

Motion at Council

Cars Parking on Grass Verges

Cabinet

Date: 10th December 2014

Author: Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration, and Skills,
Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety
Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, and
Board Director, Service Delivery

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report is in response to the Council resolution of 3rd April 2014 (Council Minute 112, 2013/14 refers).

“The Council recognises the concerns of local residents in many of Swindon’s communities who do not have adequate parking capacity in their residential area. Furthermore, Council recognises that this can sometimes lead to residential areas being left untidy as a result of residents having to park on grass verges.

This Council requests a report be brought to Cabinet detailing options for how the Council can increase car parking capacity in residential areas that need it.”

- 1.2 The issue of verge parking relates to the corporate priority of working with residents to provide well cared for neighbourhoods.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the summary of the history and key issues around verge parking in residential areas.
- 2.2 Note the work currently under way to provide additional parking areas through the Housing Capital Repairs and Improvement Programme.
- 2.3 Note the work under way to review waiting restrictions in Residents Parking Zones in order to identify additional parking capacity, and the opening of public car parks to Residents Parking permit holders at peak times.
- 2.4 Note the competing pressures on the Highways and Transport capital budget (around highway maintenance and growth and regeneration related schemes), which must currently take priority and the existing £25k annual Locality budget that allows local Members to prioritise schemes to address verge parking if it is a priority issue in their area.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Philip Martlew, Direct Dial Telephone Number 01793 466369, pmartlew@swindon.gov.uk.

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- 2.5 Request the Head of Highways and Transport to prepare information and a schedule of costs associated with the process of converting verges to parking that can be used to inform local residents seeking to self-fund such works,
- 2.6 Authorise the Head of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration, and Skills and the Director of Law and Democratic Services and, in relation to Council owned land, the Head of the Service Area for the land involved, to determine any applications from residents to convert verges at their own expense, subject to any necessary planning permission.
- 2.7 Advise the Council of the contents of this report in response to the Motion at the Council meeting on 3rd April 2014.

3. Detail

- 3.1 There are pressures on the availability of car parking spaces in many residential areas of Swindon. This is particularly the case in areas that were designed and built before current levels of car ownership developed. It is also prevalent where houses have been converted into multiple occupation and there is no available off-road parking. In more modern areas, where garages were provided it is usually the case that those garages are used for purposes other than car parking and remote blocks of garages are often unattractive and under used.
- 3.2 Where a residential area has a demand for parking spaces above the amount of space available this can result in parking on the pavement (fully or partly), parking on grass verges and other green spaces. There can also be overspill into adjoining streets, obstruction of traffic flow and emergency access, conflict between neighbours and inconvenience for disabled drivers who are unable to park close to their houses.
- 3.3 Where cars are parked habitually on grass verges or other green spaces this results in damage to the verges leaving an unattractive street scene. In some cases the damage is severe enough to threaten the integrity of underground utilities in the verge and presents a trip hazard to pedestrians.
- 3.4 In most of the terraced housing areas around Swindon town centre and Old Town a system of residents only parking was introduced in order to free up spaces by removing commuter parking. However, times of peak demand in the evenings and weekends still see many of these areas with excess parking demand solely from residents. Officers are currently working with communities in these areas to review existing waiting restrictions in order to create additional parking spaces where it is safe to do so. This work is continuing. In addition, public fee-paying car parks have been opened to Residents Parking Zone permit holders at times of peak demand.

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- 3.5 Most of Swindon's post war local authority housing areas were designed with grass verges and extensive green spaces. As car ownership grew there has been some provision of driveways in the front gardens of many properties. However, many houses and flats were constructed in a pattern that does not allow such provision – because either they have no road frontage or they are a significant distance from any vehicle access point. Blocks of garages away from properties have become less popular as people wish to park close to their homes. Areas such as Penhill, Pinehurst, Moredon, Park North and Park South tend to be the locations where reports are received of damage caused by habitual verge parking. These concerns have been exacerbated by the recent very wet winters and the damage caused to the verges on main routes within neighbourhoods in particular the through roads in Penhill and Park North are clear examples of the damage caused. For this reason Cabinet in February 2014 agreed to prioritise Housing Revenue Account underspend in 2013/14 on these areas.
- 3.6 Historically the provision of additional off road parking for Council tenants has been regarded as something that would fall within the Housing budget rather than the highways budget. Although verges alongside the road will be the responsibility of the highway budget to maintain, the green spaces in such areas that could be converted to alternative parking areas are within the ownership of Housing.
- 3.7 Provision of additional residential parking by converting verges to hard surfacing, or by constructing new car parks on green spaces can have significant costs and there has been a general reluctance to prioritise funding for such work against other Housing or highways investment priorities.
- 3.8 On 5th October 2011 the Housing Advisory Forum received recommendations from a working party which had been set up to prioritise the allocation of a small budget to address complaints from tenants about parking provision. The group (which included tenant representatives) visited sites across the Borough to determine their priority as high, medium or low against an agreed set of criteria. Further work was then carried out to assess the financial viability and benefits for tenants of the high priority areas. This resulted in a limited programme to create additional parking spaces in green areas (in Housing ownership).
- 3.9 On 12th March 2014, the Housing Advisory Forum considered the Housing Investment Programme 2014 to 2017. For 2014/15, the Housing Capital Repairs and Improvement Programme allocated £150k to carry out improvements to individual garages and £115k to improvements to off road parking. These investments will contribute to the creation of additional parking capacity in areas where verge parking is a particular concern.
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- 3.10 More recent housing developments tend to have less widespread parking issues although increased car ownership, multiple occupation of properties, conversion of garages to additional rooms and general non use of garages for parking contribute the localised problems in some areas. Without the extensive, publicly owned green areas of previous developments there are fewer options to provide additional parking on new estates.

