

BUILDING THE UK'S LARGEST CAR CLUB IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON

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1. INTRODUCTION

Car clubs provide people with affordable access to a car without having to own one. Vehicles parked in dedicated bays on public streets can be booked in advance, with members billed only for the time and distance they travel. Car clubs have been proven to remove private vehicles from crowded streets and to increase members' use of public transport.

In response to the rising interest in car clubs across the UK, and to assist other cities still in the early stages of car club establishment, this paper outlines the key achievements and lessons learned to date in the London Borough of Islington. Recommendations are made regarding funding the establishment of bays, signage and permits, enforcement, incorporating car clubs into controlled parking zone implementation, using the planning process to expand car clubs, promoting car club membership, and political implications.

2. CAR CLUBS IN ISLINGTON

Car clubs were embraced by the London Borough of Islington as a potential solution to its high density and severe parking pressures – Islington has the second highest car density in the UK. In 2002, Islington joined six other boroughs to form the London City Car Club and has since worked to establish the club and to promote club membership. Initial funding was secured as part of the Congestion Charging Zone Complementary Measures Scheme.

Expansion of the club in Islington has been rapid despite the loss of Transport for London funding in April 2004, halfway through the four-year pilot period. Islington's first two dedicated on-street car club bays were created in September 2003, and in the following 18 months the number of vehicles in Islington has grown to 23, more than any other UK local authority.

Although Islington has a larger car club network than any other London borough, further growth is needed to establish a 'critical mass' of membership that will sustain car clubs without subsidy. To this end, Islington aims to provide a car club vehicle within a five-minute walk of every household in the borough.

3. CAR CLUBS DEFINED

3.1 What is a Car Club?

A car club is a membership scheme that provides pay-as-you-go motoring – affordable access to a car without the hassles of car ownership. Vehicles are

parked in dedicated bays on public streets near people's homes or workplaces. The vehicles can be booked in advance over the phone or the Internet for as little as one hour and up to a few days. Members are billed only for the time and distance they travel. These charges include road tax, insurance, maintenance and fuel, thus removing all the hidden costs of motor vehicle use. An electronic smart card registers the distance travelled and the time the vehicles are being used. Members use their smart card to access the cars, and after entering a Personal Identification Number (PIN) into the on-board computer, they can use the keys already in the car to start the engine and begin their journey.

3.2 Car Clubs versus Car Rental

Car clubs are different from commercial car rental in a number of ways. First, because cars are parked in residential areas, members do not have to travel to a rental station. Designated on-street car club parking bays in fact create small-scale rental stations in the member's own street or just around the corner. Second, with car rental a contract is drawn up for each rental. With car clubs, members only need to sign a contract once when joining. They can then use car club vehicles as many times as they wish. Thirdly, car club vehicles can be booked for as little as an hour, whereas commercial car rental is aimed at booking for longer periods of time.

3.3 Benefits of Car Clubs

Car clubs offer benefits to both individuals and to the wider community, as outlined below.

Benefits to the Individual

Car clubs provide hassle-free access to a car. The benefits to individuals are:

- access to new and reliable vehicles;
- cars parked nearby with guaranteed parking upon return;
- hassle-free motoring without worries about tax, insurance, maintenance and cleaning;
- a cheap alternative to owning a car for those who don't drive much; and
- a cheaper alternative to commercial car rental for short errands – the pay-as-you-drive charging structure clearly reflects the cost of motoring, so car club members can see how much they are saving on transport every month.

Benefits to the Community

The main community benefits of car clubs are relief of parking pressures, significant shifts in travel patterns and an overall contribution towards a cleaner local environment.

In terms of relieving parking pressure, car clubs help to free up kerb-side parking space by offering residents and businesses an alternative to owning their own vehicle. Research in mainland Europe, where car clubs have been operating successfully since the early 1990s, has shown that one car club car replaces between four and five privately owned vehicles (Car Plus, 2004). Figures in London show that 30% of car club members defer the purchase of

a new vehicle or scrap already owned vehicles, and that for every car club vehicle added to the fleet, 3.3 private cars are displaced.¹

Car club members make significant changes to their travel behaviour. Because they can see the exact cost of each car trip, car club members make more sensible use of the cars. Mileage per car drops and usage of more sustainable forms of transport goes up. For example, members in Berlin reduced their driving by 53% after joining a car club, and walking and cycling increased by 28% while use of public transport increased by 35% (Car Plus, 2004).

