



Top 5 things to look for in a Car Park Management Partner

Changing, challenging times

The rise in the number of cars on the road combined with limited parking availability continues to create pressure around the issue of parking. With hundreds of providers listed as BPA Approved Operators alongside many who aren't, choosing the right parking partner can be overwhelming – especially if you're under pressure to quickly stem the flow of rising complaints or generate more revenue to support growth.

Undeniably, finding a perfect technical solution will transform the experience for both your users and internal teams alike but it's also worth investing time to ensure you're aligning with an organisation you can trust and who will deliver a service in line with your values.

Here, we discuss the key factors that really matter when picking your perfect partner.

Every day in the UK
39 MILLION JOURNEYS
end in a parking space.



1. Innovation

Never stand still

Like most industries, parking must evolve to keep up with the world in which it operates. Finding a provider who can not only support the way the world ticks today, but also way beyond tomorrow will be invaluable in future-proofing your organisation – after all, imagine putting a solution in place only to find it is ‘incompatible’ with emerging tech 2 years down the road.

Car park management partners with a genuine commitment to innovation will demonstrate that passion in many different forms and at all levels, from a fully-baked R&D programme to an all-singing-all-dancing technology roadmap. They may concentrate on cutting-edge technologies such as car park robotics and autonomous/driverless cars or place their focus on innovative uses of current technology such as superfast connectivity and cloud-based parking apps. Could parking be going digital?

Embracing smart-city thinking

Smart cities are effectively built on big data and super-connected devices (AKA The Internet of Things) to create today’s information economy. When integrated successfully with a people-centric focus, they have the power to create safer communities (think ANPR, next generation 999 services and body camera –tech), reduced environmental footprint (parking integration with smartphones/in-car sat-nav could slash time/emissions and maybe even save lives) and improved transportation, including intelligent traffic signals which optimize traffic flow and smarter parking capability – the focus of this guide.

Essentially, smart parking solutions help people park and work effortlessly in a highly connected world, across any device. The technology to support their service delivery could include space availability communications, in-car pre-

book/pay functionality, fully automated and interaction-less payment (via ANPR), availability and management of electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) and subscription-based parking apps which create a superior retail experience and drive loyalty...

The nett effect is a truly ‘frictionless’ parking experience with minimal effort for the driver to identify, book and pay for parking - free-flow some might say. A superior customer experience for users, when compared to more traditional solutions with sticky tickets and the subsequent struggle to remove their gluey residue. Indeed, next-generation payment Kiosks don’t issue physical tickets of any kind, relying on powerful ANPR technology to understand when each visitor entered and left, along with what’s been paid. This, taken alongside the obvious time savings for motorists and the environmental benefits due to lower emissions, it’s compelling stuff even for the stalwart traditionalist.

You’d expect these smart-city services to be highly efficient in the back-office, and they are but even better, because they are wholly data-driven solutions, valuable and actionable insights from already live services can drive future decisions. For instance, promotions, planning applications and optimum opening times can all be guided by accurate occupancy data, at the click of a button.

smart-city (noun)

An urban area that uses different types of electronic data collection to supply information which is used to manage assets and resources efficiently.

Whether a prospective partner is taking a unique approach to existing tech or plans to unveil something brand new, technology has the power to transform the way your site operates, delight your users and give you a competitive edge so ensure you ask about new, potential innovations being trialled, even those still at research stage. Make sure there’s also an understanding of how collaborative the process is with existing customers and if key focus groups, beta trials, etc are used to help shape plans – this will not only display a working methodology but prove the longevity and nature of client relationships.

Bottom line – Embracing technology in any form to create better parking experiences and finding new and better ways of working can only be a force for good. So, whether you’re looking to stem the impact of unauthorised users to support genuine customers better or looking to monetise your facilities, so you can reinvest parking revenue to generate growth, it’ll be time well spent.

“ It was a nightmare finding a parking space in the centre of town. Now, I use a parking app where I can pre-register my car along with my card and simply drive in and out. No more dragging the kids to find a payment machine which may or may not be working or scratching around for change – just a text to confirm my parking cost. It’s like magic - I love it.

Hayley, Scarborough resident



2. Testimonials

For a busy business tasked with finding a car park management provider who can ease their parking pain, make life easier and won't let them down, the search can be daunting. In a highly competitive market with multiple providers offering similar solutions, it can be hard to pick out 'the gold'.

