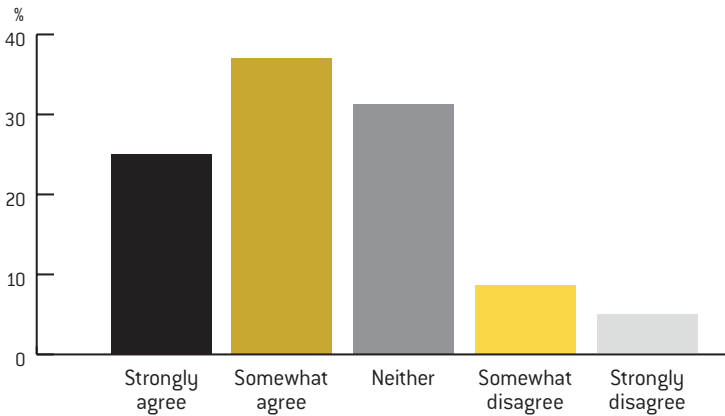


Payment

There's a debate to be had over where enforcement should be pitched – to maximise revenue or minimise customer penalties – and this will depend on the business strategy and need. However our research suggests that the approach to issuing Parking Charge Notices (PCNs) is also a major factor in managing customers behaviour with likely commercial impact.

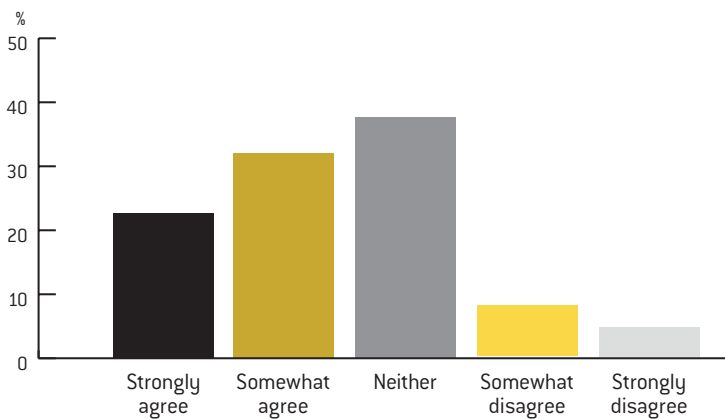
First and foremost, **three in five motorists (61%) agree that there should be PCNs for anyone who purposefully breaks rules when it comes to parking** (it's worth bearing in mind that **two in five believe there should be no PCNs at all**, so installation of barriers is one potential solution to dealing with this prevalent attitude).

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I think that PCNs should be issued to anyone purposefully breaking the rules



However, the way that customers are communicated with is all-important. Over half (**52%**) of all motorists have visited a particular retail park or shopping centre because they know the parking rules there are clear. At the same time, four in ten (**40%**) have avoided retail sites where parking rules are unclear or confusing.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I have visited a particular retail park or shopping centre because I know the parking rules there are clear



So, clarity and consistency of message to the consumer is important and retailers that want to maintain their reputations with their customers need to consider the ways that parking partners communicate – are terms fair (first of all) and clear across a site and do consumers feel they have clarity? That question becomes important when you consider that just over a quarter (**26%**) of shoppers admit they have postponed or cancelled a trip to a shopping centre or retail park because of a concern they will incur a PCN there.

In the same piece of research, we explored the ways in which PCNs are enforced and found that there is a critical moment for retailers in their customer relationship.

We found that 5.16 million motorists say they have been issued with a PCN because they accidentally over-stayed in a free parking environment.¹

At the same time, almost two thirds say they would be unlikely to return to a retail park or shopping centre where they had previously been served a PCN. The way enforcement is carried out is therefore vital when you consider the repercussions of poor or cavalier enforcement or where communicating with a company that has issued a PCN is challenging.

Our belief is that in many instances the customer is right and that enabling a customer's case to be simply heard and sympathetically reviewed is of utmost importance. In this instance a "considerate enforcement" approach is infinitely more profitable in the longer term.

