



■■ Parking Fines in the UK — Complete Guide

Your rights, the rules that catch people out, how to spot an invalid fine, and a step-by-step guide to challenging parking charges — private and council.

■ The Most Important Thing to Know Before You Read Anything Else

There are two completely different types of parking ticket in the UK and they look almost identical — by design. Which type you have changes everything about what the issuer can do to you, and what you should do next. Section 1 explains the difference. Start there.

PART 1 — The Two Types of Parking Fine

1. Penalty Charge Notice vs Parking Charge Notice

These look almost identical. The name is nearly the same. But they are fundamentally different in legal terms — and that difference determines everything.

	Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)	Parking Charge Notice
Issued by	Local council, TfL, Highways Agency, or police.	Private company — supermarkets, retail parks, hospitals, car park operators.
Legal nature	A STATUTORY FINE. Issued under the Traffic Management Act 2004 or Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.	A CONTRACTUAL CLAIM. The company claims you breached the terms displayed on signage when you parked.
What happens if you ignore it	It doubles after 28 days. Escalates to debt enforcement. Can affect your credit. Must be taken seriously.	They must take you to County Court before they can enforce. No court order = no bailiffs.
Appeal route	Formal representations to the issuing authority, then independent adjudicator (PATAS or PATROL).	Internal appeal to the company first, then independent POPLA adjudicator (free to use).
Time limit to pay at discount	14 days from issue (50% discount). After 28 days it doubles.	Typically 28 days before charges increase — check the notice.

Still not sure which type you have? Look at who issued it. Council name, TfL, or a highways reference = Penalty Charge Notice (statutory fine). A company name like 'ParkingEye', 'Excel Parking', 'UKPC', 'Smart Parking' = Parking Charge Notice (contractual claim).

PART 2 — Your Rights and the Rules You Need to Know

2. The 10-Minute Grace Period — It's The Law



Since 2015, private parking operators **must** allow a minimum 10-minute grace period after a paid session expires before they can issue a Parking Charge Notice. This is mandatory under both the British Parking Association (BPA) and the International Parking Community (IPC) Codes of Practice.

If your overstay was under 10 minutes on a private car park — you have automatic grounds to appeal.

Cite the mandatory grace period in your appeal letter. In the vast majority of cases, the company will back down. Template appeal letter available at bettercallkal.co.uk.

3. The ANPR Overstay Trap

Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras record when your car enters and exits. If the duration exceeds your paid time — even by one minute — a charge is automatically issued. No human reviews it. It simply fires.

- Always build in a **buffer of at least 15 minutes** beyond your paid time.
- If you overstayed due to a genuine emergency (medical, broken down, queue at exit) — document it and appeal.
- If the machine was faulty or not working — photograph it and report it immediately to the operator.
- Private companies have **up to 6 years** to take you to court. 'Gone quiet' does not mean 'gone away.'

4. The 10 Rules You Need to Know

Rule 1 — Single yellow line

No parking during restricted hours shown on nearby sign. Outside those hours — you can park. Check the sign every time.

Rule 2 — Double yellow line

No parking at any time. Blue badge holders may be exempt in certain circumstances — check local signage.

Rule 3 — Loading exemption

You may stop briefly on a double yellow to load or unload goods, as long as you are actively loading and do not take longer than necessary.

Rule 4 — Dropped kerbs

It is an offence to park in front of a dropped kerb even with no yellow line and no sign. Councils enforce this actively.

Rule 5 — School keep clear (zigzags)

Yellow zigzag lines outside schools are not double yellows. Stopping on them — even to drop off — carries a £150 fine. No grace period. Cameras are active at school opening and closing times.

Rule 6 — Bus stop clearways

No stopping at any time in the marked yellow box area around a bus stop. Not even for 30 seconds. Not even to drop someone off. Cameras at bus stops run continuously in most cities.

Rule 7 — Disabled bays

Using a disabled bay without a valid blue badge carries fines up to £1,000 in some areas. Misusing a deceased person's blue badge is fraud.



