

OAKFIELD ROAD CAR PARK

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In April 1961 the Highways Committee of Woking Council were handed a petition by Cllr Rhoda McGaw on behalf of the residents of Oakfield Road, off Church Street, complaining of the 'grave nuisance and inconvenience' of cars parked in their road. Commuters and shop-workers parked their there all day and even traders left their vans there, with evening cinema-goers taking their place (the Ritz being just around the corner). It was almost impossible for residents to park outside their own gates, and on one occasion an ambulance bringing someone home had to drop them off at the end of the road! But it wasn't just ambulances and other emergency vehicles that were inconvenienced, coalmen refused to carry the heavy sacks up the road and no doubt the dustmen had problems too.

'They are absolutely fed up with the position they are in' said Mrs McGaw, before declaring 'they are living in a car park'.

Was that the 'light-bulb' moment in the head of a council official that meant that almost a decade later Oakfield Road would literally become a 'car park' - the site of the first multi-storey car park to be built in Woking Town Centre?

As is often the case in Woking the 'progress' of any idea was slow. The first signs that a multi-storey car park may be built on the site was in the Spring of 1966 when the idea was muted at the Highway's Department of Woking Council.

Eventually compulsory purchase powers were sought and the residents re-housed, but the sight of empty properties awaiting demolition further provoked Mrs McGaw and her Socialist colleagues on the council, who wanted to see the homes used as temporary accommodation until the bulldozers were brought in.

Plans were drawn up for the 900 place multi-storey, with access onto both Church Street and Boundary Lane (which was earmarked to become part of the new town centre by-pass). Commuters were to be encouraged to park elsewhere, with this development solely for shoppers and local employees.

It was estimated that there would be a need for 1,717 parking places by 1970 for people employed in the town centre, and 1,380 spaces for shoppers, so clearly the multi-storey would not be the entire answer. The surface car parks at Commercial Road, Clarence Avenue, and eventually West Street, would have to be closed

The houses of Church Street (between the Ritz Cinema and Skeet & Jeffes Showroom) were also demolished to make way for the Oakfield Road Multi-Storey (now better known as the Victoria Way Car Park). Work started on the scheme in April 1970 and was due for completion by July 1971.

once work on the new town centre began, so a second multi-storey would be required - although that was a long way in the future.

Clearly none of this work was going to be cheap, but at the public inquiry in 1968 into the compulsory purchase of the Oakfield Road properties, the council promised that the charges at the new multi-storey would be the same as in other town centre car parks.

Note they didn't promise that the car park charges would remain the same, merely that the charges in all car parks would be the same!

Almost immediately they approved an increase in the maximum charge, from four shillings (20p) to ten shillings (50p) - a massive 150% increase - in order 'to avoid a substantial deficit on the general rate fund when the multi-storey car parks at Oakfield Road and Church Street were brought into operation'.



The surface car parks at Commercial Road, Clarence Avenue and West Street (centre of picture) would all eventually be cleared for the new town centre development, whilst the cars parked off Boundary Lane were soon to be cleared for the new town centre bypass. Only Brewery Road (top left) would remain as an open-air car park to the north of the town centre.

Fortunately for commuters the increase did not apply to the commuter car park in Heathside Crescent, where cars could still park for just one shilling (5p) a day - sixpence (2½p) after 9.30am - but with the proposal by the GPO to build a large new telephone exchange on the

temporary commuter car park on the 'White Rose Grange' site by the station, it was not long before many found it harder to find a place to park before heading up to London.

The lack of free parking in the town centre prompted one local housewife to launch her own protest, by parking on the single yellow lines that had remained at the closed off end of Chertsey Road. She had to park there a few times before finally getting a ticket, allowing her to have her day in court. In her letter to the magistrate she berated the council for their parking policy and for not removing the yellow lines 'as parking does not and cannot impede traffic in any way' when there is no longer any traffic on that section of the road.

She realised that as an individual, writing to the council would probably not get her anywhere, but believed that 'members of the bench are in a special position where they both can and should point out in a practical and forceful way to the responsible authorities cases where common sense is not being applied'.

Ironically the chairman of the Highways Committee on Woking Council was Mr Henry Cawsey - who also happened to be chairman of the Court!

Eventually the commuter car park at Heathside Crescent would itself be turned into a multi-storey, but the White Rose Grange site (top right) was soon to be replaced by the new telephone exchange.