Consumers agree:

73%

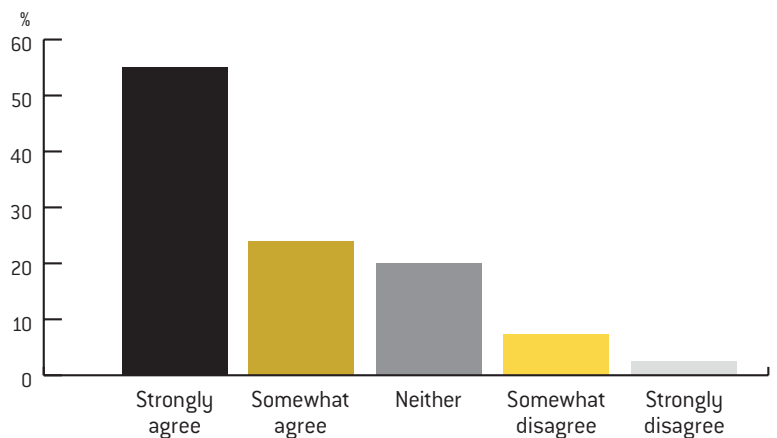
believe there should be some leeway concerning PCNs if someone has made a genuine mistake

76%

think that if they enter a retail or shopping centre car park by mistake and leave within a short amount of time, they should not be charged

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

If you've entered a retail park or shopping centre car park by mistake and leave within a short amount of time, you don't believe that you should be charged

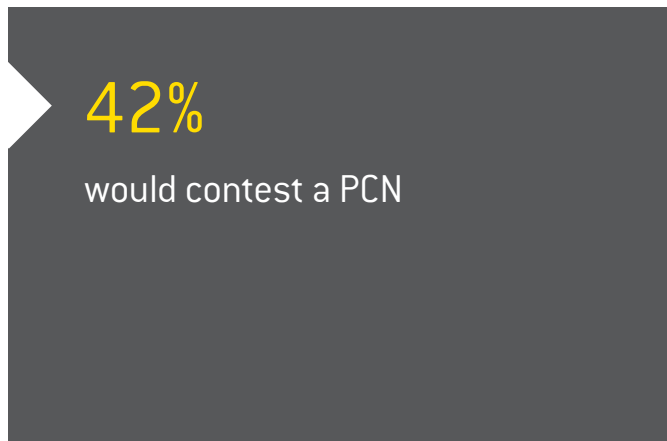


¹ This is based on 16.65% of motorists questioned by NCP reporting that they had been served a PCN as a proportion of the total number of UK motorists recorded by Statista: www.statista.com

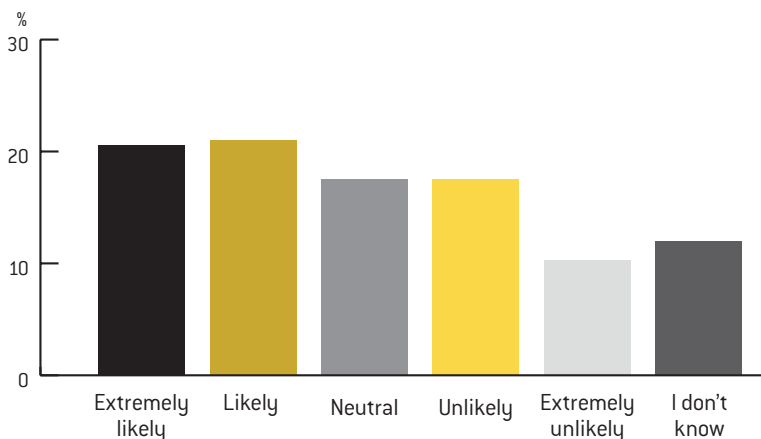
Human review of technology is major factor in a considerate approach.

For example, checking an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system has not misconstrued an 8 for a B is vital. At the same time, appropriate leniency is also applied – a friendly note to explain that a customer has over-stayed by a short period and should be aware of this next time – can also enhance rather than diminish a relationship.

Not only does this approach maintain customer relationships, it also has economic benefits by lowering the volume of contested PCNs. Our research has found that:



What is the likelihood of you contesting a legitimate parking notice or PCN if you were issued one?



The costs of these contested PCNs can quickly mount – to the point that managing a process can be economically unviable.

Chapter three

Desired car park features



Chapter three: Desired car park features



Technology is making the car park experience frictionless for customers. Where best use is made of this technology, it drives an improved customer experience and increases the likelihood they'll return to that specific retail destination.