First things first. Before making any decisions, seek out referrals and get a sense of life through the customer lens – word-of-mouth remains the most powerful measure of quality. Ask about the day-to-day aspects to find out if the service team responds quickly to queries or your customers are treated with respect and understanding. Within testimonials, case studies and existing customer discussions, is there evidence of genuine quality of service? Great providers can demonstrate a fundamental, deep-rooted focus on quality across every tiny step in the customer journey (and every touchpoint). This may be in the extra time spent on signage wording to ensure terms are easily understood by users, clear instructions which direct people toward mobile terminals where they can claim their exemption/s or ensuring modern-day payment choice with great usability to minimise any frustration. Only this level of detail can give users the very best customer experience and offer your business a highly efficient operation – a provider worth their salt should welcome you talking to other clients and be transparent in their working practices.

The right support

Make sure your provider isn't looking to 'install and run' and has a solid account service plan in place. Whilst initial design, implementation plans and install are all key, ongoing management and support will keep life hassle-free and smooth-sailing, even for the most self-serve platforms. That starts with a great service delivery, beyond promises from the sales team and is often the responsibility of a dedicated Key Account Manager, to whom you should have direct

access around the clock. Ideally with knowledge of your sector and depending on the size of the contract, a person supported by a team of account executives who'll handle all manner of day-to-day requests, quickly and effectively. It's the Key Account Manager who should liaise with the various other business areas to keep your KPI's over-performing and feedback any suggestions or issues that arise. This is about so much more than purely building rapport or a slick operation but goes further to drive a culture of continual improvement, so life continues to get better and better, long after install.

This commitment to quality may well extend to a dedicated Quality Assurance team and any provider offering this should be top of your shortlist. This demonstrates a root-to-tip commitment towards doing things right, a business serious about standards. The Quality Assurance team should continually audit service levels and enforcement activities through a variety of techniques, such as remote call listening, match checking reviews and random appeal handling checks to make sure each stage in the process is not only compliant but honed to deliver exceptional service levels to you, and your users.

Alongside the day-to-day running, monthly review meetings are very useful, with access to members of the senior team such as the operations lead for instance if required and led by the Account Manager. Your business may also benefit from a 'Technical Owner' – someone who works within the partner operations team and has responsibility for the performance of equipment on your site. This gives you a named person who can answer hardware and IT-related queries as and when you have them. This role is also accountable for ensuring the nationwide engineering team fulfils its Service Level Agreements to you and meets both business needs and expectations every minute of every day.

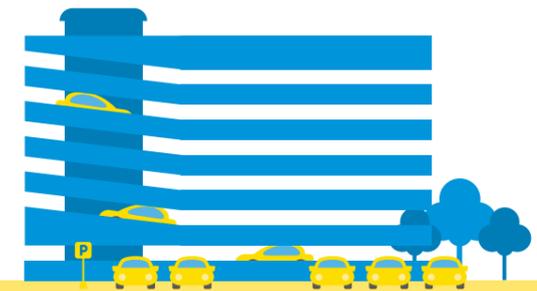
After all, your business never sleeps and neither should your payment machines, ANPR cameras, and so on.

Six-monthly innovation reviews are a great forum for sharing ideas to drive further customer service improvements, efficiencies or other actionable insight from management information like occupancy, duration and throughput.

Life on the front line

Last but certainly not least, research the quality of direct interaction with your users, including the conduct of personnel on-site. Unprofessional copywriting, confusing instructions and delays in response will most certainly create cranky motorists so ask for examples along with SLAs for each stage in the parking cycle – think back to our advice about the Quality Assurance team. We'll cover the enforcement process and appeals in far more detail within the Ethics section

but undoubtedly these aspects must be above reproach in the quality of their operation and understandably remain an area of sensitivity and concern for most businesses. If you need personnel, these individuals will represent your business 'on the ground'. It's in these interactions where the small things really matter and whether that be attendants helping the elderly into their cars or handing back credit cards left in payment machines, these behaviours should speak volumes about the core values your partner demonstrates at all levels of their organisation. Ask for examples and speak to team-members across different roles – it might surprise you.



“ We needed to work with a partner who understands our complex needs. Customer care extends to more than just the car park – it sets the tone for the whole parking experience.

Security Manager



3. Ethics

Let's be fair

Aligning yourself with a partner who has different ideas about ethical management can create serious difficulties for your reputation, your time and your business. Responsible, fair enforcement is a crucial deterrent against abuse but a great provider never loses sight of the customer journey. Take the time to get a sense of how people-centric a business and its solutions are to ensure both your business and users are always at the heart of everything you, and they do. Less time, hassle and money spent parking means happier customers who will return time and time again, driving more business through your doors. A partner who is responsive to your needs and easy to do business with day-to-day will reap hours in saved time.

