

To: COUNCIL

On: 17 December 2020

Report by: Lead Officer – Michael Moran

Heading: Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Board Review on Conversion of Grassed Areas to Parking

1. Summary

- 1.1 Over a period of months and as part of the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board's 2018/19 annual programme, reports have been presented to the Board by the Lead Reviewer on the subject of conversion of grassed areas to open spaces.
 - 1.2 Research information in relation to the topic was reviewed with council officers providing information on the relevant services they are responsible for delivering. This was then presented to the Board.
 - 1.3 This report describes the purpose and scope of the review, it includes summaries of the information reported to each Board meeting and concludes with the key findings, conclusions and proposed recommendations.
 - 1.4 The Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board agreed the final report at its meeting of 23 November 2020.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Council is asked to:
note the findings and recommendations.

3. Background

- 3.1 There are many small areas of grassed and / or planted areas within our residential estates. The majority of which are maintained, on behalf of the Council, by Environment and Infrastructure (Operations and Infrastructure).
- 3.2 There are also suggestions of increasing pressures around available parking spaces within our residential estates.
- 3.3 This review will consider whether there is a need to, and whether it would be possible to, convert some of these maintained small areas to create additional parking space and thereby relieve some of the parking pressures.

4. Purpose of the Review

- 4.1 Report 01 was presented to the 4 November 2019 meeting of the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board, which agreed the key purpose and scope of the review was to:
 - (1) Set out the Council's current arrangements for maintaining and / or repurposing open spaces across Renfrewshire;
 - (2) Review available evidence to measure and identify the scale of the parking problem, linked to open spaces, within specific areas and across Renfrewshire;
 - (3) Identify benefits or challenges regards the repurposing of open spaces within residential areas; and
 - (4) Provide recommendations for consideration of the Board.

5. Key Findings

- 5.1 Progress reports were presented to the Board and paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 provide a resume of the main points presented on each occasion.
- 5.2 Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board – Report 02 – 16/03/20
 - 5.2.1 The council currently has significant areas of open space across Renfrewshire with ownership, split between Environment and Infrastructure (E&I) and Communities, Housing and Planning Services (CHP).

Each open space tends to be identified as being under the ownership of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) or of the General Services Account.
 - 5.2.2 There are opportunities currently available for an individual(s) to request to repurpose an area of open space. This will involve an application being made to the Council's Asset Management Team to purchase the open space.

There are, on average, no more than 10 applications each year to repurpose an area of open space, with very few requesting conversion to create parking facilities.

- 5.2.3 A small number of requests to repurpose open spaces have previously been made by Community Groups. However, these have tended to be to propose aesthetic changes to the open area e.g. planting of flower beds, rather than conversion of the space to create parking spaces.

Such requests tend to be dealt with through a leasing arrangement, rather than a purchase request.

- 5.2.4 Elected members can also make requests for repurposing of open spaces, as this would be viewed as a local ward issue. Such requests are considered by the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board.

Officers from Environment and Infrastructure would undertake a formal consultation process and traffic monitoring surveys within the affected area, so as to support Board members to take informed decisions.

- 5.2.5 If a community group felt they could improve underused or neglected green space within their area and had a project which could potentially strengthen the character, identity and heritage of their community they can make a funding request to do so, to the Council's Green Spaces, Parks, Play Areas and Villages Investment Fund.

This fund provides investment where the community can demonstrate a sustainable plan to improve and maintain the condition and use of a green space or community asset.

Whilst additional parking spaces could potentially be an element of such a request, it is unlikely that it would be its' core purpose.

5.3 Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board – Report 03 – 24/08/20

- 5.3.1 The lead officer was unable to identify a centralised, formal method of systematically recording specific enquiries / complaints regards parking issues and linked requests to convert open spaces to create additional parking areas.
- 5.3.2 CHP and E&I colleagues confirmed that there have been a low number of enquiries / complaints over the past few years. Such enquiries / complaints tend to come from individuals rather than groups.

Further, CHP colleagues noted that for many of the enquiries they had received the open space in question was maintained through the Housing

Revenues Account (HRA). However, many of the residential properties adjacent to the open space identified were now owner occupied.

