

REPORT: Executive Board
DATE: 24 September 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment
SUBJECT: Residents-Only Parking Schemes
WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To review Council policy in relation to residents-only parking schemes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That it is recommended that residents-only parking schemes should not be introduced at the present time.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Parking in Halton

3.1.1 The increasing numbers of vehicles on our roads is creating more and more pressure on parking space on the highway. The problems are at their worst adjacent to schools, shops, transport hubs and other key destinations, but there is also a growing problem within residential areas, partly due to multiple car ownership in some households. In other towns and cities where there is pressure on parking space in residential areas this has been compounded by commuter or shopping parking, but these situations are rare in Halton being limited to the areas around Runcorn and Widnes North (Farnworth) rail stations. In Victoria Avenue (Widnes North rail station), where most residents have off-road parking facilities, the problem has been largely solved by the use of parking restrictions.

3.1.2 Parking on Halton's roads is free and open to all highway users on an equal basis, provided their vehicles are street legal. It is an uncomfortable truth that nobody has an absolute right to expect to park on the highway directly outside or even near their own home. Owning and running a car is a lifestyle choice that residents make and, therefore, it is their responsibility to ensure they can legally park their vehicle when not in use. The highway is for the passing and re-passing of traffic and not for parking.

3.1.3 In Halton, there is no charge levied for the use of the limited number of Council owned car parks and thus there is no income from these facilities: indeed they are a financial liability to the Council, due to their ongoing maintenance costs. Most parking provision associated with the town centre and supermarket shopping is in private ownership and again carries no charge, currently. However, there is charging by the owners of car parks at some locations such as the hospital and at

Runcorn mainline railway station. It should be noted, however, that the Council has commissioned parking studies in Runcorn and Widnes Town Centres and in Halton Lea. These studies provide the base data and analysis to enable consideration by the Council, in conjunction with private car park operators, of future car parking management policy. The initial report on these studies is considered elsewhere on this agenda.

- 3.1.4 Enforcement of on-highway parking restrictions is the responsibility of Cheshire Police.

3.2 Civil Parking Enforcement

- 3.2.1 Cheshire Police have been consulted to ascertain if they would be prepared to enforce a Residents Only Parking (ROPS) scheme in Halton, if one were introduced. This request has been declined as the Police have indicated that the "Force's position on residents only parking is that it is solely a local authority issue....." Extensive internet research and contact with other local authorities confirms that this Force's view is consistent with those of other Forces in the country. The Police were also not prepared to enforce ROPS, even if the funding was provided by the Council to enable officers to work overtime.
- 3.2.2 Using powers introduced by the Road Traffic Act 2004, it would be possible for Halton to take on responsibility for enforcing on-street parking restrictions instead of the Police, including any ROPS. These Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) powers would mean that the majority of parking offences, including parking on yellow lines and misusing disabled person parking bays, would no longer be criminal offences. A total of 247 local authorities have taken on CPE powers to March 2009, freeing some Police resources to tackle more serious crime.
- 3.2.3 The case for introducing CPE in Halton is in the process of being considered and will include an assessment of the financial implications as well as any enforcement benefits. However, should Halton subsequently decide to adopt CPE powers it would be able to keep the income from any parking tickets issued under the initiative. This income would then have to be used to cover all operational costs including funding parking attendants (called Civil Enforcement Officers), who would replace police staff for enforcement, and also the management and administrative systems associated with collecting fines and pursuing defaulters. The operational costs would be dependent on the areas covered and the times of operation. If the income from any parking charges issued did not cover operational costs, any shortfall would have to be met from other Council resources. It follows that there is a direct relationship between the number of parking tickets issued and the level of parking enforcement that could be resourced.

- 3.2.4 Previous requirements for CPE to be self-financing were lifted by the Road Traffic Act 2004, but any extra income after the costs of administration and enforcement have been deducted must be used specifically for improving local transport. This includes improving parking, traffic management, better public transport and facilities for pedestrians or cyclists.
- 3.2.5 As indicated above, there is no charging regime in place either 'on street' or in the limited number of 'off street' car parks, which are operated by the Council. Therefore the Council has no parking income against which it could offset the cost of a ROPS within a CPE regime. Without wishing to pre-judge the outcome of the Council's feasibility study into CPE, its ability to fund a ROPS could be limited.