A truly ethical provider should be working with you to ensure genuine customers aren't caught in the same net as abusers of your site/s. Good pointers to help you understand a provider's approach to 'ethical charges' include asking how they track and understand the customer journey, alongside specific processes which safeguard against genuine customers receiving Parking Charge Notices (PCNs). Enquire about the ways in which PCNs are double-checked (which may include proof of purchase for instance) to be sure the correct driver is receiving the ticket – anyone taking the time to exclude genuine customers from the off has your reputation front-of-mind.

Symptoms such as incorrectly issued PCNs can often be caused by operational aspects such as confusing signage, contradictory on-site terms and so on. Each site is unique, as is your business so beware of a 'one size fits all' approach to site terms – instead, prompt a discussion about tailoring guidelines for your site/s and agreeing a bespoke set of rules. Whether you manage one site or one thousand, your car park management partner should take the time to review

your estate in detail and propose procedures to suit them perfectly. It's worth getting things right first time.

Putting your customers first

Clearly, any business looking to install equipment on your site has to recoup cost somewhere, be it upfront or downstream. Maybe this is in paid parking revenue, ticketing (PCN) charges, management fees and so on, but a word of warning... A partner who places their own revenue over the reputation of your business is the wrong provider. Simple.

Whilst a provider might do all they can to protect genuine customers, there may be instances where customers are issued with a PCN. In such circumstances, it should never be a battle to request that a PCN be cancelled – either in time or effort. Whilst a quality provider will, or certainly should offer advice on setting precedents for instance, they must also be on your side, no matter what and if you make a request, it should be honored without a fight. Enquire about an operator's position on requested cancellations – it could well throw those looking to push back on any requests and follow their own agenda once the kit is in the ground.

Operators should be working with you throughout the contract term to review and refine rules for your site/s so that you can request cancellations quickly and easily if you need to, mitigate against customer PCNs and hopefully, together eradicate the need for cancellations entirely over time. This push for continual improvement never stops, as the best providers want what you want. Beware of any providers who have a reputation for making it difficult to cancel PCNs.

The right to appeal

Instead of resolving a problem, poorly issued PCNs and badly handled appeals can have a detrimental impact on a business in terms of time and reputation. It's the reputational

damage that can be hard to reverse so be careful you don't focus on PCNs and cancellations without taking a close look at appeals handling.

Every motorist has the right to appeal. Making it easy should be a given but this takes more than just good intentions – it needs systems and people in place to manage those appeals quickly, fairly and effectively, especially if you have a large estate attracting thousands of visitors each week. Without droning on about documentation and audit trails, fundamentally the appeals process must be simple and accessible for all, with a number of 'gates' in the process at which either the appeal progresses or is rejected, backed-up by regular communication with the motorist and their options. Ask for a comms plan or a walk-through of the process flow so you can experience what the motorist does and don't be afraid to ask some awkward questions – a great provider will rely on the legal process, a consistent approach and simple yet clear communication.