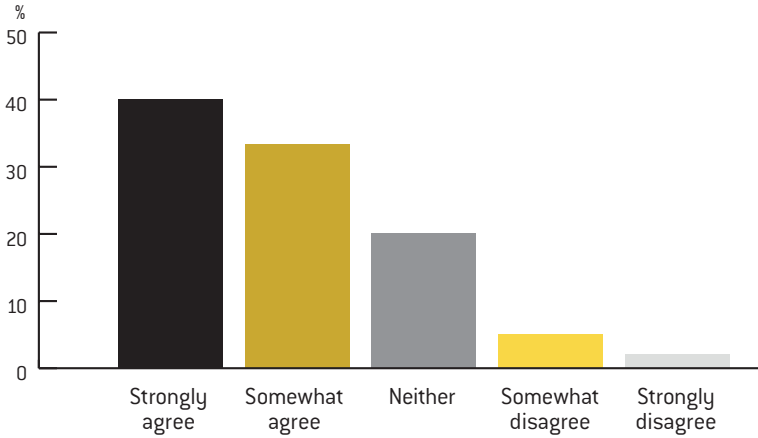
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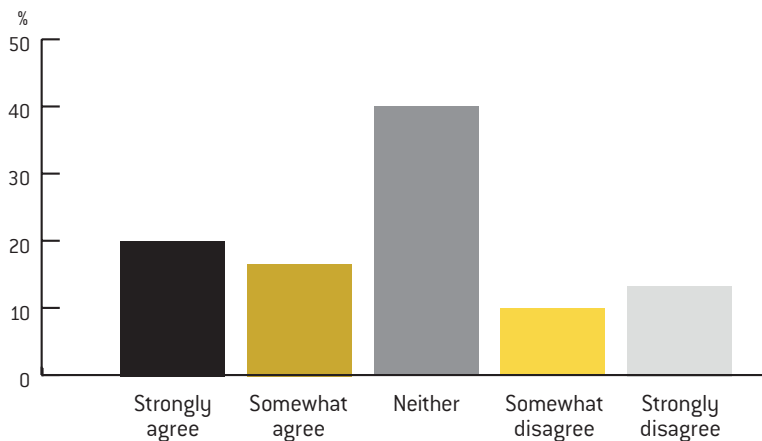
When looking at parking facilities, it's clear that consumers aren't expecting huge innovation in car parking, instead they are simply looking for clear, easy solutions offered at fair value.

Three quarters (75%) of adults admit they would be more likely to visit a retail site if they could guarantee a space in the car park. Additionally, over a third (36%) believe free parent/child or disabled parking would be enough to encourage them to visit a retail site more often.

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I would be more likely to visit a retail park or shopping centre if I
could guarantee a parking space there**