This change in travel behaviour reduces congestion and parking problems, reduces local air pollution and noise, improves road safety and increases the viability of low-car housing and 'Home Zones'. As the vehicles are all new, the environmental standards are high, contributing even further to a cleaner environment.

4. FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the main challenges in establishing a dense car club network is securing funding. Because of the need to issue new or modify existing Traffic Management Orders, conversion of kerb-side space to car club parking bays is a costly business. Consultation makes up a large part of the cost, around 75% of the total cost of a single new bay.

4.1 Ways of Minimising Costs

Islington Council has found several ways to minimise the costs of converting bays for dedicated car club use, and to raise the required funds.

The key cost-reduction technique employed in Islington has been to consult on a large number of bays at once. The major expansion of the car club network in Islington was the conversion of 18 bays in one consultation process, thereby reducing the cost per bay by 50%.

Another cost-reduction technique has been to establish car clubs in conjunction with other changes to parking arrangements. Islington, like most other London boroughs, is largely covered by restricted parking areas called Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs). CPZs reduce commuter trips within the borough and thus reduce parking congestion. Car club parking bays are being introduced as part of the introduction of new CPZs and the revision of existing ones. This approach significantly diminishes the costs of bay conversions, as no separate car club bay consultation needs to be undertaken. Car clubs are also a positive new service that the council can offer, which can help improve the public reaction to CPZ proposals.

4.2 Attract Funding

On the funding side, Islington Council works on various levels to attract funding for car club bay conversions. Internal council funds were secured to establish the first on-street bays. And the council will continue to bid for funding from Transport for London for further conversions. Another important

source of funding is through the planning process. Developers of residential units contribute money for car club bay conversions near the development for future residents to use. In car-free housing developments, where no on-site car parking is provided for residents and residents are not eligible to purchase on-street parking permits, a car club contribution is a standard planning requirement to get planning permission. Funds have also been secured to subsidise membership and actual use of the vehicles for new residents of car-free housing developments.

5. PARKING BAYS DESIGN AND PERMITS

5.1 Designated Car Club Parking Bays

With commercial car rental, people know where they need to pick up and return the vehicle. The same applies for car club members, with the difference that the location from which the car can be picked up and to which the car needs to be brought back is a designated on-street or off-street car club parking bay. Every car club vehicle has its own individual 'rental station' in the form of a designated parking bay. Car club parking bays are therefore not designated to car club vehicles generally, but rather to one specific car club vehicle only.

5.2 Signage & Markings

Each car club bay is clearly signed and marked to make people aware of the special status of the bay. Every car club bay has its own signpost with a sign that states: "Car club permit holders only" plus a "P" (for parking) and a unique bay number (see figure 1).² Every bay has markings on the street that clearly indicate the boundaries of the bay, and the words "Car club only" are printed alongside the bay.³

Figure 1: Example of Islington's car club parking bay sign



5.3 Parking Permits

To ensure that the car club bay is only being used by one specific car club vehicle, one parking permit matching the number of the car club parking bay is issued for the car club operator who will occupy the bay. Permits are not designated to a vehicle of a specific registration number so that operators can more easily move their car club vehicle fleet between bays.

Permits for car club bays are generally the same as residential parking permits. However, with residential parking permits, permit holders are entitled to park in any residential parking bay with matching permit number (in one specific CPZ). With car club parking permits, the area in which the car is

entitled to park is restricted to one parking bay only. When using the vehicles, members must use pay-and-display bays or private car parks like other motorists.

5.4 Cost of Parking Permits

In the start-up phase of the car club in Islington, the car club operator has been required to pay for only the administrative costs of issuing permits. At the moment this is £20 per year per bay. In comparison, a residential parking permit costs £95 per year and a business permit costs £600 per year. After March 2006, when the initial four-year pilot ends, Islington Council will start charging car clubs a more substantial amount for car club parking permits. The yearly cost will likely be somewhere between residential and business parking permits. There is also likely to be an initial charge to car club operators to partially cover the costs of establishing new car club parking bays.

6. ENFORCEMENT

Because of their unique characteristics, car club vehicles form a new parking category in Islington. While general vehicles are only used by the owner, car club vehicles are used by many different people. Enforcement in the form of clamping and towing away has serious consequences for the operation of the car club. Islington Council has established arrangements to overcome many of the challenges of car club parking enforcement.