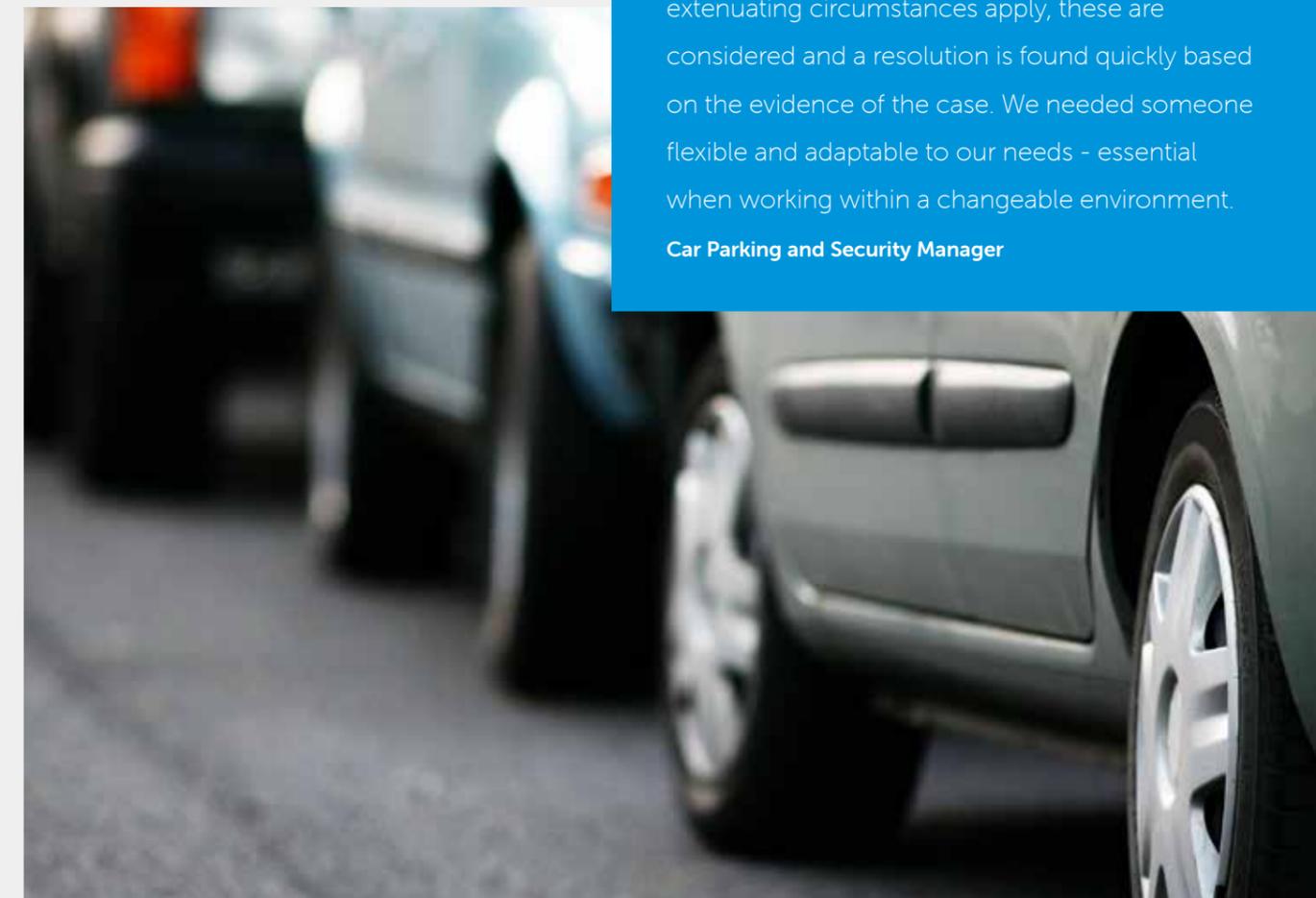
POPLA
Parking on Private Land Appeals

Before making any decisions, take a look at POPLA (www.popla.co.uk) – the independent appeals service.

They publish a very useful list each year detailing the upheld and overturned rates of the top operators. As a neutral party in what is an unregulated industry, their findings are hugely valuable to a business looking for the right car park management partner. In particular, their upheld rates are a key indicator of a robust and fair appeals process as effectively, POPLA agree with the operator ruling. Higher appeal 'refusal' rates signal providers who aren't getting it right so always check to validate what your provider is telling you.

“ We wanted a true long-term partner and work collaboratively to resolve any issue that may arise around the clock. Each complaint goes through a rigorous appeals process to ensure that, when extenuating circumstances apply, these are considered and a resolution is found quickly based on the evidence of the case. We needed someone flexible and adaptable to our needs - essential when working within a changeable environment.

Car Parking and Security Manager



4. Proven, reliable technology

No solution, whatever the cost, is worth a penny if you can't rely on it. Whether you're a blue-chip enterprise business with a huge estate or a small independent surface site with 15 spaces, you need to know your solution is robust and can tolerate whatever life throws at it, from IT bugs and hardware failures to snow and vandalism. Aspects such as high-quality equipment, great 'up-time', flexible staffing levels, market-leading SLA's, a responsive account team or infrastructure resiliency to provide a failover if the worst happens, should give you confidence that you're in safe hands.

A provider with some scale could offer greater resiliency simply through UK-wide coverage, allowing them to flex resources as and when required to deliver a level of responsiveness which competitors may struggle to match. What's more, anyone with regionally based maintenance engineers and hubs could potentially offer much faster resolution times and make access to equipment far more efficient. Ask about 'time to fix' for instance as there are so many operators to choose from but the vast majority are small businesses, so if your kit breaks it's important that you have commitments on how long it will take them to respond and send engineers. Certainly, something to bear in mind.