Therefore, any conversion would not seem to directly benefit those tenants who were contributing to the HRA.

- 5.3.2. The main benefits derived from the conversion of open space to parking would be the creation of additional and potentially safer off-street parking spaces for those local residents who have a vehicle.

There would also be a reduction in ongoing open space annual maintenance costs. However, as the size of each open space varies it is difficult to quantify such savings in a meaningful way, without firstly identifying a specific area(s).

- 5.3.3 The two main challenges to consider for conversion of open spaces to parking would be around Climate and Cost.

- 5.3.4 On 27 June 2019, full Council approved two motions relating to the declaration of a climate emergency in Renfrewshire.

Council, through the cross-party Climate Emergency Working Group, has agreed to work to ensure Renfrewshire was carbon neutral by 2030. Being carbon neutral means that organisations or places reduce the carbon that they emit to the lowest possible level, whilst offsetting or mitigating against the impact of these emissions.

- 5.3.5 A report which noted a request to convert an open space to create a parking area was considered by the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board on 22 January 2020.

Within the report it was noted that there can be a challenge in properly estimating the total costs required.

The report noted that general repurposing costs could be estimated.

However, there was a need to relocate utilities with costs ranging between £10,000 and £100,000 to do so. It was noted the exact cost could only be known following excavation works.

The need to relocate utilities is often required for such works given the close proximity of residential and/or business premises to the open space.

The Board, on this occasion, decided against the request to repurpose noting the uncertainty over cost and the inconsistency with Council position regards climate change.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The following conclusions can be drawn from this review:

(1) There are various processes in place which allow for individuals / organisations to request to convert or repurpose an open space, including for the purposes of creating additional parking spaces, if required.

(2) There was no evidence to suggest that these processes are ineffective or fail to meet the needs of applicants.

(3) The small number of enquiries / complaints received requesting to convert open spaces to parking would indicate that the scale of the problem is not significant.

(4) However, the lead officer was unable to identify a centralised, formal method of systematically recording specific enquiries / complaints regards parking issues and linked requests to convert open spaces to create additional parking areas.

Therefore, there is the potential that some enquiries / complaints could be inappropriately recorded and therefore the scale of the issue may be greater than is originally evident.

(5) Benefits could be realised in converting open spaces to create more parking spaces, in particular the opportunity to potentially create safer off-street parking in some areas.

(6) Clear financial challenges were identified. In particular, the often hidden costs to relocate utilities, which can be substantial, and cannot be properly costed until excavation works are completed.

(7) The most significant challenge would be the potential that any increase in conversion of open spaces to parking may undermine the Council's declaration of a climate emergency on 27 June 2019.

7. Key Recommendations

(1) The current processes which allow for individuals / organisations to request conversion of an open space, including for the purposes of creating additional parking spaces, remain in place;

(2) A specific category related to enquiries / complaints linked to conversion of open spaces to parking be created on the Council's Mail Tracking System.

This would create a more robust centralised, formal method of systematically recording such enquiries / complaints.

It would also allow more detailed reporting information on the scale of the issue to be collected and, if shared across the services involved, would improve information sharing on an ongoing basis.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** –

A decision to convert grassed areas would lead to additional expenditure for the Council, in particular for the Housing Revenue Account.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – Not applicable

3. **Community/Council Planning** – None

4. **Legal** - None

5. **Property/Assets** - None

6. **Information Technology** – None

7. **Equality & Human Rights** –

The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – None

9. **Procurement** – None

10. **Risk** – None

11. **Privacy Impact** – None

12. **Cosla Implications** – None

13. **Climate Implications** –

Council decision of 29 June 2019 declaring a climate emergency would have to be considered for this Review.

List of Background Papers

- a) Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board Annual Programme Approval 27/08/18
- b) Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board Conversion of Grassed Areas to Parking Report 01 04/11/19
- c) Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board Conversion of Grassed Areas to Parking Report 02 16/03/20
- d) Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board Conversion of Grassed Areas to Parking Report 03 24/08/20

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Finance and Resources for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Michael Moran, Assistant Economic Development Manager, 0141 618 7269

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