Options

- 3.11 An alternative option is to take measures to prevent parking on verges through physical measures (such as bollards) or through the introduction of Traffic Regulation Orders or Bye-laws allowing enforcement to take place. This may be appropriate when alternative parking facilities are available.
- 3.12 Potential options to increase car parking supply depend on local circumstances and may include the following.
- 3.12.1 The provision of vehicle crossings to allow residents to create parking within their property cartilage.
 - 3.12.2 The renovation of unused garages in public ownership to allow them to be brought back in to use.
 - 3.12.3 Hardening grass verges to formalise verge parking and prevent damage.
 - 3.12.4 Creating new car parking areas on open spaces.
 - 3.12.5 Reviewing parking restrictions to see if additional on-street spaces can be created.
 - 3.12.6 The Head of Highways and Transport could also be asked to prepare information that could be made available to residents, and to Ward Councillors, explaining the process associated with the conversion of a verge to parking, where residents wish to self-fund such works. The information to include a schedule of estimated costs associated with the process of converting verges to parking,
 - 3.12.7 In the event that a resident wishes to proceed with such conversion, at their own cost, it is suggested that the Head of Highways and Transport be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration, and Skills and the Director of Law and Democratic Services and, in relation to Council owned land, the Head of the Service Area for the land involved, to determine any such applications from residents to convert verges at their own expense, subject to any necessary planning permission.

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- 3.13 Highways and Transport capital budgets have not previously been used to provide additional residential parking (except occasionally as part of larger traffic management or road safety schemes). There remains significant pressure on this budget with a number of competing priorities. Maintenance of roads and pavements, lighting and structures is a high priority for funding in view of the significant backlog of outstanding repairs to the highway asset. Other funding is directed to road safety schemes and to traffic management and highway capacity schemes necessary to deliver growth and regeneration priorities. Officers would not recommend that funding for off-road parking in residential areas should be prioritised ahead of these issues. Where parking capacity issues can be addressed as part of wider traffic management schemes then this should continue to happen.
- 3.14 To a certain extent the issue of excess demand for car parking in residential areas will be self-limiting as when no further capacity exists residents are likely to reconsider further car purchases. In private sector housing (whether rented or owned) availability of parking needs to be one of the factors considered when choosing a property. Providing additional, publicly funded parking may simply encourage further car ownership – with the number of vehicles expanding to fill the spaces created
- 3.15 The situation may be different in public sector housing where there may be limits on a prospective tenants' ability to decline a property with no parking. It is therefore appropriate for the Housing budget to continue to work on improving the situation for their tenants.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 If there was a desire to prioritise Highways and Transport Capital funding to address verge parking issues then it would be appropriate to create a way of prioritising potential schemes (as is done by Housing) and establish a programme for implementation over coming years. This would take in a range of issues such as cost per space created, the extent of the existing problem, deliverability of potential solution etc. This investigation, assessment, and design work would have an impact on staff resources if other schemes were not to be delayed.
- 4.2 Alternatively it could be that preliminary investigation and assessment work could be carried out and then the scheme could be put forward for consideration alongside other highways and transport schemes for prioritisation against each other.
- 4.3 It remains the case that each Locality has a budget of £25k for highways and transport schemes prioritised locally as a result of community concerns. To date

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no Locality has prioritised verge parking for the use of their funding. As parking in residential areas is primarily a local road issue rather than a strategic road network concern it may be best for this to be considered by each Locality that feels there is a problem in its area.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report as no additional actions are recommended.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 The content of this report will not have a direct implication on human rights issues. It is believed that its recommendations are compatible with Convention rights.
- 5.3 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.4 There are no other direct implications.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed. It identified that verge parking can result in reduced confidence and independence for pedestrians who are disabled people, blind or partially sighted and frail elderly people. This is because of the obstruction caused by the parking, the damage to the verges, the spreading of mud onto the footways and parking extending onto adjacent footways. It also identified that the ability to park near to home is important to those with mobility difficulties and those who may fear walking home after dark. It identified the funding from the Housing budget and prioritisation of Highway Locality funding as appropriate ways of addressing these concerns while balancing other demands on Highways capital funding.

Risk Management

- 5.6 A risk register has not been completed as there is no action proposed.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

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7. Background Papers

7.1 None

8. Appendices

8.1 None

9. Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan

9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme/Forward Plan for December 2014.