6.1 Illegally Parked Vehicles in Car Club Bays

Although car club parking bays are clearly marked, occasionally people will still park illegally in car club parking bays. Islington's parking enforcement service quickly tickets and removes illegally parked vehicles. Nevertheless, members do occasionally return to their dedicated car club bay to find it already occupied by an illegally parked vehicle, forcing them to park the car elsewhere. This not only inconveniences the current user, but can potentially prevent the next member who has booked the same vehicle from finding it. A second problem is that the car club parking permit only allows the vehicle to be parked in its own designated bay.

6.2 Finding the Vehicle

In Islington, a procedure has been put in place whereby a member who has to park the car outside the designated car club bay informs the car club operator who then contacts the next member with a booking to tell them exactly where the car club vehicle has been parked. If the period between different users is more than a few hours, the car club operator will return the vehicle to its designated bay after the illegally parked vehicle has been towed away. The enforcement team informs the car club once the vehicle has been towed away.

6.3 No Residential Parking Permit

The second challenge was to provide a solution to allow car club vehicles to park outside the designated car club parking bay. One way to give car club vehicles flexibility is by issuing them with a residential parking permit in

addition. While this option has been pursued by other London boroughs, Islington Council has chosen not to do this, because a residential permit is for exclusive use of residents and car club vehicles are not exclusively for residents.

6.4 Alternative Arrangement with Enforcement Team

Islington Council has come up with an alternative arrangement whereby if a car club vehicle cannot park in its designated car club bay, the car club vehicle can be parked in the nearest available residential bay or combined residential/pay-and-display bay, providing that the enforcement team is contacted immediately. Enforcement action will not be taken if this procedure is followed. The clamping and removal enforcement contractors are instructed to give high priority to ticketing and removing vehicles parked illegally in car club parking bays to ensure that the car club vehicle can be moved to its designated bay as soon as possible.

To ensure that this arrangement works effectively, a 24-hour hotline is required to be maintained by both the car club operator and the council. Islington Council makes use of the Parking Service hotline. Through this hotline the enforcement team can be informed that someone has illegally parked in the car club bay and that the car club vehicle has been parked outside its designated bay as prescribed by the procedure. All enforcement officers need to be well informed about the procedure – and even so, a small number of penalty charge notices issued to car club vehicles have had to be appealed and waived as the procedure catches on.

6.5 Blue Badge Holders

Although most of the problems with non-car club vehicles parked in car club parking bays have been tackled, 'blue badge' holders present an additional challenge in providing and enforcing designated car club parking bays. Blue badges give people with physical impairments entitlement to park their vehicle as close as possible to their destination, including in any parking bay and on all kerb-sides with single yellow line, for a period up to three hours. Although car club parking bays are designated exclusively to one specific vehicle displaying a valid and matching parking permit, blue badge holders are entitled to park their vehicle in the car club bay for a maximum of three hours.

Because the blue badge system has been established through national regulations, local regulation cannot change these arrangements.

As the best possible solution, Islington Council is working with key stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of car club parking bays in the hope that blue badge holders would avoid using them whenever possible. A letter may also be sent to all blue badge holders who live in Islington. But because blue badge holders cannot be forced not to use car club bays, it is all the more important to establish procedures for situations when car club bays are occupied.

7. PROMOTING CAR CLUB MEMBERSHIP

Islington Council assists in the development of car clubs by providing on-street parking space for car club operators. It is mainly the car club operators' responsibility to promote car club membership and to do marketing. However, the council does provide assistance in the promotion of membership in a number of ways.

7.1 Travel Awareness

Every year Islington Council organises events to promote sustainable transport. On a London-wide level this is done under the umbrella called '*good going*'. '*TravelWise*' is a similar programme for the rest of the UK. Car clubs are being promoted as part of the good going travel awareness campaign.

7.2 Car-free Housing

Islington Council is increasing the number of car-free developments within its boundaries. Car-free housing is housing where no on-site car parking for residents is provided and where residents are not entitled to purchase parking permits. To ensure that car-free residents have access to the full range of transport options despite not being able to own a car, the council promotes car clubs. As part of the planning approval process, Islington Council negotiates with the developer to secure contributions towards car club membership and use for all future occupiers of the development.

As mentioned earlier under '*funding for infrastructure*', developers are asked to pay for the provision of on-street car club parking space if no on-street car club parking bays are available near the development, or if additional car club vehicles are likely to be necessary to cover new demand from larger developments. The council will provide the on-street car club parking bay. Alternatively the developer can provide on-site car club parking, as long as it is accessible for all car club members and not only for the occupiers of the development, which may be the case when the car parking is under the building. In addition, the car club operator contracted by the developer must be accredited through the national Car Plus car club accreditation programme. Car Plus is the overarching organisation that promotes car clubs in the UK and assists operators and local authorities in the development of car clubs.

