

## **PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF RESIDENTS PARKING ZONES**

#### **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Residents Parking Zones.
- 1.2 The Council has only a 'high-level' policy regarding Residents Parking Zones (RPZs) which has not been fully reviewed since 2004. There are regular requests for them from residents living near town and local shopping centres, as well as near traffic generating facilities such as hospitals and schools. Many residents think that RPZs are a panacea with no downsides – the reality is that there are a range of issues that could arise out of them (e.g. costs to residents and visitors, no guarantee of a parking space for residents or visitors, issues with enforcement, potential loss of parking spaces, moving the problem to areas immediately outside any residents parking zone, etc.).
- 1.3 To fully investigate the need for a RPZ requires a reasonable amount of staff resources and has a financial impact on the Council, but ultimately leads to the majority of requests being turned down either because there are no justifiable reasons to implement a scheme or because they are not supported by the majority of residents. An updated and more detailed policy and procedure might result in fewer resident requests and a more efficient way of dealing with these, thereby saving both money and officer time. The administration, maintenance and enforcement of these schemes are also an ongoing burden on Council resources.
- 1.4 There is limited publicly-available information on how the Council assesses a request, and further clarity as to the role of Ward Councillors would be useful. Councillors can find themselves in an invidious position if they are asked whether they support a request without having the results of the investigation arising from the request itself.
- 1.5 Residents have an understandable desire to be able to park near their homes, however, the full consequences of implementing a RPZ to residents are not always clear when initially requesting a scheme.
- 1.6 A review would tie-in with the Council's town centre regeneration proposals. There is an important interface between encouraging businesses and customers, and impact on residents living nearby, requiring a balance to be struck. Areas where demand on parking is oversubscribed can lead to road safety and accessibility issues, especially to those who are mobility-impaired.
- 1.7 RPZs can help keep people safe and healthy by managing parking in areas where it is oversubscribed to ensure roads and pavements are safe to use by all. Correctly balancing the needs of residential and business-related parking can also help support jobs and the economy.

- 1.8 The overall aim of the review would be to inform the objectives / components of a revised policy on Resident Parking Zones (RPZs) to be contained within the revised Car Parking Policy for the Borough, and provide:
- Updated clear and transparent policy and procedures for assessing the need and implementing RPZs.
  - Full information available to residents on the pros and cons of a RPZ so that they can make informed decisions about whether to request one in the first place.
  - Minimise the cost to the Council of investigating, introducing, enforcing and ongoing administration of RPZs.
  - Clarification of the Ward Councillor role in the process for determining whether a scheme is progressed or not.
- 1.9 The Committee heard that RPZs are introduced and enforced through Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), with permits required to park in the zone (signage and bay markings formalise parking spaces) during specific times. They are enforced by the SBC Civic Enforcement team via issuing of PCNs.
- 1.10 There are multiple pros and cons surrounding the use of RPZs. Positive developments include residents with no off-street parking facility having a reasonable opportunity to park close to (even if not right in front of) their homes, reduced traffic flow on residential streets (improving safety and air quality), and improved access for emergency vehicles. However, RPZs also have a potential downside – a scheme in one area might create or worsen parking problems in adjacent areas, could inhibit activities of commercial and other non-residential activities within the zone (especially retail areas), and parking capacity could still be inadequate (compared to demand). Crucially, having a permit is not a guarantee of a particular parking space at all times.
- 1.11 The Committee was briefed on the existing SBC principles and processes around RPZs, including costs to the applicant (currently £10 for each resident's car, £10 for each visitor permit, and £50 for each business permit (one per business)). Members heard that it costs SBC between £10,000-£20,000 to introduce a RPZ (officer time to produce scheme, legal costs of TRO (including advertising), signing and lining), plus admin (permit applications and production) and enforcement officer costs. Members noted that an RPZ scheme could not be introduced on a single street and questioned whether this policy was appropriate in all cases (e.g. in relation to streets with problems of parking over driveways).
- 1.12 There were currently six RPZs in operation across the Borough – Hardwick Estate, Stockton Town Centre, Trinity Gardens, Eaglescliffe (Station Road), Yarm High Street, and Yarm Town Centre West. Compared to the total number of eligible properties for these six RPZ areas, the rate of resident and visitor permits issued had remained relatively low since 2017-2018 (though was higher in Yarm).
- 1.13 In terms of enforcement, 629 PCNs (imposing a fine of £50.00, reduced to £25.00 if paid within seven days) had been issued in the previous year for parking offences – 9% of these were in relation to RPZs. The SBC Civic Enforcement Team was a multi-disciplinary team with numerous responsibilities (parking contraventions were just one of their priorities) – the team were reactive but also operated on an intelligence-led approach; as RPZs often

bordered town centres, they were incorporated into patrol routes. However, it should be stressed that resources are limited which inevitably impacts on SBCs ability to enforce existing RPZs, let alone any potential new ones.