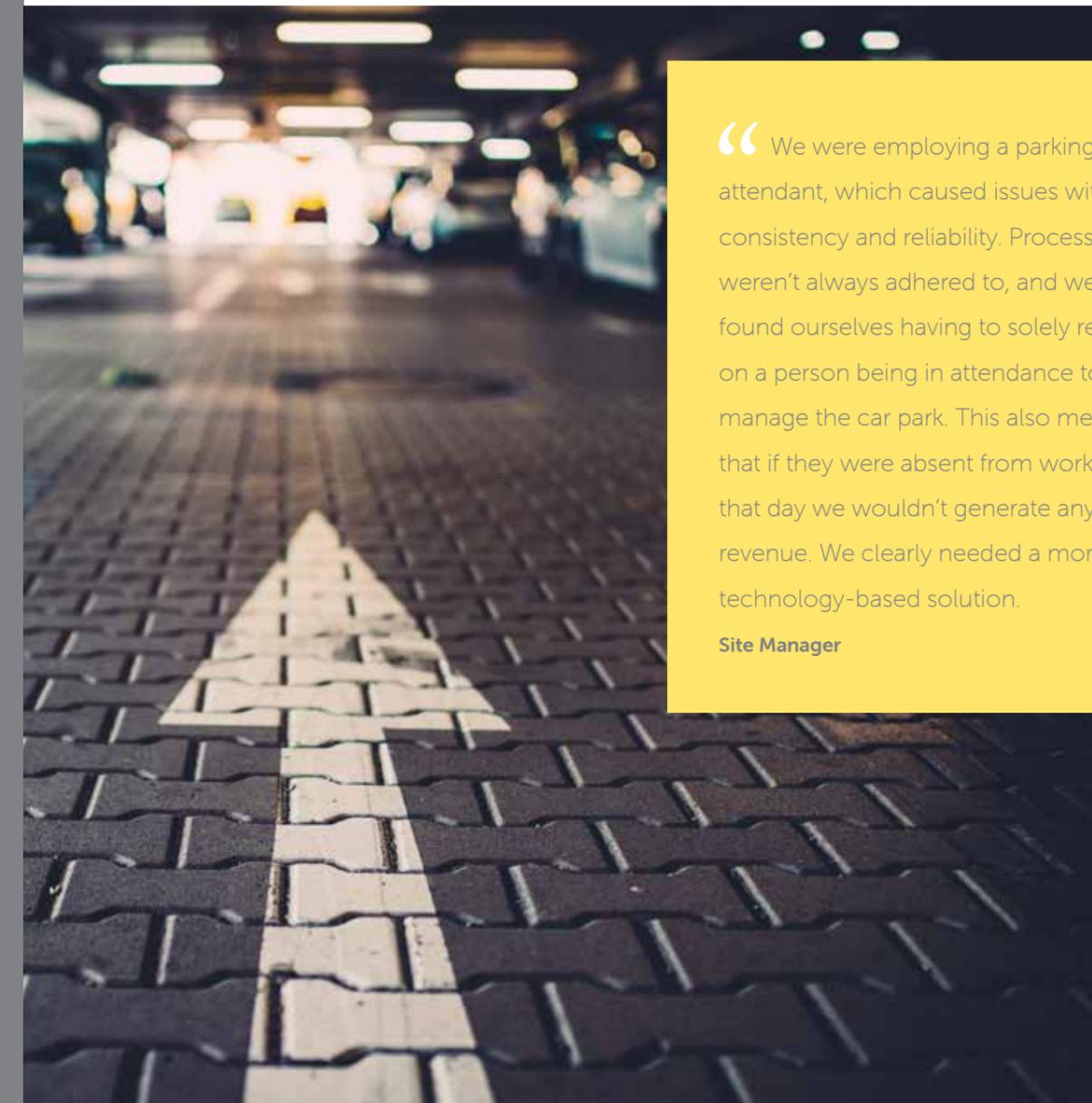
If you're opting for ANPR cameras across your estate, take the time to ask about testing, maintenance and which software technology is used. Be on the look-out for a team who commit to proactively monitor both the equipment and the live feed and respond quickly in the event that something isn't as it should be – remember, if your business is generating revenue from parking, if payment machines go down, so too does your bottom line. Camera uptime and first-time resolution rates are good benchmarks for quality and ANPR should run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Tried and tested

Parking is now a highly technical operation, or it should be. Don't underestimate the value in choosing a provider who is equipped to analyse multiple data points in real-time and can demonstrate a solid ability to turn 'big-data' (from cameras, payment machines and so forth) into accurate, actionable insights which can really improve the way you work. Furthermore, it's also a good idea to clarify that your data is held on a secure server with the ability to scale up as necessary otherwise there's a danger your data may not be available when you need it or of it falling into the wrong hands.

