

Keeping it safe

The BPA has got safer parking in the bag, says **Kelvin Reynolds**, director of technical services and head of the Safer Parking scheme



Customers in any shopping centre rely on a safe and welcoming environment to park their car in while spending time shopping. This part of the shopping experience is a convenience that some people take for granted – until there is something to complain about at the parking facility.

The British Parking Association (BPA) launched a scheme to promote best practice in the management of safer parking facilities in 2004. The scheme, run by the BPA for the Association of Chief Police Officers, was developed to provide a benchmark standard for all parking areas across the UK with the aim of creating safer environments for the public and their vehicles.

Car parks which meet the high standards set out in the scheme are given a Park Mark Safer Parking Award, which signals to motorists

that the facility is of a particular standard and has special measures in place to meet this standard.

In order to achieve an award, parking facilities must meet the requirements of a risk assessment conducted by the local Police authority. The parking operator must put in place measures that help to deter criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, and do everything they physically can to prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime in their facilities.

Car parks granted the award can feature the distinctive Park Mark tick on their signage, so that drivers know exactly where to go for safe parking. Certain parking facilities that have received the Park Mark Safer Parking Award have also seen a drop in

vehicle-related crime of over 80 per cent. Car park operators across the UK are becoming increasingly aware of

the Park Mark® scheme and the benefits it brings to help prevent crime and boost confidence with residents and visitors.

In January 2009, a shopping centre in the South East undertook a remarkable overhaul of its multi-storey car park to earn its first Park Mark Safer Parking Award and is seeing what a difference achieving the all important 'tick' can make.

St George's Shopping Centre in Gravesend, Kent is used by around 400,000 motorists a year and had issues with the facility being covered in graffiti, full of dark corners and generally an unpleasant place to leave a car, or pass through on the way to the shops. That was the case until its owner, Edinburgh House Estates, embarked on a radical makeover which took two months to complete. They focused on brightening the facility with fresh paint and enhanced

lighting, and made parking spaces more accessible.

Working in partnership with the Safer Parking Scheme, Edinburgh House Estates worked hard to meet the criteria for the Award, and achieved accreditation in February 2009. The work is still ongoing, further improvements are being made all the time with the shopping centre taking on board recommendations from the BPA to help deter crime, and these are working.

The car park is proving to be a safer and more hospitable place for shoppers to park, and rather than being fearful, users now have nothing but praise for the owners, who, of course, proudly display their Park Mark tick.

For more information visit www.britishparking.co.uk or to find your nearest Park Mark car park, please visit www.parkmark.co.uk