7.2 Corporate Membership

Islington Council has signed up as a corporate member of the car club. This is a pilot scheme to investigate if car club membership could act as a more cost-effective replacement for council fleet vehicles. The council hopes to set an example for other businesses in the borough to reduce fleet vehicle use and support the car club. In addition, corporate membership helps to facilitate further car club expansion to benefit local residents, and allows constant use of 'fleet vehicles' even during evenings and weekends when not in use by the council.

7.3 Internal Promotion

Islington Council promotes the car club internally to council staff on the Intranet, Internet, and in internal newsletters on a regular basis including with discount offers for council staff negotiated with the car club operator.

8. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Initial Support

In Islington, councillors and senior transport officers were very supportive of piloting car clubs. Council funding was secured, and officers were encouraged to dedicate time to help establish the first bays. The main reasons for this support were the need to address Islington's significant parking pressures through reducing car ownership, the opportunity to provide a service to residents to help counter public resistance to controlled parking zones, and the high priority the council places on environmental sustainability. Other local authorities looking to build internal support should consider compiling a brief cost-benefit analysis to justify a pilot, and undergo a simple market research or consultation exercise to gauge public support for the car club concept.

8.2 Getting your First Bays

The first car club parking station in Islington took six months to establish, as all the issues discussed in this paper had to be explored in detail with all relevant officers. While the lessons learned in Islington and elsewhere will help to reduce this initial timeframe for other local authorities, each authority will still have to undergo some internal negotiation to determine how best to establish the various car club procedures and to ensure support from all relevant officers.

8.3 Objections from Residents

Consultation is undertaken for each new car club bay that is established. Objections from residents on the conversion of a bay due to the loss of residential parking space were initially granted and conversion would not proceed. Senior officers did not disregard these objections at first despite statistical proof from other car clubs all around Europe. However, since London-based evidence is now available to show that car club bays actually relieve parking pressures almost immediately, in addition to the environmental benefits due to reduced car use among car club members, objections from residents are less frequent and the implementation of car club bays can proceed more easily.

9. FUTURE: ISLINGTON'S CLUSTERED APPROACH

In March 2006, after a four-year period in which the first car club was developed in Islington and Islington Council had been working exclusively with one operator, the exclusive arrangement will come to an end. After March 2006 the market will be opened to any interested Car Plus accredited operator. Islington Council is currently looking for the best future arrangements for the car club in Islington. There are advantages and disadvantages to working with a single operator or with multiple operators. Islington is looking to combine the benefits of both approaches with car club clusters, described below.

9.1 One Car Club versus Multiple Operators

Easy Access with One Operator

The idea of a car club is that members have access to a car within walking distance from home. The vehicle nearest to your home may be booked, in which case you will need to book another vehicle. If Islington has a car club network where there is a bay within five-minute walking distance from every household and if one single car club is operating in the borough, the next car club vehicle will be within walking distance from the vehicle you initially wanted to book. If multiple operators are randomly spread over the borough, it is more likely that you need to walk further to the next vehicle from your own car club.

Better Quality and more Choice with Multiple Operators

Working with multiple operators increases competition and offers potential members a choice.

Competition between car clubs has mainly two benefits. In the first place will it increase the quality of car clubs. Car clubs will improve their operations (e.g. user-friendly booking systems, easy joining). They are forced to deliver the best possible product to compete with other car clubs. For the council this also has benefits. They can for example ask for a fleet of clean-fuel vehicles to ensure that car clubs become an even more environmentally friendly transport alternative. And the product needs to be delivered for the best possible price, which is the second benefit of competition. Competition will lead to lower prices.

A borough that works with multiple car club operators offers a choice to potential members. Although in general all car clubs sell the same product, i.e. a pay-as-you-drive transport system based on a membership scheme, each car club has its distinctive features. The fleet of vehicles will be different, hourly rates and monthly charges will differ and so on. With multiple operators, potential members can choose the car club that best suits their needs, preferences and usage behaviour.

9.2 Future Approach in Islington: Car Club Clusters

Islington's draft Sustainable Transport Strategy, the council's local transport plan, aims to establish a car club network that provides a car club vehicle within five-minutes walking distance from each household within the borough. To achieve this aim, the council currently intends to work with multiple operators spread over the borough in small clusters to offer a choice to potential members and guarantee easy access to locally parked cars near home.

