

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	14 JANUARY 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	5
TITLE:	PETITION RESPONSE: HAMILTON ROAD PLANTERS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND REGULATORY SERVICES	WARDS:	PARK
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Officers reported the receipt of a petition seeking the installation of in-carriageway planters along Hamilton Road at the November 2020 meeting.
- 1.2 This report informs the Sub-Committee of the findings of the officer investigation.

2 RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 2.1 That members of the Sub-Committee note this report.
- 2.2 That members of the Sub-Committee consider the contents of Item 4 and agree to the officer recommendation not to progress the implementation of planters on Hamilton Road.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Any proposals would need to be considered alongside the Borough Council's Traffic Management Policies and Standards, Council Priorities and the Local Transport Plan.

4. BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATION

The Petition

- 4.1 At the Traffic Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 9th November 2020, a petition of 44 signatories at the time of writing was reported to this Sub-Committee.
- 4.2 The petition asks Reading Borough Council to consider the installation of wooden planters on Hamilton Road to act as road narrowing obstacles at intervals along the road. Signatories suggested the following benefits from the proposal and suggestions regarding implementation:
- Reduction in traffic speed to the benefit of reduced pollution and improved safety - it will emphasise to drivers that this is a residential area with a 20mph speed limit;
 - The plants will improve air quality and increase plant diversity and quantity on the road with benefits to insect and birdlife;
 - The planters could be long and narrow, to stretch out in to the road without taking up parking spaces, narrowing the road as much as possible but still allowing access for emergency and delivery vehicles; and
 - The planters could be positioned outside of the ends of the parking bays at Crescent Road and the outer ends of Hamilton Road and only located in places that do not obstruct access to driveways.

External comments

- 4.3 An external representation, submitted to the Council, was shared with Members ahead of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 9th November 2020.
- 4.4 The representation proposed the following:
- That the planters would have no positive effect on traffic speed above that already provided by the current speed bumps and parked traffic, and would increase rather than reduce pollution as vehicles encounter the new obstructions;
 - That they are unaware of any speeding related issues within Hamilton Road, as speed bumps are already in place;
 - That the introduction of the planters would lead to increased motorist / cyclist / motorcyclist frustration rather than calming;
 - That the safety of pedestrians is paramount with the introduction of planters as the eyes of road users are drawn to the planter and away from pedestrians and other road users. The planters would create poor sightlines for turning traffic from adjoining roads; and

- That the proposal will lead to greater danger for pedestrians, cause more pollution and encourage the accumulation of unsightly rubbish whilst adding nothing to the safety of pedestrians above that already provided by the current speed bumps.

Officer Comments

- 4.5 Officers designed the recently implemented residents permit parking scheme to maximise parking space capacity in respect of the layout of Hamilton Road and intersected junctions. This included sections of yellow-line restrictions to protect junctions from obstructions to visibility and other parking that could compromise safety and passage along the street.

Officers recommend against planters, or other objects, being sited outside/at the end of the bays as the bays are already as close as we would like to junctions. The placement of planters on the carriageway in this way, along with the risk of the vegetation growing taller, could compromise visibility along the road and around junctions/accesses.

If the planters were to be sited within the bays, effectively breaking the bays up, then this would lead to more clutter in the form of poles and signage to ensure the bays and associated signage is legal. This would also reduce the availability of parking spaces for residents and their visitors.

Officers recommend against siting planters, or other objects, within passing spaces (breaks in the parking bay to facilitate the passing of two-way traffic) as it would reduce the length of these, potentially rendering them unfit for purposes. This risks gridlock (no one has anywhere to go). Additionally, they could not be placed on the non-parked sides. These have been restricted against parking to ensure sufficient carriageway width for traffic flow.

Planters will create more obstacles for delivery lorries, refuse trucks emergency vehicles and residents' parking vehicles to negotiate effectively.

- 4.6 Officers do not believe there is a speeding issue within Hamilton Road and police-reported casualty data identifies two incidences with 'slight' severity within the last 5-year period, which does not highlight any pattern of safety concerns. Officers do not consider that the planters will reduce traffic speed to a greater extent than the existing traffic calming, regulatory signing and layout of the parking bays along the street.

- 4.7 The petition suggests that a number of residents would be willing to plant and maintain the vegetation in the planters. This shows a very positive community approach to the street scene. It is, however, important for the Council to consider future costs and public expectation and if these planters are not watered and cared-for, they would become an eyesore with an expectation on the Council to maintain or remove them, which would have an impact on maintenance budgets.

The planters themselves will have a limited lifespan and being placed into the road puts them at risk of damage and the Council at risk of damage claims.

While the Council has placed similar features on the highway, these are typically at clearly presented road closure points and not along a running carriageway. Built-outs and other similar features would have large, high-visibility bollards and lining to guide motorists away from them. Given the restraints in this area, this will be difficult to achieve.

Reducing the parking bays to accommodate such features would require changes to the underlying Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). An adjusted TRO would need to be advertised and publicly consulted.

- 4.8 While officers understand the street-scene benefits that vegetation can bring, this is a challenging area. The recent introduction of the Resident Permit Parking scheme was introduced partly to help clear the narrow footways of parked vehicles and also to improve accessibility across the area by managing where parking could and could not take place. During this process, however, it was clear that the remaining level of parking availability was a concern to residents.

Recommendation

- 4.9 Having considered the content of the petition, the representation made to Members at the November 2020 meeting and investigated the implications of the proposal, Officers recommend against progressing proposals to place planters along Hamilton Road.

In summary of the previous points raised in this report, this recommendation is based on the following implications:

- Parking capacity - The current layout of bays maximises the parking capacity, while maintaining visibility at junctions and providing sufficient space for traffic to flow. Siting planters on the carriageway will reduce the number of parking spaces available for residents and their visitors.
- Speeding and safety - Hamilton Road is already a traffic calmed street with speed humps and there is no pattern of speed-related (nor other) incidents involving casualties. It would be a concern that the planters themselves could compromise visibility at junctions and add risks for road users.
- Costs - Aside from the cost of introduction, there would be costs associated with maintenance and repair/periodic replacement of the planters. There is a risk of future neglect regarding the upkeep of the planting, watering, weeding and potential removal of litter from the planters.

5. **CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

The recommendations of this report support the aims and objectives of the following Council Priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2 It is not anticipated that the result of the decisions arising from this report will have significant environmental implications.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The lead petitioner will be informed of the decision of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the agreed meeting minutes.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Any amendments to waiting restrictions as a result of the Hamilton Road planters are advertised under the Traffic Management Act 2004 and/or the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is relevant to the decisions arising from this report, as it is not considered that the decision will have a differential impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None arising from the recommendations of this report.
- 10.2 Funding would need to be identified prior to the development of a scheme to introduce planters, or alternative new street furniture, to Hamilton Road.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Petition Receipt: Request to Install Traffic Calming Planters on Hamilton Road (Traffic Management Sub-Committee - November 2020).