

Task & Finish Panel

Register of development Proposals sub-group Roads and Pavement parking in Residential Areas

Report for the meeting on 18th October 2005

Introduction.

At the panel meeting on the 30th August we agreed some basic recommendations on parking in residential areas. There remained a number of areas that the panel needed to clarify, particularly as a result of the loss of the Highways Agency, and options that needed to be considered in more detail.

A spreadsheet was circulated with a number of questions for members to consider. Since then it has become clear that the loss of the Highways Agency raises a number of issues that need to be addressed and further evidence from other organisations has provided further background information.

As a result the Head of Highways, Paul Hardy, and the Head of Environmental Services, John Gilbert, have been invited to the next meeting on the 18th October. It has been agreed with the O & S Co-ordinating Committee that the panel will need one further meeting to consider its final proposals before they are presented to the O & S Co-ordinating Committee.

Supporting Documents.

1. The London Assembly Environment Committee report of September 2005 on the importance of front gardens and the problems associated with front garden parking. A summary of this report is enclosed (appendix 1). The full report is available on request.
2. RAC Foundation Report on parking. Summary enclosed (appendix 2).
3. Copy of e-mail dated 13/09/05 from Paul Pledger setting out procedures (prior to loss of the Highways Agency) for approving and implementing off-street parking schemes on Housing land (appendix 3).
4. Decision by the Housing Portfolio Holder reference E// /2004, dated 28 September 2004, including the priority database for parking on Housing land for 2004/5/6. (Appendix 4).
5. S. 6 of the Essex Act 1987 (cap xx) which prohibits parking on grass verges (Appendix 5).
6. The draft Highways LSA. This has not been circulated as it is 19 pages long but a copy can be if any Member requires one. A summary of issues relevant to parking provision is enclosed (Appendix 6).
7. The Highways standards for cross-overs, report to Cabinet C/109/2002-03 dated 25.11.02 (Appendix 7).
8. The Council proposed revision of standards for crossovers on Housing land.
9. Item 182 of Cabinet minutes of the 9th January 2003 'Review of Parking Restrictions'.
10. Decision by Pfh H/007/2001-2002 confirming phasing in of licenses for vehicular access across housing land.
11. Answer from Pfh to question in Council September 2005

General Principles.

The following principles were agreed on the 30th August:

1. Parking provision is at a premium across many parts of the District and is the source of much public discontent. This leads to damage to the verges and green swards, may cause dangerous obstructions in some locations and is detrimental to the local environment.
2. Whilst parking provision is not a statutory task of the Council it should be regarded as an important issue, not only to reduce the environmental impacts of parking, but to meet the aspirations of residents for their neighbourhoods.
3. There is no formula that can be devised to address every situation. Each needs to be addressed individually and a flexible approach may provide some unique solutions.
4. In view of the large number of problem areas across the whole of the District some system of prioritisation will be required, particularly as funding will never be enough to tackle all the problems in the short term.
5. In some areas the problems may be impossible or uneconomic to solve.
6. A teamwork approach by officers, Members and the Highway Authority working together will result in a more effective response to problems.
7. Land ownership is a key factor and where the land is in Council ownership it should be possible to implement schemes relatively quickly. More extensive negotiations will inevitably be required for land outside the Council's control, however there are no definitive plans outlining Housing land and that a search through Legal Department files is often required to establish ownership.
8. We agreed that a meeting should be sought with Highways to establish the principles of:
 - a. Recognising the need and working co-operatively to solve parking problems.
 - b. To establish whether it is possible to reduce the cost of providing parking/hard standing by relaxing the specifications in some circumstances.
9. We would wish to discourage the conversion of garages into living accommodation where there is no driveway long enough to accommodate a car, although it is accepted that this is a planning consent issue and has to be dealt with under current planning legislation.

10. Consideration should be given to combining the cross-over guidelines issued by the Council and the Highways Authority into one document and modified to include any proposals made by this panel (see point '18' below).
11. Where hard standing is agreed on front gardens the surface should be porous e.g. paved or drained, and should cover only the minimum area set out in the cross-over guidelines, and the remainder landscaped to avoid run-off on to the pavements and highway. Concrete should not be permitted because it is non-porous and unsightly. This should also be included in the cross-over document although advice would have to be taken on whether any or all of these conditions could be made mandatory or advisory only.
12. The use of bollards (preferably of Woodscape design), tasteful fencing, and raised kerbs should be considered where appropriate.

Outstanding Questions.

Committee members are asked to consider their views on the following:

On-road parking schemes

1. Is the current budget of approximately £100,000pa, made up of 50% from the HRA and 50% from the General Fund, adequate to meet the parking needs of the District, bearing in mind that currently each space can cost in excess of £5,000?
2. On mixed estates should the decision about whether to go ahead with a parking proposal be based on a simple majority of tenants/owner occupiers? Where this is agreed should the owner-occupiers be charged for their full contribution based on strict proportionality? Where home-owners have clear access to parking, research suggests the value of their property is enhanced by between 5-20% depending on other parking restrictions in the road.
3. Should privately owned houses within a 'reasonable distance' of newly created parking bays on open highways, not individually assigned to them, be asked to make a financial contribution to the cost or should this be funded from the General Fund and /or Highways on the grounds that anyone can use them and the flow of traffic generally is enhanced?
4. Housing Services maintain a database of parking proposals which Highways contribute to by surveying sites, setting Highways priorities, costing proposals and scheduling contractors. Since the loss of the Agency the future of the database has not been made clear. The database does not include non-Housing land. Should EFDC continue to maintain this database and seek the co-operation of Highways to include their involvement as before?
5. Should a separate database for non-Housing land be maintained? If so, should this be maintained by Environmental Services or should both databases be combined and agreement sought with Housing that they will maintain the whole database or jointly with Environmental Services?