Imagine your business rolls out on-site parking payments with tickets issued to any abusers (PCN) with an appeals process for those who seek it. That's three pretty sophisticated workflows, handling potentially millions of pieces of data (as an example, we handle over 2m pieces of data each day). Done right, this can and absolutely should provide a smooth, frictionless parking experience to your users which supports your business model – whether that's to eradicate abuse, generate revenue or drive efficiency. In the wrong hands, this may well serve up a painful, frustrating exercise for all involved which has the very real potential to damage your brand reputation. Scary stuff.

If there are inefficiencies in the back-office, your business will pay for them – be that in time, money or reputation. Convoluted processes, manual handling and inconsistent ways of working can really have an impact if you're the customer. Not only will response time start to suffer but there is a very real danger of your users feeling the frustration if site staff are unreliable, machines aren't emptied on time or incorrect paperwork is issued. You're looking for an experienced team and a process, however detailed, which has



“ We were employing a parking attendant, which caused issues with consistency and reliability. Processes weren't always adhered to, and we found ourselves having to solely rely on a person being in attendance to manage the car park. This also meant that if they were absent from work, that day we wouldn't generate any revenue. We clearly needed a more technology-based solution.

Site Manager

been tested and re-optimised over years to create a smooth and efficient journey (pardon the pun). This will not only drive cost from the operator's business (allowing them to re-invest into market-leading service for instance) but also deliver commercial competitiveness which should be reflected in any proposals to you. Request documented procedures covering elements such as on-site parking payments, resulting PCNs, received appeals and the processing of any cancellations as this provides a solid baseline and could be an area where less experienced providers falter.

Be on the look-out for ongoing investment in proprietary back-office systems, coupled with any research aimed at optimising technology – such as camera accuracy, process automation, server efficiencies and personalised communication. Clever tech can really optimise the experience alongside an opportunity to drive cost out of the solution (for instance through ANPR) but always insist on a strong 'people' based team to support your business, who know your account intimately. The best providers demonstrate an easy balance between the two, enabling efficiency coupled with a highly personal service in one seamless approach. Such ways of working will help to deliver a consistent and resilient solution which in turn should draw out the more responsible and professional organisations. In a sector which attracts much negative attention, this is vital.



5. Compliance

No-one wants to be on the wrong side of the law so ensuring your provider is not only compliant themselves but can support you in all aspects of prevailing legislation and regulatory guidance as a business is essential.

A great place to start is to ask if company procedures, processes, policies and documentation is compliant and fit for purpose. A good starting-point would be signage which is compliant with BPA guidelines but ask about sector-specific requirements too which may also apply to test internal knowledge and experience. For instance, providers working within the healthcare sector must also adhere to further NHS Car Parking Management Guidelines.

Risk is a terrifying prospect for any business and often, we find customers are largely unaware of the work put in behind the scenes to mitigate potential issues on their behalf. Safety should come first, no matter what - for your users and your site - so compliance with CDM (Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015) and Health & Safety at Work legislation should be top of your list, a hygiene factor for any provider worth their salt. Installing car park infrastructure requires significant civils and electrical work so strict adherence to laws on high risk aspects such as asbestos management is crucial. Remember, your business will be liable in the event that something goes wrong.

Also ask about the level of training provided to staff. The better providers may offer an in-house Health & Safety Manager and conduct a series of proactive site safety audits periodically (ours are undertaken every week, for instance). Navigating through regulations such as these can be daunting so make sure your provider is able to provide expert advice and support to guide you through the maze.

Compiling and presenting planning documentation is also a complex area where your provider can help. This, coupled

with ensuring land documentation is fully checked and audited will ensure the process of issuing PCNs is delivered compliantly. The last thing you need is any liability or exposure from the way in which infrastructure is implemented, never mind getting on the wrong side of the local planning team.

No-one could escape the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on the 25th May 2018 which replaces the Data Protection Act 1998. You would expect a provider to be fully compliant, not only to protect your business data but the personal data of your users (registration plate information for instance). Don't just assume companies are working within the law.

The British Parking Association (BPA) offer bags of best practice guidance, as well as a number of useful resources which can be used as 'indicators' for quality and ethical car park management. Certainly, beware of any organisations with BPA 'Scheme of Sanctions' points against their operators' license as this could indicate poor processes or questionable standards and in the worst cases, licenses revoked. Always check your provider holds a valid license and has never been subject to a past withdrawal. Don't forget those POPLA appeal rates mentioned earlier – another valuable indicator of the operators who are doing things right.

Further to this, parking providers serious about driving industry change and raising standards in a heavily-regulated environment will be involved with key industry bodies. A good place to start is the British Parking Association Council of Representatives and their Operational Service Board, the Public Affairs Board, the Standards Panel, the CCTV Working Group and the DVLA, in particular their Focus Group. Accreditations and alliances such as these provide clients with independent assurances that their partner meets required standards, which may also save a little time in pre-qualification.