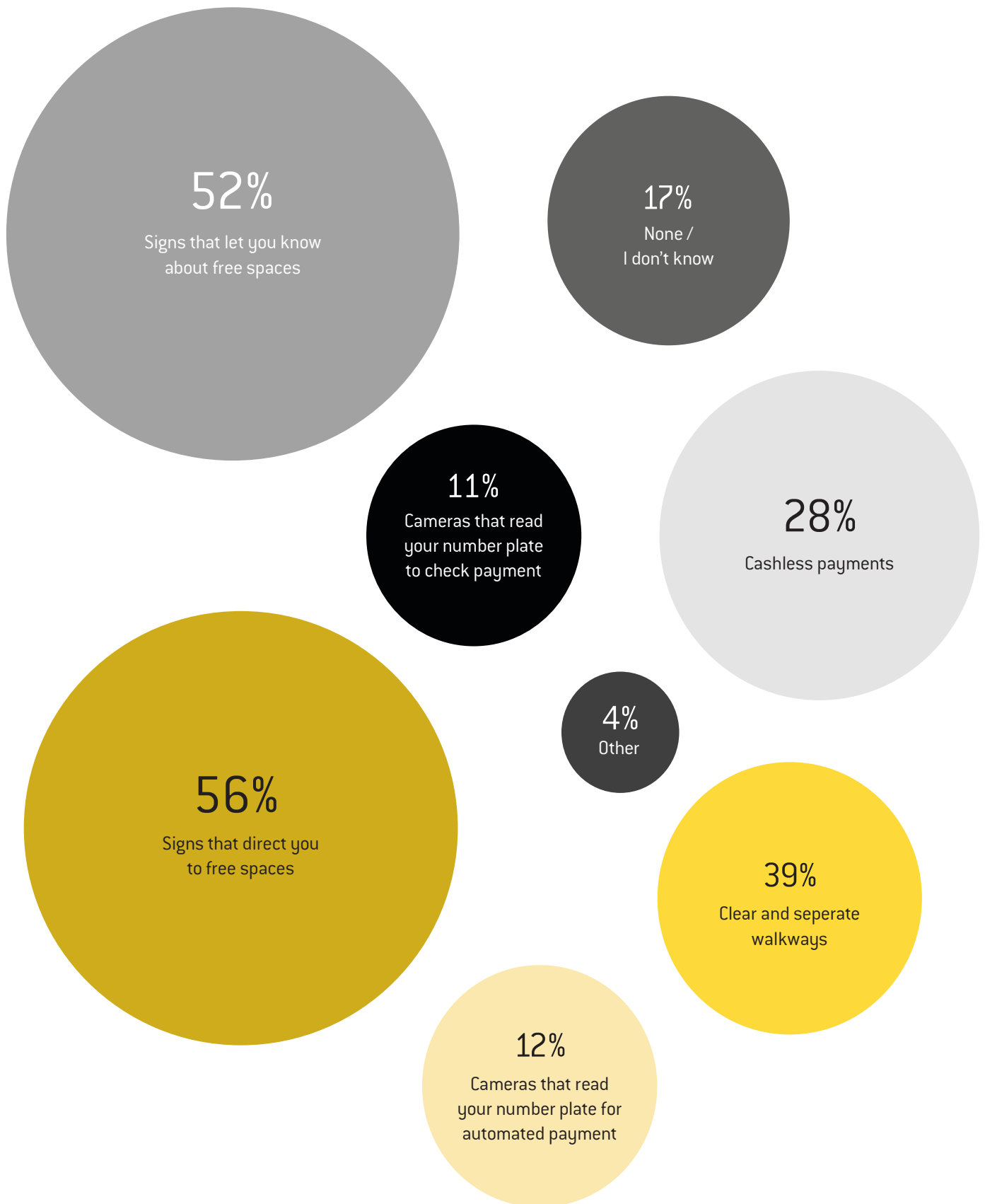


**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I would be more likely to visit a retail park or shopping centre if
parent-child / disabled parking was free**

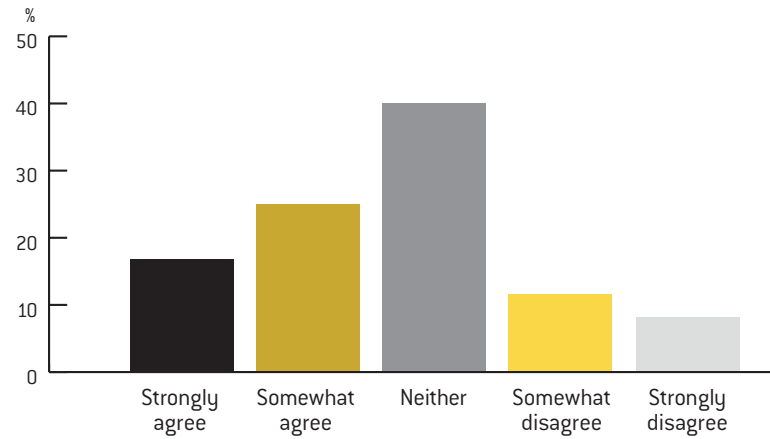


When asked which features they would like to see more of, the highest-ranking features were the simplest to implement: **space availability signs (51%)**, **free space/bay indicators (51%)** and **clear and separate walkways to make getting around the car parks safer for pedestrians (38%)**.

What parking-related features would you like to see at retail parks or shopping centres?

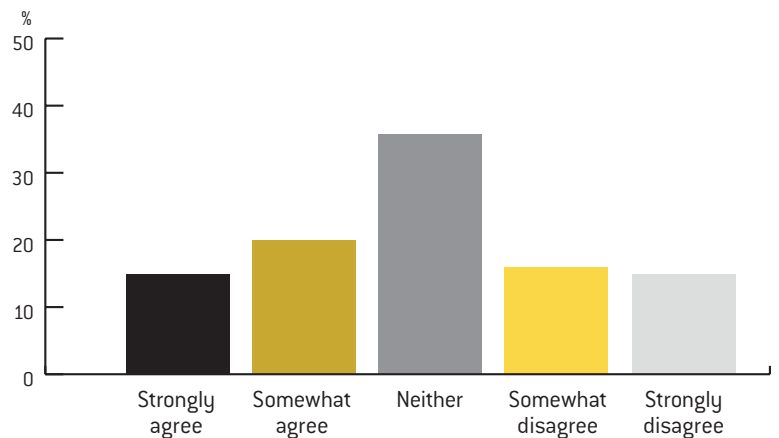


Price, of course, is a key driver for customers. While low cost parking is a priority for shoppers: **40% believe that if they were able to get a discounted parking price by paying ahead of time**, they would be more likely to visit a shopping centre or retail park.