6. Should environmental services review its residual responsibilities for Highways, including evaluating parking schemes and cross-over requests, channelling them to Highways and liaising with Highways on the progress of schemes, reporting to, and liaising with Members and the public on parking issues, managing the database, monitoring the LSA and proposing changes to improve its clarity and effectiveness, and emergency planning in conjunction with Highways as well as dealing with maintenance functions including verges, trees, lighting, weed control, public rights of way, sign cleaning etc.
7. Should there be a panel or committee that oversees proposals from the public or Members, and agrees which proposals should be added to the database and monitors the progress of schemes? (see Appendix 9). If so, how should it be constituted and who should it report to? On minor roads should priorities be set by Highways or EFDC? Should works, unless urgent, be prioritised to take place when the road is scheduled for re-surfacing work to keep costs down?
8. Are the procedures for entering a proposal onto the database in the correct order? (see Paul Pledger e-mail Appendix 3).
9. Should Housing land be prioritised over other areas, at least initially, because it will enable some quicker returns if these policies are adopted?
10. Commuter parking and parking in residential roads close to shopping centres is a problem in many areas. Should officers be tasked with proceeding with the residents parking schemes as a priority? A Cabinet decision of the 9th January 2003 (appendix 9) agreed that the database listing proposed parking schemes should be circulated to all members and that short-term solutions were needed pending the diversion of staffing resources from other Highways work to progress residents parking schemes such was the urgency then felt about addressing the issue. So far it is thought only Epping has been completed. Was the database ever circulated? The matter needs addressing urgently as it is the subject of much public disquiet and Council needs an explanation for this apparent failure to carry out its decision made in 2003.
11. Where small strips of green verge (less than 1m wide) have been destroyed by vehicles and are impractical to maintain or restore would this panel support losing this verge, providing a hard surface to take vehicles (perhaps 2-on, 2-off) or taking back the kerb in order to provide a partial lay-by?
12. The committee opposed the loss of significant amounts of green sward. Do you feel the current limit of 6m. for the length of cross-overs is about right? If not what would you change it to?
13. Should the Council seek greater clarity from clauses 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 , as part of its LSA agreement with Highways, by additions as follows:
 - 4.1 In particular the Highways authority will consult with the District Council on major roads when up-grading or re-surfacing works are carried to examine the issue of on-street parking with a view to improving the flow of traffic, providing safe provision for pedestrians and protecting the environment.

- 4.2 After ‘.....respective Councils.’ This includes changes to the road lay-out to improve on-street parking provision if thought desirable by EFDC.
 - 4.3 last bullet point referring to items not included in the LSA merely says ‘On street parking’. Should this be clarified to read ‘On street parking management and enforcement of regulations’?
14. Should the provisions of the Essex Act 1987 which prohibits parking on grass verges be enforced where alternative parking within a reasonable distance is available (see enclosed extract)?

Cross-overs

15. Since the loss of the Highways Agency should EFDC be involved at all in cross-over decisions on non-housing land ie should all requests be directed straight to Highways? What system of appeals will be available to non-Housing land residents?
16. Since the loss of the Highways Agency, Environmental Services Highways Policy and procedure Handbook on Vehicle crossing applications needs to be revised (or removed), assuming that EFDC remains involved. Highways should be asked to re-confirm its current policy so that any EFDC policy is consistent with the Highways scheme.
17. Should the same EFDC Housing cross-over scheme apply to all properties in the District and not just Council or ex-Council properties?
18. Should the former Epping Forest District Council Vehicle Crossing Scheme be removed now that Highways has reverted to ECC control or should Environmental Services have a new scheme that should be available to all residents which is managed by the District Council but which is compatible with the Highways scheme? It follows that should EFDC have a local scheme, applications for cross-overs on non-highways land should be approved by EFDC prior to forwarding to Highways for their appraisal.
19. Should the current annual licence fee to cross Housing land, agreed by the Pfh on 1st July 2002, be re-confirmed?
20. Should Highways be encouraged to issue enforcement notices for illegal cross-overs bearing in mind the cost of taking legal action and manpower resources?

Matters for joint consideration/discussion with Highways

21. Where hard standing is being proposed is it reasonable for the minimum size as set out in the cross-over guidelines be enforced to ensure that cars of any size (up to a full-size saloon car) do not overhang the pavement? Current Highways standard is for a minimum of 4.8m between the front of the house and the back of the pavement but does not go so far as to say this is enforced. Is it reasonable to take into account that the current owner has a smaller car that will fit into the smaller space?

22. Should there be additional conditions for cross-overs eg hard standing for one car only and landscaping of remaining un-surfaced area? It is doubtful if some of these conditions are enforceable in law on owner-occupied land (except the condition on using porous surfaces as this could come under Department of the Environment Regulations, Design Bulletin 32 'No water from private property may be channelled onto the highway') but they could remain as recommendations. It could be mandatory on Housing land. Should a condition be added that cross-overs will not be approved in conservation areas, except in the most exceptional circumstances?
23. A typical cross-over loses about 1.5 road parking spaces. In considering an application for a cross-over should consideration be given to the effect on parking in the road generally i.e. applications could be refused where they might have a detrimental effect on the amount of available road parking?
24. There are currently fees of £20 for considering a cross-over (refundable if it goes ahead) and a further £100 for administration and inspection costs. These fees (or any revision considered by Highways) will presumably revert to Highways in the future. Should EFDC decide that it should oversee applications for cross-overs in the future should it also make a charge for its consideration of an application?