3.3 Residents Only Parking Schemes

- 3.3.1 Within Halton, there have been intermittent requests over the years for ROPS to be introduced in individual streets in the Borough; usually triggered by residents being unable to park immediately outside their homes. However, even taking into consideration the town centres and other areas subject to high levels of often transitory demand for parking space, it is clear that the area around Runcorn mainline rail station is the one most under pressure, with Holloway being the main focus of attention. This is due to the 'on-street' parking by rail users, who wish to avoid paying the daily parking charges at the station's car parks and the practical difficulties facing householders in constructing 'off-road' parking, due to the height of their front gardens relative to the carriageway of Holloway.
- 3.3.2 The situation has been much worse over the past few months as construction of a new multi-storey car park at the station required the temporary closure of the main car park. A large proportion of the usual parking demand was displaced onto the surrounding streets and following the opening of the multi storey car park, drivers are now reluctant to pay for parking. Instead, they are continuing to park in surrounding roads, wherever possible, with some leaving cars outside resident's homes for days on end.
- 3.3.3 Many of Holloway's residents see the introduction of ROPS as a simple solution provided that the restrictions are enforced robustly. However, based on the reported experiences of other local authorities such schemes have a number of associated problems and impacts that must be considered:
- Permits to park would only be supplied to residents and essential visitors, at a cost, and would be vehicle-specific. When a vehicle is changed, a new licence would have to be issued indicating the correct registration number, as permits would not be transferable. In addition, licences could not be provided for relatives or friends, due to the limited road space available. The whole process would therefore require a high degree of administrative support;

- Parking would still be on a first come, first served basis between permit holders, as a permit would neither reserve a specific space nor guarantee a space within the designated parking zone;
- Parking problems can merely be displaced into adjoining areas, requiring the ROP scheme to be extended further to protect a wider area of residential properties;
- Casual visitors would not be allowed to park in the area, though essential visitors such as carers could be provided with licences if arranged in advance, though such arrangements would have to be fairly rigid to avoid abuse;
- Introduction of ROPS requires the Council to take responsibility for the safe siting of parking spaces to ensure that access can be maintained. Therefore, amongst other things, consideration would have to be given to the access requirements for ambulances and fire vehicles, meaning that for many terraced or estate roads, parking could only be permitted on one side of the road, due to the width needed for 'official' parking places. This could lead to ROPS reducing parking capacity and causing a worsening of the parking problems; and
- Due to Cheshire Police's refusal to enforce ROPS, any scheme in Halton could only operate under the umbrella of a wider CPE regime. As indicated above, the cost implications and enforcement advantages of Halton adopting CPE powers are currently in the process of being evaluated, but given the potential cost implications to the Council, it is likely that the cost of implementing, administering and enforcing a ROPS would have to be borne by the holders of the parking permits.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The issues covered in this report have been reported to the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board, and any comments from that Board will be reported at the meeting.
- 4.2 It can be seen from the above that the Council's ability to introduce Residents Only Parking Schemes within the Borough at this time is dependent on the viability of it adopting Civil Parking Enforcement powers. However, notwithstanding this fundamental issue, there remains a substantial number of disadvantages to agreeing to the introduction of Residents Only Parking Schemes within the Borough associated with: inflexibility in the provision of licenses and parking spaces; inability to guarantee parking spaces for individual residents; inconvenience to residents and visitors; displacement of parking problems; potential reductions in the availability of parking space; and costs. It is therefore considered inappropriate to introduce Residents Only Parking Schemes in the Borough at this time.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The introduction of ROPS was previously considered and refused by both the former Planning and Transportation Sub-Committee in 1993 and the Planning, Transportation and Development Policy & Performance Board in 2003.

5.2 The Council has a policy of free parking throughout the Borough and charging for on-street parking for residents would be inconsistent with that policy.

6.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct social inclusion, sustainability, best value, legal or crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES.

7.1 Children & Young People in Halton

There are no direct implications on the Council's 'Children and Young People in Halton' priority.

7.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

There are no direct implications on the Council's 'Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton' priority.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no direct implications on the Council's 'A Healthy Halton' priority.

7.4 A Safer Halton

There are no direct implications on the Council's 'A Safer Halton' priority.

7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no direct implications on the Council's 'Halton's Urban Renewal' priority.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 There are no direct risks associated with this report

9.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ISSUES.

9.1 There are no direct equality and diversity issues associated with this report.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Document

Place of Inspection

Contact Officer

Background information Traffic Section, Rutland House Steve Johnson