Rule 8 — EV charging bays

Parking in a dedicated EV charging bay without actively charging is now being enforced by many local authorities. This includes EV drivers who are not using the charger.

Rule 9 — Private car park signage

For a Parking Charge Notice to be valid, the terms and conditions must be clearly displayed on signage that a driver could reasonably see on entering. Inadequate or unclear signage is a strong appeal ground.

Rule 10 — Your appeal window

For council PCNs: 28 days from issue to pay at discount (50%), or challenge. After 28 days it doubles. For private PCNs: typically 28 days to appeal internally, then 28 days to go to POPLA. Do not miss these windows.

PART 3 — Invalid Fines, Fake Fines, and When to Challenge

5. When a Private Parking Charge Notice May Be Invalid

Not every parking charge is enforceable. A Parking Charge Notice from a private company is only valid if specific conditions are met. Check every one of these:

- The signage was **clearly visible and legible** on entry to the car park.
- The terms displayed on signage were **clear enough to form a contract**.
- The company is **accredited with BPA or IPC** — the two approved trade associations.
- The notice was issued by someone with **the authority to issue it** on that land.
- The charge represents a **genuine pre-estimate of loss** — not simply a penalty disguised as compensation.
- The notice contains **all required information** — your vehicle reg, the date and time, the alleged contravention.
- The **DVLA keeper liability requirements** have been followed — the company must have made a proper keeper liability request.

If any of the above is missing or incorrect — you have grounds to appeal. Use the Parking Appeal Letter Bundle from bettercallkal.co.uk, which covers all of these grounds.

6. How to Spot a Fake or Fraudulent Parking Notice

Fake parking fines are more common than most people realise. These are designed to look official but have no legal standing whatsoever.



✓ Signs of a VALID notice

- ✓ Issued by an accredited BPA or IPC member (check their websites).
- ✓ Has a clear appeals process and POPLA reference.
- ✓ States the correct vehicle registration.
- ✓ Has a legitimate company name and contact address.
- ✓ References the relevant legislation or code of practice.

■ Signs of a FAKE or INVALID notice

- Cannot be traced to a real company or parking operator.
- Has no appeals process or POPLA reference number.
- Uses threatening language about bailiffs without a court order.
- Has an address that does not correspond to a real business.
- Contains spelling errors, incorrect registration details, or wrong dates.

If you receive something that looks like a fine but you cannot verify the company — do not pay it.

Check the company on the BPA register (bpa.uk.net/find-an-operator) and the IPC register (theipc.info). If they are not registered with either, the notice is almost certainly unenforceable.

PART 4 — How to Challenge a Parking Fine

7. Three Questions to Ask Before You Do Anything

1. What type of fine is this?

Penalty Charge Notice (council) or Parking Charge Notice (private company)? The answer determines the appeal process entirely.

2. Is the fine actually valid?

Work through the checklist in Section 5 above. If any condition is not met, you may have automatic grounds to challenge.

3. Do I have genuine grounds?

Did you actually breach anything? Was there a machine fault, an emergency, unclear signage, a grace period breach, or an error on the notice? Document everything before you do anything else.

8. Challenging a Council PCN — Step by Step

Step 1 — Make Informal Representations (within 28 days)

Write to the issuing council within 28 days setting out your grounds clearly. You pay nothing at this stage — paying at this point is an admission. If accepted, the charge is cancelled. If rejected, you receive a Notice to Owner.

Step 2 — Formal Representations (after Notice to Owner)

Once you receive the Notice to Owner you have 28 days to make formal representations. These are considered by a more senior officer. If rejected, the council issues a Notice of Rejection and you have 28 days to pay or appeal to the independent adjudicator.



Step 3 — Independent Adjudicator

Appeal to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (outside London) or London Tribunals (London). This is free to use. An independent adjudicator reviews your case and the council's decision. If you win, the charge is cancelled. There is no further escalation for the council.

Council PCN Appeal Letter Template — included in the Parking Appeal Bundle at bettercallkal.co.uk. Covers formal representations grounds including signage defects, machine failure, genuine emergency, procedural errors on the notice, and more.

