

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

I previously asked a written question about parking permits for residents which is becoming an increasing problem in our towns.

I would like clarification on whether or not a written policy exists which clearly sets out the criteria for parking permit schemes. It is important to have this clarification so that councillors and members of the public are clear that the assessment of requests is carried out in a transparent and equitable manner in accordance with an agreed procedure.

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

There is no formal County Council Policy for the installation of new resident permit parking schemes, applications for resident permits schemes are assessed on an operational basis and on a site by site basis. When assessing requests for residents permit parking schemes, County Council Officers look at the number of requests or complaints received and generally would expect at least 40% of local addresses to support the installation of a permit scheme. This saves any abortive costs to the County Council when final proposals are consulted and do not meet widespread support. It is not usual to introduce a resident permit scheme in a single road and we would look for support from a wider area so that the perceived problem is not simply transferred to adjacent residential areas.

Resident permit parking schemes are designed to provide a reasonable chance for car-owning residents to park near to, although not necessarily directly outside, their houses as often the demand for permits exceeds the number of parking bays available.

In assessing applications for new resident permit schemes or extensions to existing schemes, Officers are guided by the level of local support and also take into consideration local conditions such as proximity to railway stations, shopping areas, hospitals, schools and each application needs to be considered on its own merit. All requests for a permit parking scheme are processed in a fair and consistent way.

More and more households now own more than one vehicle, placing a greater strain on the available kerb-space, and often generating complaints from other residents.

The times of operation of resident permits also need to be considered as well as prospective enforcement. It may be that a request for a permit scheme is not the most appropriate option, for example if most residents have suitable off-road parking. Equally there may be other remedies to combating commuter parking and school drop-off problems, such as time limited parking restrictions at certain times of the day.

It must also be noted that there is a cost to introduce resident permits to cover the cost of introduction, installation, maintenance, and enforcement.

For these reasons it is felt that the assessment of, and potential introduction of, resident permit parking schemes should not be policy driven, but instead remain managed on an operational basis, with due consideration to the circumstances surrounding each application. However every application is assessed in a consistent and fair approach.

2. Question by Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Residents frequently raise concerns about parking on grass verges and pavements. It would appear that no action is taken to prevent people from parking on these spaces which annoys residents, damages the infrastructure and is dangerous for those with sight and mobility issues and parents with pushchairs.

Will the County Council take action to prevent people parking on verges and pavements including considering placing bollards on key problem sites if residents are prepared to contribute to the cost?

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

There is no national legislation, outside London, to prevent parking on verges and pavements. However, where there are existing yellow lines these extend to verge and pavement and in Lewes District our parking enforcement contractor NSL is able to enforce those existing lines and signs.

The County Council introduced a trial scheme that was approved by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment in October 2014 following requests to ban vehicles from parking on pavements and verges. A prioritisation process was developed to enable Officers to assess requests for a verge-parking ban. Various criteria are used to assess a particular location, such as whether it is close to schools, shops, hospitals, or if it is on a bus route etc. It also takes into account the duration and frequency of the problem, whether damage is being caused to footways and verges, and if such a ban would cause congestion.

Footways are designed for use by pedestrians and as you have witnessed, vehicles parking on the footway can cause damage, breaking paving slabs and leaving the footway unsightly and potentially unsafe for pedestrians. Verges can also be damaged by vehicles parking on them. A footway and verge parking ban helps prevent damage to paving caused by vehicles parking on the footways and verges in identified areas.

Banning vehicles from parking on the pavement is not always appropriate and could lead to congestion in narrow or heavily trafficked roads. This could have a detrimental effect, especially in town centre areas where commercial vehicles would have no option but to frequently load and unload in the road. Any such ban in a busy town centre area should not be introduced on its own, but instead should be assessed as part of a wider assessment and consideration given to alternative arrangements for loading and unloading.

At locations where it is not considered appropriate to implement traffic regulation orders to enable enforcement to take place, consideration will be given to installing bollards to prevent inconsiderate parking. Clearly, with limited budgets the County Council has to prioritise what it does on the highway and therefore contributions may be sought from local communities.

Any requests for new or changes to existing parking controls where we operate civil parking enforcement (CPE) should be directed to Parking Services. Our current CPE areas are Eastbourne borough, Hastings borough, and Lewes district. Requests outside the CPE areas should be forwarded to the Highways Contact Centre.

3. Question by Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Seaford is the biggest town in Lewes District and has a high percentage of older people with complex and chronic healthcare needs. These older people struggle to access healthcare services provided by local hospitals, particularly those provided by Eastbourne District General Hospital. It is not possible to take a bus direct to the hospital – people have to travel first to Eastbourne town centre and then get a further bus out to the hospital. This is unsuitable and difficult for those with mobility issues, particularly in bad weather and in the dark winter evenings. Taxis are extremely costly: the average cost of a single fare is £20 - £25 from Seaford to the hospital and this is simply unaffordable for those on fixed incomes.

Will the County Council address these health inequalities by funding an enhanced service so that the Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA) or a similar organisation could offer low cost or free travel to hospital appointments for older people in Seaford and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups?

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Whilst I understand the concerns raised, the County Council cannot take on the additional commitment to provide communities and individual residents with subsidised transport to medical appointments.

Councillor Lambert refers to the need for Seaford residents to change buses in Eastbourne town centre so as to access the District General Hospital. I would add that buses run every 10 minutes between Seaford and Eastbourne town centre, with a similar frequency from there to the Hospital. The change of bus in Eastbourne involves crossing the road in the buses only Terminus Road precinct.

Hospital appointments by their nature require the transport provision to be appropriate to the patient's individual appointment times. This is why the East Sussex Community Transport Operators Forum, which includes CTLA, have said to the County Council that it is not usually appropriate to look to community transport minibuses, with paid drivers and therefore higher costs of provision, to provide a cost-effective solution for these patients.

Some communities have gone some way to addressing the problems of transport access to medical appointments through setting up their own volunteer car scheme. This community self-help is a practical and rewarding way of helping those who have these transport issues. I am however not aware that such a scheme exists in Seaford. Information on how to go about setting up such a scheme, which was developed with the help of our community voluntary action partners, is available on the County Council's website. The toolkit can be found on our Community Transport page.

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