Glossary

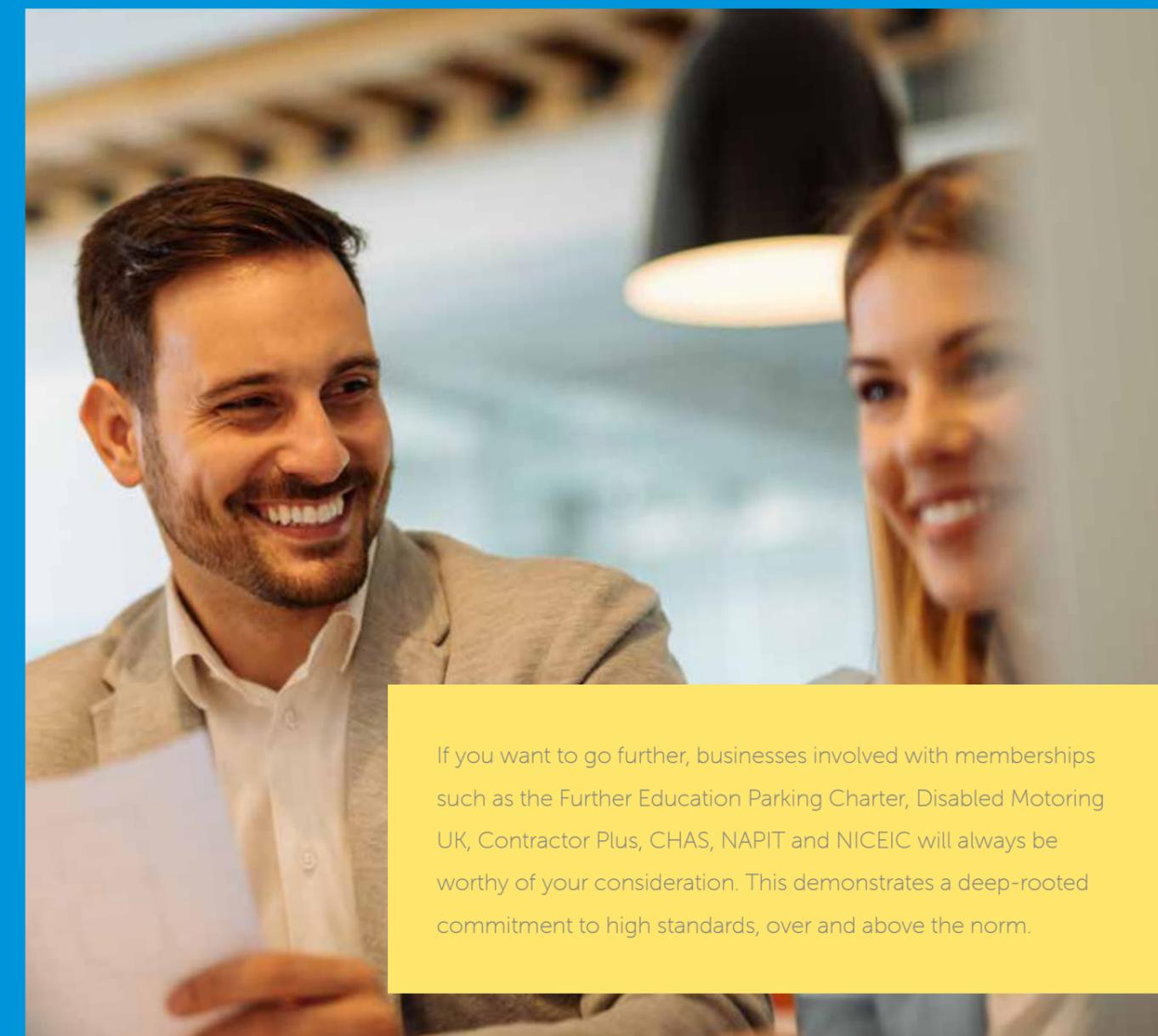
Not essential but well established and customer-centric organisations will be members of key industry bodies and list accreditations on their websites. Here are a few to look out for:

The British Parking Association (BPA) is a non-profit organisation which actively represents the parking sector by increasing knowledge, standards and professionalism enabling members to provide a better service for motorists. Members of the BPA and their Approved Operator Scheme (AOS) will be regularly audited by both the DVLA and the BPA to ensure they adhere to the very highest standards.

The Approved Operator Scheme (AOS) was launched for BPA members to improve and maintain standards and is designed specifically for those operating parking enforcement services on private land or in unregulated car parks.