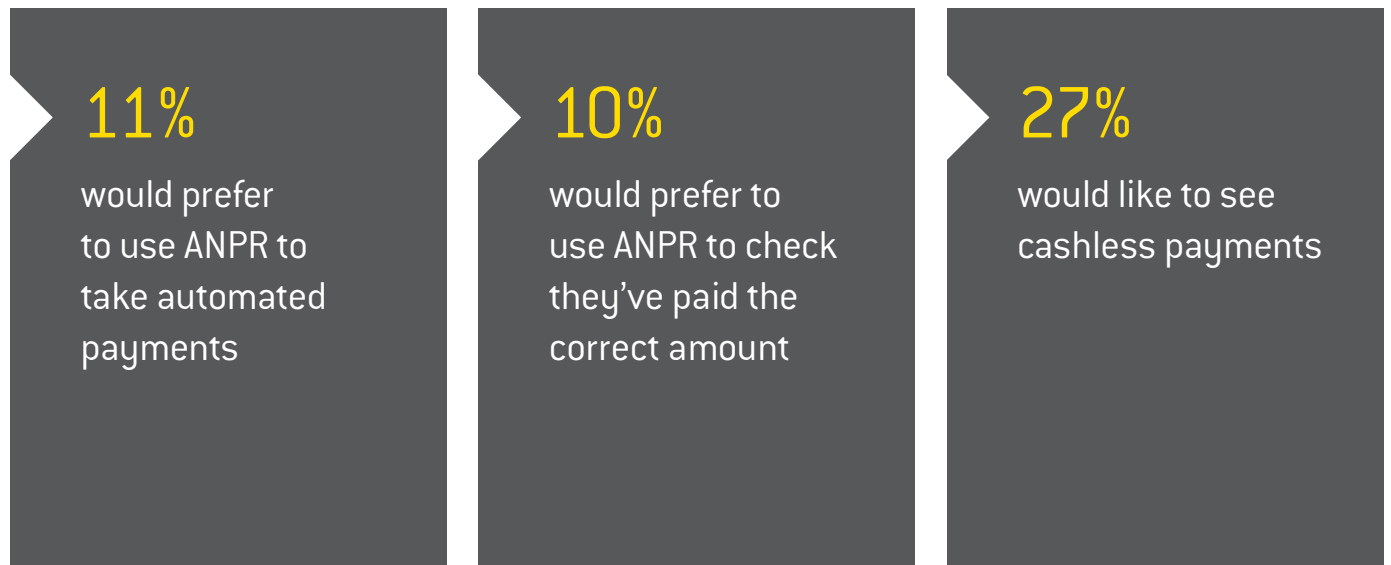


How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I would be more likely to visit a retail park or shopping centre if I could get a discounted parking price by paying ahead of time

