

City's worst parking blackspot

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A study by a groundbreaking public journalism project has revealed the worst place to park in Birmingham. And it emerged that Birmingham City Council is currently handing out about 200 tickets a day more on average than at the same time last year.

Alum Rock Road in Washwood Heath, a suburban artery leading towards the centre of the city, saw almost 4,000 tickets handed out in the last year alone, making its two-mile stretch the most ticketed street in the city.

And figures revealed by the Help Me Investigate project show the date, time, location and infraction for every one of the 135,656 parking tickets handed out

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by officials working for Birmingham City Council between April 2008 and April 2009, the last full year of figures available.

Apart from tickets handed out in multi-storey car parks, the most ticketed streets in the city were, unsurprisingly, the crowded city centre streets.

The ten most ticketed streets in Birmingham for the year were:

- Alum Rock Road, Washwood Heath (3,995)
- Stratford Road, Sparkhill (2,418)
- Corporation Street, city centre (1,748)
- Alcester Road, Moseley (1,545)
- Waterloo Street, city centre (1,455)
- High Street, Harborne (1,391)
- Gas Street, city centre (1,083)
- Whittall Street, city centre (1,022)
- St Paul's square, Jewellery Quarter (1,006)
- Dean Street, city centre (978)

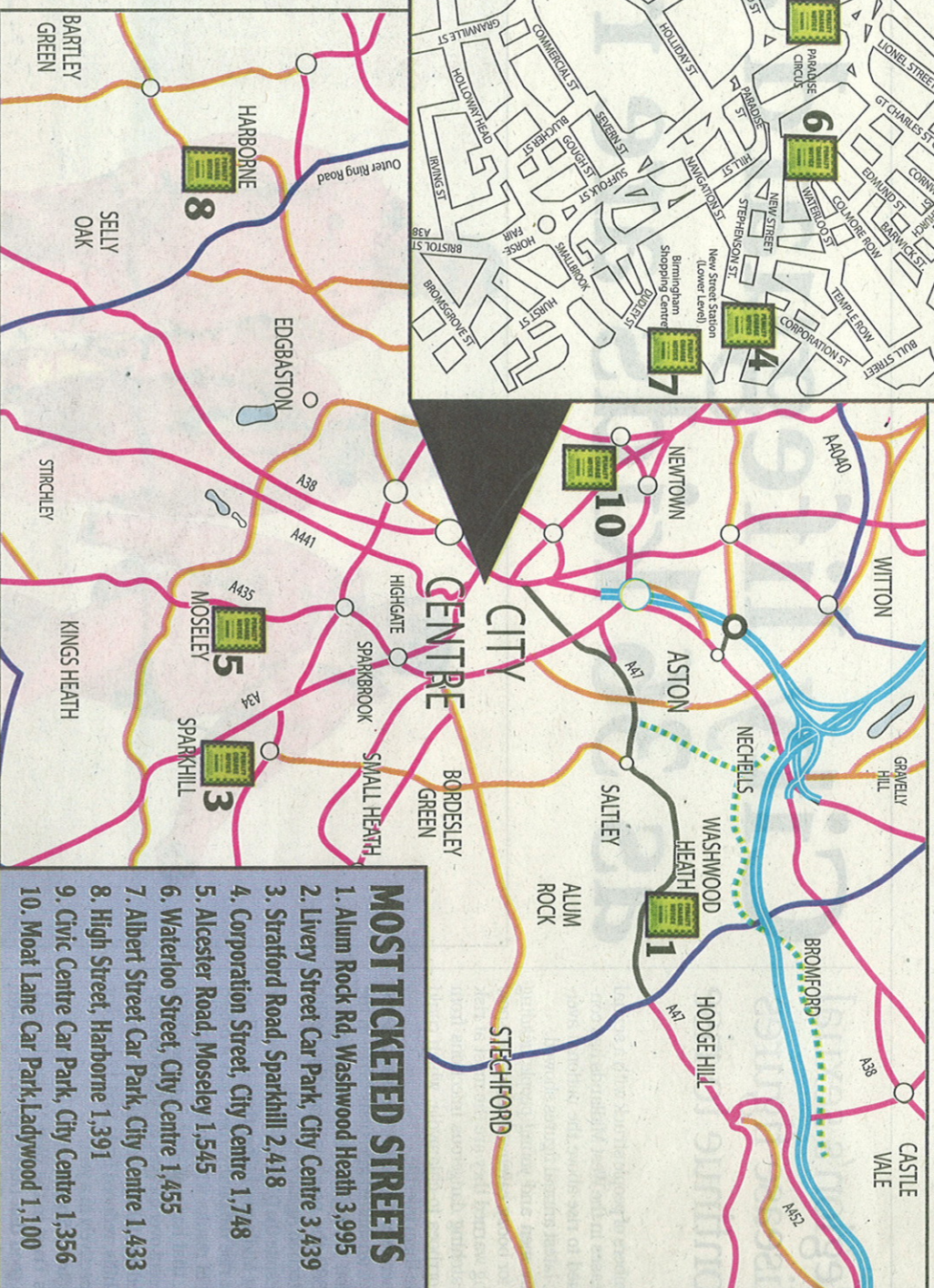
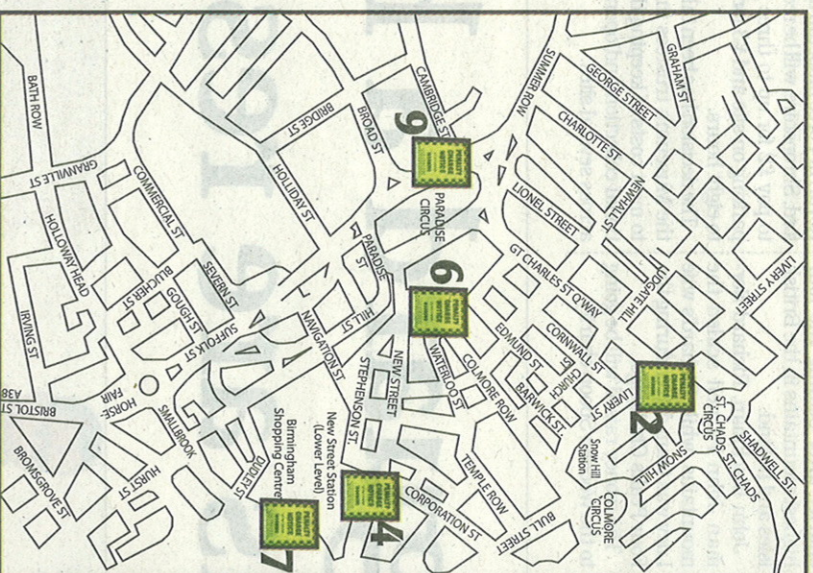
Alum Rock Road has been a problem area for parking for years. It has various parking restrictions in place to try to prevent traffic congestion blocking up the flow of cars in and out of the city.

