

Happy Parking!

Makers Construction is a multiple award-winning and innovative market leader in the refurbishment and protection of car parking structures. In this article, Makers' business development manager – **Graeme Middleton** – discusses car park transformation.

Is your car park 'happy'?

At the British Retail Consortium's annual Shopping Centre Management Conference in March this year, David Atkins – chief executive of Hammerson – posed the question: 'What's the very first thing that customers experience when arriving at a shopping centre?'

Answer? The car park. Give your customers a well lit, bright, colourful and welcoming car park that's easily navigable with good signage and an overall user-friendly parking experience, and you're sure to be onto a winner.

Customer expectations

Experience shows – quite simply that – what car park users are looking for is a safer, cleaner and more user-friendly parking experience. To be able easily to find the right space that's big enough to park their car; to be able to get in and out of their vehicle safely; to find an egress point easily and to get to and from it safely. And when it comes to leaving, can they 'transact' simply with readily accessible and easy to use payment machines with a range of payment solutions?

Owners' responsibilities

There are literally thousands of multi-storey car parks throughout the UK that unfortunately remain in poor condition as a result of a lack of meaningful maintenance. These car parks are of course both in public sector ownership and privately owned and, despite being a major 'cash cow' for their owners, investment in repairing and maintaining car parks remains comparatively low.

Lifecare planning

There's no escaping the fact that owners and operators of car parks have a legal duty to maintain their structure to ensure that it doesn't endanger the people using it. The Institution of Civil Engineers 2002 publication *Recommendations for the Inspection, Maintenance and Management of Parking Structures* outlines the need for a Lifecare Plan to be adopted for car parks. Though many owners and operators appear to lack sufficient knowledge about what a Lifecare Plan is, how to create one and even how to adopt or implement one, help is at hand. Makers provides a free Lifecare Planning Service, which includes an initial visual assessment of the structure that highlights areas of remedial work, as well as assisting with condition testing, budgetary and programme advice.

Safe asset, sound structure

Outside of the home, the car is the most expensive asset to most people and so it comes as no surprise that they would want to park it somewhere that it's going to be well protected. Corroding reinforcement poking out of the concrete, narrow parking spaces, leaking movement joints dripping salt-water, and falling lumps of broken concrete are all symptoms of a poorly maintained structure and are the very reason why people won't want to use your car park.

Understanding defects

When approaching any kind of refurbishment of a parking structure, it's vital to understand the causes of the defects that are occurring. This will ensure that

as and when any refurbishment works are carried out, the correct remedial approach is taken, providing both longevity and value for money.

Protecting your car park

Having repaired your structure, it's then vital to ensure that it is protected to prevent the development and recurrence of the defects that you would have just spent a lot of time and money on. The application of fully waterproof wearing surfaces to the car park decks is fundamental to ensuring that water-borne salt chlorides from de-icing salts can't get back into the concrete substrate. The creative and imaginative use of decking colours is a great way of improving the aesthetics within car parks. You can also use them to denote safe pedestrian access walkways, and to highlight specific designated areas such as disabled parking facilities and parent-and-child-only parking.

Light & bright

As well as looking after the parking decks, you should also protect the 'un-trafficked' parts of your structure. There are important technical reasons why you should apply anti-carbonation coatings to protect soffits, columns, beams and walls from the effects of the atmosphere so, at the same time, use light and bright colours to enhance each level of the car park visually. The application of white coatings to the soffits, in particular, will aid light dispersal and can improve lux levels dramatically. Colour-coding columns and some walls – particularly the egress points – of each level in differing but attractive colours will assist your customers in remembering which deck they parked

their car on and point them towards the nearest exit points and payment machines.

Customer interface areas (CIAs)

Ask anyone what their pet hate is about car parks and among a variety of answers will be: 'The stairwells and lifts stink and are covered in graffiti!' Statistically, the longest part of a customer's journey through a car park is spent getting from their vehicle, via a stairwell or lift, down to a street-level exit or adjoining structure, such as a shopping centre or office building. When they return, they will spend time at a payment machine before repeating that journey. Look to refurbish the CIAs, stairwells and lift lobbies.

First impression

Don't forget the importance, too, of the visual impact on your customers as they approach your car park from the outside, and maybe for the first time. Drab and unappealing 1960s and 70s concrete façades can undergo a variety of transformations that make dramatic improvements and add the 'wow' factor.

High footfall and use means strong parking income creating a 'win-win' of happy owners and regular happy customers. A programme of refurbishment and ongoing maintenance therefore makes transformation self-funding. The bottom line is, make your customers' experience a pleasant and memorable one, and we guarantee they'll keep coming back.

For advice on how to approach the refurbishment of your car park, including Lifecare Planning and Concrete Condition Surveying and Testing, please contact Graeme Middleton on 01543 480959 or via e-mail: sales@makers.biz



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