In the neighbouring London Borough of Camden, a multiple-operator approach is already being explored. All accredited car club operators can apply for on-street car club parking bays. Camden Council is trying to prevent a random spread of the car clubs. They have divided the borough into areas. One car club roughly operates one area. Although one objective of this approach is to increase choice for potential members and competitiveness between car clubs, in reality potential members can only join the car club that operates in their area. Of course they can join a car club in the next area, but

they may need to catch a bus to access those car club vehicles rather than walking a short distance from home.

Islington will try to overcome this problem by its small cluster approach. The car club parking network in the borough will be divided into clusters of about four bays each. Each cluster will be operated by one car club. The adjacent clusters will be operated by other car clubs. Bays within each cluster will be located within walking distance from each other. If the nearest vehicle has been booked, another vehicle from the same operator will always be within walking distance. And potential members can choose between multiple car club operators relatively nearby.

9.3 Tender of Clusters of On-street Parking Bays

Since the establishment of the London City Car Club by a consortium of seven London boroughs, Islington Council has been working exclusively with one car club operator, Smart Moves Ltd. It was envisaged that working exclusively with one car club operator in the initial phase of car clubs would benefit the development of car clubs. However, other car club operators are beginning to operate in Islington using only off-street bays, and after March 2006 a new mechanism will be in place to allow these and other Car Plus accredited operators to use new on-street car club bays established by the council.

Islington Council will tender clusters of bays, not individual bays, to one operator to establish the above described clusters. In the allocation of bays to an operator Islington Council will look at various elements: pricing structure of the car club, environmental performance of vehicles fleet, operating systems, marketing plan, website, booking system and spread of clusters and operators throughout the borough to offer choice between operators and guarantee easy access within one car club.

10. FUTURE EXPANSION OF THE NETWORK

To ensure that Islington will have a car club parking bay within five-minutes walking distance from each household, it is important to continue establishing new car club parking bays throughout the borough. Islington Council will provide on-street parking bays as part of CPZ reviews, paid for from Section 106 contributions and from funding from TfL.

10.1 Car Club provision in Controlled Parking Zones

Islington Council is introducing Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) throughout the borough wherever residents are supportive. Car club parking provision will form an integral part of the introduction of new CPZs. When a revision of an existing CPZ takes place, the introduction of car club bays will also be proposed and form part of the consultation. This approach ensures the cost-effective expansion of car clubs across the borough.

10.2 Car Club Provision through Section 106 Contributions

As a planning condition for new developments in the borough, a contribution is sought for the provision of on-street car club parking. This is always the case when it is a car-free development, but also for car-capped developments

where residents are not entitled to a parking permit though there is limited on-site parking provision, and for some other developments.

10.3 The Role of On-site Car Club Bays in New Developments

Developments that offer on-site parking are asked to provide car club parking space on-site that is accessible to non-residents. The alternative is for developers to contribute towards the council's costs in establishing new on-street car club parking bays.

10.4 Other Funding

Because car clubs are a relatively new concept in the UK, there is the potential for significant new funding sources to be identified, or new cost-effective implementation approaches to be developed. It is therefore important for local authorities to be creative about how funding can be secured.

11. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to present a range of useful approaches to car club establishment that have been developed within the UK based on experience in the London Borough of Islington. It is hoped that these approaches will help other local authorities across the UK to establish their own car clubs. While car clubs offer significant local benefits, these benefits will be compounded as more cities and towns have car club vehicles available. National expansion of car clubs will enable many more travellers to choose faster and more environmentally-friendly inter-city train travel, instead of having to drive a car between cities just to have a car available at their destination. Car clubs are no longer a 'clever European solution that wouldn't work here' – by learning from existing UK experience, any UK local authority can now harness the benefits of car clubs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Car Plus (2004) *Using Cars to Reduce Car Use in Local Transport Planning: A guide for building car clubs and car sharing into local transport planning*, www.carplus.org.uk, November.

NOTES

¹ London City Car Club monitoring data, 2005.

² The car club sign in figure 1 is consistent with diagram 660 in Schedule 2 of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002, which allows permit names and numbers to be varied without special permission.

³ The car club road markings used are consistent with diagram 1028.4, 1032 and 1033 of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002, depending on the configuration of the bay. But each local authority needs to attain permission from the DfT to print 'CAR CLUB ONLY' next to the bay instead of 'DOCTOR'.