As long ago as 2005 the council had identified the road as a potential parking trouble spot, and had two full-time parking attendants working with the police patrolling the area between 8am and 6pm to try to keep traffic flowing along the busy street.

After a confrontation with the owners of one car who got in and refused to get out while the car was being towed away in 2005 the council released a statement saying: "The council receives numerous complaints with regard to illegal parking in Alum Rock Road from the public, the police and various bus and haulage companies. Buses are frequently re-routed due to the congestion problems caused in this road due to inconsiderate and illegal parking.

"The road fronts a very busy shopping area and the pavements outside of these retail premises are quite narrow. It is, therefore, important that illegally parked vehicles do not block the footpaths or endanger pedestrians and other road users."

During the year covered by the figures released, the average number of tickets handed out per day went from about 280 in April 2008 to nearly 500 in April this year, a rise the council put down to a change in the law and the way it had been enforced.



- MOST TICKETED STREETS**
1. Alum Rock Rd, Washwood Heath 3,995
 2. Livery Street Car Park, City Centre 3,439
 3. Stratford Road, Sparkhill 2,418
 4. Corporation Street, City Centre 1,748
 5. Alcester Road, Moseley 1,545
 6. Waterloo Street, City Centre 1,455
 7. Albert Street Car Park, City Centre 1,433
 8. High Street, Harborne 1,391
 9. Civic Centre Car Park, City Centre 1,356
 10. Moat Lane Car Park, Ladywood 1,100

After seeing the 2008-09 figures a spokeswoman said: "Large sections of Alum Rock Road were unenforceable from late 2007 until early in 2009 due to poorly maintained lines and signs, missing road markings and incorrect Traffic Regulation Orders. Therefore only a small section of Alum Rock Road and

on the first section of Alum Rock Road which resulted in parking restrictions on this section of road being enforced."

Regarding the rise in tickets handed out, she said there were a number of reasons why the figure had gone up. These included the introduction of the Traffic Management Act 2004 in April this year, which required the introduction of new software, and retraining of parking staff.

There was also a high turnover of staff in parking after a new contractor was appointed to enforce the parking tickets. The move from apoca to NSL meant a disruption to staffing levels.

The figures on parking tickets in Birmingham were obtained by the Help Me Investigate team. Help Me Investigate is a project set up by a group of Birmingham-based academics, journalists and programmers that encourages people to get involved in journalistic investigations.

Washwood Heath Road was patrolled by Civil Enforcement Officers. In February 2009 all the lines were refreshed and necessary remedial work carried out, allowing enforcement to take place.

"Alum Rock is subject to regeneration and a new traffic scheme was introduced

Buses are frequently re-routed due to problems caused in this road due to inconsiderate and illegal parking

By joining the site, users can pose questions they want to find the answers to or suggest topics that need looking into. They can also look at the investigations that are already running and either suggest ways of solving them, or help out themselves.

The site has journalists, academics and members of the public working together to try to



get results. The site was setup by a team including BCU academic Paul Bradshaw, social media consultant Nick Booth, Freedom of Information expert Heather Brooke and online entrepreneur Stef Lewandowski. It received a huge boost earlier this year when it was selected for support by regional funding body Screen West Midlands and 4IP Channel 4's project to encourage investment in public service digital media to get involved, log on to <http://helpmeinvestigate.com>.