- 1.14 Business groups provided their views on RPZs and the potential impact on trade due to restrictions on parking (particularly when trying to recover from the difficulties posed by COVID). Concerns were also repeated around enforcement and the displacement of parking problems to other areas, and the need to factor-in business views when considering a RPZ request.
- 1.15 An Elected Member survey was undertaken to establish Ward Councillor views on this scrutiny topic. Of the 20 respondents, just over half felt they understood the current eligibility criteria for a RPZ, and only 8 were aware of the current procedure for investigating a RPZ. Just over half felt the current permit prices were about right, and 14 felt the permit allowance per household (two resident permits and one visitor permit / booklet) was appropriate. Respondents also stated that further consideration around additional permits for households with someone with a disability on the enhanced mobility level or blue badge.
- 1.16 Several examples of RPZ use by other Local Authorities were considered (including costs to the applicant), with Members noting that Stockton-on-Tees was the only Borough in the Tees Valley to have a limit on the number of permits permitted per household (officers explained that previously there had been abuse of permits to facilitate parking for local businesses and, as a result, a full consultation exercise had been carried out and visitor passes limited to two per property). The Committee was particularly keen that a revised SBC policy should incorporate a periodic review of any existing RPZ (as per West Sussex County Council), and also highlighted the need to understand the potential impact of a RPZ on nearby amenities such as leisure facilities, parks and schools.
- 1.17 In summary, the Committee is sympathetic to the problems which local residents, businesses and their visitors encounter, and urge the Council to continue to promote the key messages around RPZs, in particular the fact that they may not solve the parking issues being experienced within a specific part of the Borough. Moving forward, it is also acknowledged that the impact of the push for electric vehicles (and the associated ability for owners to charge their vehicles outside / near to their property) may well be a future scrutiny issue.
- 1.18 Scrutiny has embarked on several parking-related reviews in the past, and challenges remain in finding solutions when, ultimately, there are simply more vehicles competing for the same (sometimes less) space. Personal responsibility to park appropriately (regardless of the temptation to use a restricted area for a quick drop-off / pick-up) and observe existing rules and regulations (even if this means parking further away from the intended destination and walking) cannot be overlooked – drivers would not like other vehicle-owners misusing their allocated space, so should be respectful not to do the same to others.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

### *Process*

- 1) **To increase understanding around Residents Parking Zones (RPZs), Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) produces and publishes a flowchart outlining the key aspects involved in the process, determination and, if approved, implementation of this scheme.**
- 2) **SBC revises its existing ‘high-level’ RPZ policy (making this available on the SBC website and via any other relevant publicly-accessible mechanism) to:**
  - a) **Clearly define the different types of permits available and what these allow / prohibit.**
  - b) **Provide clear guidance on the eligibility requirements for a RPZ and define what is appropriate (giving any relevant examples).**
  - c) **Clearly define where a RPZ would not be appropriate (e.g. around schools and not deterring people visiting high-use areas like parks).**
  - d) **Outline who should be consulted regarding the determination of an RPZ request (i.e. affected residents, business forums, SBC Ward Councillors, Parish / Town Councils).**
- 3) **SBC reviews the current RPZ charging policy, particularly around the cost of business permits, and the maximum quantity of permits per household / business.**
- 4) **Ward Councillor briefings are scheduled to raise awareness of a revised RPZ policy, reinforcing eligibility / exclusion criteria and opportunities for Elected Member input during the process (including ways Councillors can feed back on the any issues regarding RPZs in their Ward).**

### *Determination*

- 5) **When responding to a RPZ request, SBC ensures that clearly defined criteria is used to identify the appropriate extents of a RPZ, taking account of the impact this would have on residents, nearby businesses, and visitors to that particular part of the Borough.**
- 6) **The revised RPZ policy allows for consideration of permits to be approved for single streets (where appropriate) in addition to the existing ‘zonal’ approach.**

(continued overleaf...)

**Recommendations** (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

*Implementation*

- 7) Work is undertaken with the SBC Civic Enforcement team to establish an enforcement plan around existing, and potentially future, RPZs, and that any enforcement action be highlighted via SBC communication platforms as a means of deterring abuse of RPZs.**
- 8) A periodic review of any RPZ is included as part of a revised RPZ policy (akin to West Sussex County Council).**
- 9) An audit of existing RPZs be undertaken to ensure line markings are clear and signage is appropriate.**