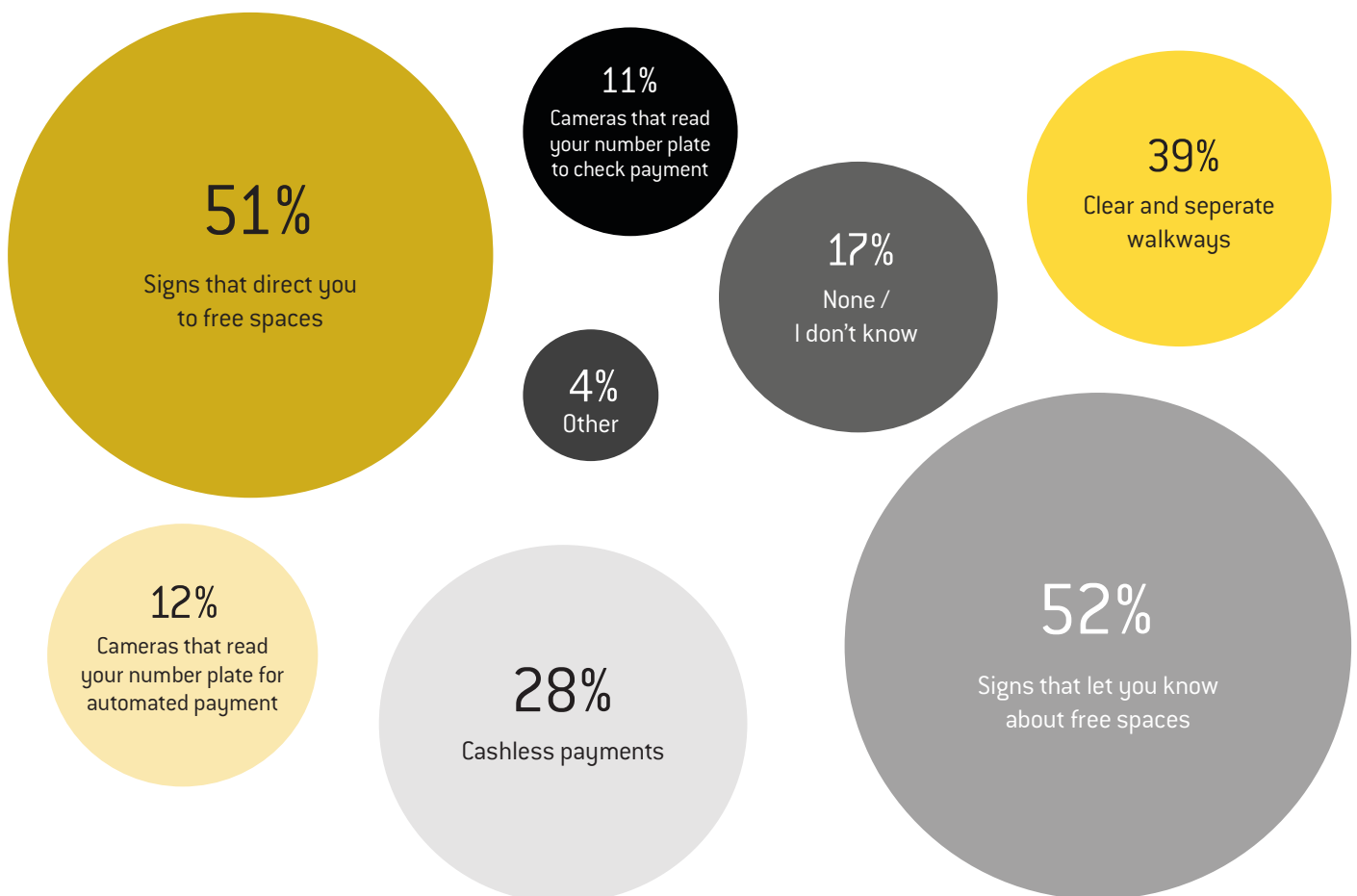
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I would be less likely to visit a retail park or shopping centre if I had to pay for parking with cash



Consumers are even open to utilising technology to take away the need for them to actively participate in paying completely. Our research found that:



What parking-related features would you like to see at retail parks or shopping centres?



Conclusion


The average adult in the UK spends an estimated £53.89 per visit to a shopping centre or retail park. Although footfall has been steadily declining in recent years, the cumulative value of these people is too great to compromise with a factor – parking – cited by so many as being critical in deciding when and where to spend their money.

Here at NCP, we're probably best known for our expertise in operating our own car parks. However, we also understand, from our experience with high profile clients like London Underground, that offering an excellent parking experience through improved customer journeys, is key to leverage the true value of the client's parking facility.

We've a flexible and broad range of Car Park Managed Services to help clients drive commercial return or added customer value and loyalty. These solutions include: Considerate Enforcement; ANPR cameras; and Pay and Display systems. Using our expertise, we provide a tailored mix of these services depending on the clients business need – whether it's reducing congestion, capturing and leveraging customer behaviour data, or a more straightforward commercial return.

We've been redefining parking since 1931, helping provide customer parking solutions for a seamless customer experience. In the current economic climate, it's more important than ever to choose a partner who has the knowledge and capability to deliver against your business needs.

To find out how we can help contact us:

 <https://www.ncpsolutions.co.uk/contact-us/>
and someone will be in touch to discuss your requirements.