9. Challenging a Private Parking Charge Notice — Step by Step

Step 1 — Internal Appeal (within 28 days)

Write to the company within 28 days setting out your grounds. Cite the BPA or IPC Code of Practice, whichever applies. Keep your appeal factual and evidenced — photographs, receipts, machine error reports.

Step 2 — POPLA Appeal (if internal appeal is rejected)

If the company rejects your appeal, they must provide a POPLA verification code. Submit your appeal to POPLA (popla.co.uk) within 28 days of the rejection. POPLA is a free, independent appeals service. Around 40% of POPLA appeals are successful.

Step 3 — If POPLA rejects your appeal

At this point the company may pursue the matter through the County Court. If they do, respond to any County Court Claim Form within 14 days — do not ignore it. A County Court Judgment (CCJ) will affect your credit file for 6 years if you ignore it.

Private Parking Appeal Letter Template — included in the Parking Appeal Bundle at bettercallkal.co.uk. Covers grounds including grace period breach, invalid signage, ANPR error, no genuine pre-estimate of loss, DVLA keeper liability failures, and more. Both private and council letters in one bundle.

PART 5 — Quick Reference

10. Key Terms Explained

Term	Plain English
Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)	A statutory fine issued by a council or public authority. Ignoring it has serious legal consequences.
Parking Charge Notice	A contractual claim from a private parking company. Not a statutory fine. They need a court order to enforce it.
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition. Records entry and exit times to calculate parking duration.
BPA / IPC	British Parking Association / International Parking Community. The two approved trade bodies private parking operators must be members of to access DVLA keeper data.



POPLA	Parking on Private Land Appeals. The free independent appeals service for private parking charges after an internal appeal is rejected.
Keeper Liability	The legal principle allowing companies to pursue the registered keeper of a vehicle rather than the driver, under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.
Grace Period	The mandatory 10 minutes after a paid session expires before a private company can issue a charge. Failure to allow this is a ground to appeal.
Notice to Owner	The formal document sent by a council after informal representations fail, triggering the formal appeals process.

11. Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Paying a Parking Charge Notice immediately assuming it is a legal fine — it isn't. Check the type first.
- Missing the 28-day discount window on a council PCN — after that it doubles.
- Ignoring a County Court Claim Form — even if you dispute the charge, a CCJ will damage your credit for 6 years.
- Assuming 'gone quiet' means 'gone away' — private companies have up to 6 years to sue.
- Making representations without evidence — always attach photos, receipts, and machine error reports.
- Paying a fake fine — verify the company on the BPA and IPC registers before paying anything.

12. Key Deadlines

Situation	Deadline	What Happens If Missed
Council PCN — pay at 50% discount	14 days from issue	Discount lost. Full amount due.
Council PCN — informal representations	28 days from issue	Fine doubles. Notice to Owner issued.
Council PCN — formal representations	28 days from Notice to Owner	Right to appeal formally is lost.
Council PCN — independent adjudicator	28 days from Notice of Rejection	Right to independent appeal is lost.
Private PCN — internal appeal	Typically 28 days from issue	Internal appeal window closes.
Private PCN — POPLA appeal	28 days from rejection letter	POPLA appeal window closes.
County Court Claim Form (CCJ)	14 days to respond	CCJ issued by default — 6 years on credit file.

13. Useful Links & Contacts

- **Traffic Penalty Tribunal (outside London):** [trafficpenaltytribunal.gov.uk](https://www.trafficpenaltytribunal.gov.uk)
- **London Tribunals (London PCNs):** [londontribunals.gov.uk](https://www.londontribunals.gov.uk)
- **POPLA (private parking appeals):** [popla.co.uk](https://www.popla.co.uk)



- **BPA operator register:** bpa.uk.net/find-an-operator
- **IPC operator register:** theipc.info
- **Citizens Advice:** citizensadvice.org.uk
- **Parking Appeal Letter Bundle (private + council):** bettercallkal.co.uk

Disclaimer

*This guide is for **general education only**. It is **not legal advice**. Parking law and enforcement rules change — always verify current rules. For complex disputes or court proceedings, seek independent legal advice.*

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