

September 2018

Parking on Grass Verges – a position statement

Introduction

The portfolio holder for Housing has asked for a short position statement in relation to residents, their visitors and other road users parking vehicles on the grass verges adjacent to roads, particularly within many of the council estates in the city.

This short brief paper has been written to cover the main issues to be considered to help the City Council frame its response to this concern.

Current situation

It is understood that on many of our estates across the city (accepting the problem is more acute in some areas than others) there is a persistence of cars being parked on the grass verges between the roadside and footpath, and on other adjacent areas of open space, sometimes to the rear of the footpaths. This is sometimes causing traffic flow issues down the streets, especially for larger vehicles such as waste collections and emergency vehicles, but during periods of wet weather it is also leading to these areas being churned up by the cars moving on and off. This is creating an unsightly mess.

This situation has arisen primarily from changing travel patterns over the years as more cars are now present than the original council estates were planned and built to accommodate. Residents understandably wish to park their cars outside their own homes, but in many cases there are no front driveways and no vehicle crossings leading to them. This leaves the only option of 'on-street' parking.

The prevalence of parking on grass areas, often half on and off the highway, is not unique to the council estates – it's an issue across many of our high density housing areas - particularly in the West End, Monks Road and Lower High Street areas which are nearer to the city centre, and so also suffer from commuter parking pressures. Parking on paths can be a significant issue for pedestrians trying to navigate around these parked cars, particularly when they have pushchairs or are in wheelchairs/mobility scooters.

Residents parking is seen as one device to assist in reducing the level of commuter parking in those areas. However, within our council estates, residents parking schemes are not the way forward as commuter parking is not the issue –its resident parking habits. A further complication is that many houses on some estates are now in private ownership so the concept of a "council estate" where the City Council has overall landlord responsibility is less clear.

Historic context.

Many years ago now the city council and county council used to work collaboratively and put significant sums into a single pot to fund parking improvements on estates. A list of target sites would be identified each year, and key members would visit these possible sites to agree the priorities. Work was then commissioned, usually by the county council as it involved layby construction. This work stopped many years ago when the City Council stopped being the highways agent for the county council.

Today officers will respond to look at sites that are the subject of complaint, but action is usually restricted to asking for cooperation. In some cases where the land is city council owned then tree planting or the installation of bollards is possible, but this is in a minority of cases. In seeking cooperation officers are mindful of the legal position, which is that verges are part of the highway, and thus action against anyone for damage would have to be taken by the county council. It is their view that they cannot take action for parking on verges.

Strategic context

Officers currently take their direction for using staff resources from the previously agreed and publicly endorsed Vision 2020 strategy, and hence focus work on projects agreed with Members and contained within this strategic document. Resources are therefore matched to the projects contained within the plan. Any newly commissioned work outside the Vision 2020 document will need to be negotiated with the relevant portfolio holder and other projects slowed down or stopped to free the necessary resources to enable work to progress on the new project.

To be clear, with specific reference to grass verge parking, this is not a scheme within Vision 2020 and hence the resources will need to be found to deliver any sizeable work on this. This could result in other projects, such as residents parking changes or expansion, being slowed if staff are commissioned to work on the project.

Ownership issues

However, before a decision is taken on if and where to locate the project, we need to first explore the ownership issue. As the problem relates predominantly to the grass verges between road and footpath, these are vested within the County Council as the highway authority

Officers have recently contacted the county council to ascertain their willingness to progress any work in this. Their response has been:

“It is the responsibility of the neighbourhood to not damage the verges in their community and there is little we can do to repair the majority of the damage. We can only attend to deep ruts but then we are only filling these with stone to offer some resistance to further parking. Re-soling is a waste of time and money we can ill afford due to demands on our budget to keep the surfaced carriageways safe from potholes etc. as they will only be parked on again and make a further worse mess. We do not routinely bollard off verges as this is an added expense and maintenance liability and causes issues for grass cutting (what grass is left).”

Clearly there is no county council budget nor county council officer capacity to progress work on this issue.

There are some open spaces on estates falling within the HRA or general fund but where problems are identified for these historically the Council has installed bollards or planted trees. As a result, predominantly where parking takes place on the grassed areas between road and footpath, these are vested in the County Council.

Way Forward

Without County Council resource for any form of intervention, the responsibility would fall entirely on the City Council. Within the General Fund there is no budgetary provision to undertake any works. Within the HRA, such works would very quickly deplete the resources available for estate improvement works.

Currently the HRA contains a total budget of £225,000 per annum for estate improvement activity. Should verge parking emerge as the number one issue then these resources would be quickly depleted to the detriment of other estate improvement works.

Even if we could overcome the barriers covered in this report and get to the point of a trial, it is envisaged that this would quickly lead to calls for similar interventions elsewhere across the city, the volume of which would be very difficult to manage.

However, regardless of where the funding is identified, any highways works would need county council sign off before progressing and this brings into question the availability of officer capacity at the county council to review and approve the works. Additionally, even if the city council did find staff and funds for this work, because it can add to the maintenance costs, it is unclear if the county council would agree all works.

A further consideration is that even if all issues were addressed, and a way forward to stop parking on verges could be found, unless extra car parking capacity is also added in these areas, people would struggle to find parking alternatives.