Parking on Private Land Appeals (POPLA) is an independent appeals service funded by the parking industry for PCNs issued on private land. It was established when the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 introduced the concept of 'keeper liability' for vehicles parked on private land.

If you want to go further, businesses involved with memberships such as the Further Education Parking Charter, Disabled Motoring UK, Contractor Plus, CHAS, NAPIT and NICEIC will always be worthy of your consideration. This demonstrates a deep-rooted commitment to high standards, over and above the norm.



In summary

With rising demand for parking, a continued squeeze on space and new technology to enable the 'smart-cities' of tomorrow, there's never been a better time to transform the way your car park operates. However, choosing an ethical, professional provider within such a competitive marketplace who can deliver the level of resiliency and expertise your business needs can be tough.

We hope you've found our guide useful but if you still have questions, don't worry. As the largest private sector operator of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems in the UK, we're serious about doing things right and have over 350 experts across the UK to offer advice.

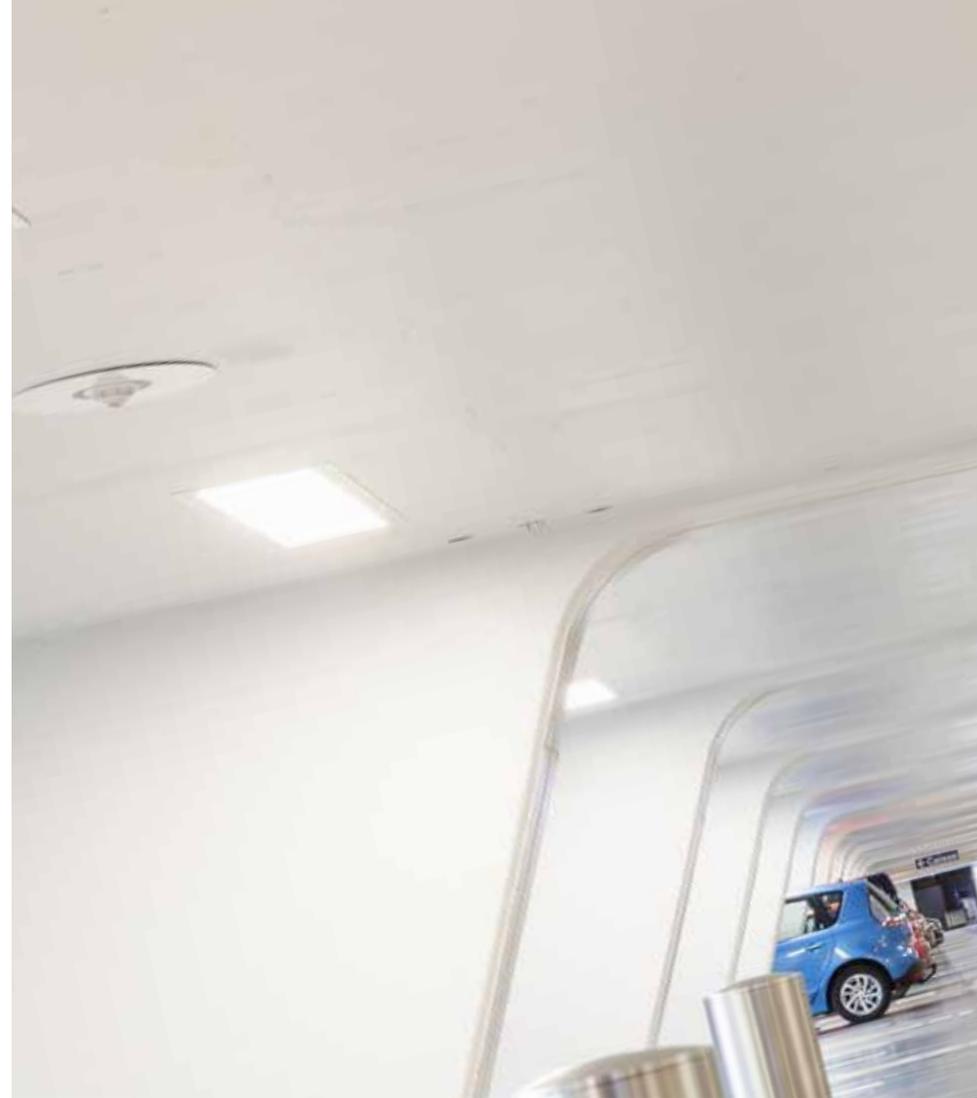
If you're suffering abuse from town and city centre visitors, you're not alone. Whether you're a blue-chip household name or a small independent surface site, we're here to help.

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