

Traffic Management Sub-Committee

13 September 2023



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Digital Parking Permits
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Elizabeth Robertson, Assistant Parking Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Ennis
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That it is proposed that Digital Permits are introduced borough wide for all permits except Visitor Permits, which will remain as physical permits.2. That offline (physical) permits will be retained for vulnerable residents (residents & carer permits)3. That residents in the permit zone 02R which was part of the original trial continue to trial digital visitor permits under the new permit software.4. The Sub-Committee agrees to a statutory consultation for the implementation of a full rollout of digital permits boroughwide to include all permit types in November 2023 and therefore authorise the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to make the Traffic Regulation Order5. That the sub-committee agrees to the Traffic Regulation Order being made permanent6. That respondents to the statutory consultation be informed of the decisions of the sub-committee accordingly following publication of the agreed minutes of the meeting.7. That no public inquiry be held into the proposal

Appendices

1. Feedback from Residents

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises the digital parking permit trial and recommendations to implement a roll out of digital permits borough wide to include all permit types on 01 November 2023, except for visitor parking permits.
- 1.2. There will be further options available for residents to request offline (paper) permits in certain circumstances.
- 1.3. Procurement of a new Civil Parking Enforcement PCN and permit software contract has taken place and a new back-office system will be implemented on 01 November 2023.
- 1.4. To report on the findings of the Digital Parking Permits Pilot Project carried out between
- 1.5. Appendix 1: Feedback received to the statutory consultation.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The provision of parking restrictions and associated criteria is specified within existing Traffic Management Policies and Standards.
- 2.2. The introduction of Digital Parking Permits complements the council's draft Local Transport Plan, Climate Emergency Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy by addressing local parking issues that can impact on traffic flow and perceived safety and accessibility.

3. The Proposal

3.1. Background

- 3.2. The Digital Parking Permits Pilot Project, which is part of the Customer Excellence Programme, delivered a pilot in order that a boroughwide rollout of digital permits can be considered by Members. The pilot was carried out between 31 October 2022 to 30 April 2023.
- 3.3. This project was aligned to the councils commitment to a self-service digital first approach, reduction in manual and paper processes and improved customer experience.
- 3.4. Digital permits work where the permit allocated to the vehicle is known within the parking management systems, specifically the enforcement system. Consequently, no physical permit is required, resulting in a more efficient service for residents. There are some consequential climate benefits from reduced printing and postage, as well as some relatively small financial savings. Residents benefit where paperless permits are issued instantly without a delay or break in cover due to delivery of a physical permit. Discussions with other local authorities also found that where digital permits were offered, greater flexibility was reported by residents as a benefit as they can be purchased by session rather than defined by a day or part of a day.
- 3.5. Shared experiences of digital permits suggest resident and visitor satisfaction is far greater when compared to a paper-based permit. From an enforcement perspective paperless permits are not compromised by the physical disc falling off the window of the vehicle for example. This, in-turn, reduces complaints and improves the reputational image of the council by its residents.
- 3.6. There are 19 residents parking zones, including almost 17,000 households and 12,000 parking spaces. In order to park in a permit bay, a permit must be displayed in the windscreen. There are two types of permits produced:
 - Annual physical permits – resident, business, carer etc (round discs)
 - Scratch card permits – Visitors, Temporary, Landlord/Tradesperson
- 3.7. Residents can apply for permits online. They need to create an account and must have an e-mail address to do so. They are required to upload proof of address and vehicle before a permit can be issued. There are no changes to this as part of the process for residents.
- 3.8. A resident can phone the council to apply for an offline permit, should they need to. The Permit team will create an offline permit account on their behalf.
- 3.9. Offline customers without an e-mail address will not be able to have digital visitor permits, however it is proposed to make provision for residents to still receive a physical permit.
- 3.10. The Digital Permit pilot ran from October 2021 to April 2022 in the area of Lower Caversham (Zone 02R). 451 resident permits were issued and 5 were offline and out of 582 residents visitors permits 14 were offline.
- 3.11. **Current Position**
- 3.12. In summary the changes proposed will mean that:

- Permits are not printed and posted.
 - The scheme no longer requires a permit to be displayed in the vehicle.
 - Residents are not asked to allow up to 14 days for these permits to be issued.
- 3.13. Procurement of a new Parking Services contract has led to a change of supplier, the new service will start on 01 November 2023, with Unity 5 providing the back office PCN and Permit software system. This has provided for improvements to be made, which allows for some of the issues that were identified at pilot stage to be resolved.
- 3.14. All permits will need to be migrated to the new system regardless of whether they are digital or not. It should be noted that even if the permits are still printed, they will still be linked to the Civil Enforcement Officers handheld computer terminal, except visitor permit scratch cards – these are individual permits completed on the date of the visitor with the details scratched out and vehicle registration written by hand. They will not be linked to the handheld and if there are any errors with the completed of the permit e.g. wrong date scratched, incorrect vehicle registration written on them – the visitor will be liable to receive a Penalty Charge Notice, as they do currently. They would also receive a PCN if the permit is obscured/falls down. The Council is unlikely to cancel PCNs that have been incorrectly completed or not displayed correctly. A digital visitor permit scheme, will remove the likelihood of a PCN being issued because the vehicle, dates are completed online and there is no issue with the permits falling down.
- 3.15. The table below shows the permits issued between 31 October 2022 and 30 April 2023 and the total on issue as of 05 July 2023:

Permit Type	Number issued Oct-Apr	On Issue at 05/07/2023
Business	2	2
Carer	3	3
Carer Offline	3	3
Daytime Visitor (8am-8pm)	463	581
Digital Resident	393	449
Discretionary Nanny	1	1
Discretionary Resident	7	13
Night time Visitor (8pm-8am)	236	287
Resident	0	154
Resident Offline	3	4
Visitor Business	5	5
Visitor Business Discretionary		2
Visitor Resident Offline	36	41
Visitor Resident	130	391
Visitor Resident Discretionary	5	12
Total	1,287	1,948

3.16. The table below shows the number of visitors permits compared with last year:

	Oct 21-Apr 22	Oct 22-Apr 23
Free	446	433
Paid	63	30
Total	509	463

3.17. Proposal

- 3.18. Appendix 1 includes all the feedback received from the pilot. The Sub-Committee is asked to consider this feedback against the proposal.

3.19. Analysis of the consultation feedback

3.20. During the pilot period we have received 17 responses via the Council's website.

3.21. From the feedback responses, 2 supported the idea of Digital Permits, 6 objected. The 9 other replies were comments about the scheme in general.

3.22. The points below highlight the main reasons for objections and officers proposals to improve and mitigate these issues:

- They like having physical permits to see when the permit expires.
 - Officers understand the importance of having a clear view of permit expiry dates. With the digital permit system, users will receive timely notifications well in advance before their permit expires. This eliminates the need for physical permits and the chance of missing renewal dates.
 - The permit information includes when it is due to expire and is easily accessible and clearly displayed from the user's online account. It is viewable anywhere from a mobile device, tablet, or desktop.
- They like to leave the visitor permit scratch cards out for their carer/visitors/tradespeople to complete.
 - Whilst it is not proposed to bring digital visitors permits forward immediately, there are a number of benefits which subject to a further decision on their roll out would be of benefit to residents.
 - The digital system offers the convenience of generating visitor permits electronically, instead of scratch cards that can be lost or misplaced. This ensures quick and secure access without the hassle of physically managing scratch cards.
 - A digital scratch card has the functionality to be completed ahead of time so that it is in place before the visit of the carer/visitor/tradesperson is due to take place.
- The digital permit system is reliant on the internet working.
 - Once the permit has been created it is available in real time to the enforcement team as well as the CEOs on the street. The device stores this data locally and they'll sync with the system once internet connectivity is restored. This ensures continuous usability even during temporary network outages.
- It is easier to use the scratch card than logging in and completing online.
 - The digital platform is intuitively designed to minimize complexity. Logging in and generating permits is a streamlined process that saves time and effort.
- The hourly versus AM/PM options for visitor permits is down to the scratch card design and not a purely digital option.
 - Officers understand the importance of accommodating various permit duration options. The digital system is flexible and can be configured to our requirements.
- It will force residents who are not tech savvy or prefer physical permits to do something they have not asked to do.
 - Transitioning to a digital permit system doesn't mean excluding residents who prefer physical permits. The solution is user-friendly and comes with comprehensive support. The council is committed to assisting all users, regardless of their tech familiarity, in adopting and benefiting from the digital platform.
- It takes too long to complete a voucher.

- The digital permit process is designed to be efficient and quick. Generating permits takes only a fraction of the time compared to manually completing scratch cards. This efficiency enhances the overall user experience.
 - The night and day system is too confusing and complicated.
 - The night and day booking system was based on the current scheme of having AM/PM permits and this can be removed and changed to 24/7 hour booking system.
- 3.23. The supported feedback comments were:
- You can book time by the hour.
 - It's easier to get a new car.
 - The system is easy to use but the supporting material make it seem harder than it is and it would be better if there was a mobile phone app.
- 3.24. The other comments on the scheme were:
- The duration section auto populates to the next day and could book for the wrong day.
 - Additional work has been done to prevent errors in duration selection and will be tested as part of the extended pilot. When selecting the time and date of a scratch card it is displayed on the screen as well as the need to select confirm to authorise the request for it to be created.
 - A number wanted confirmation the physical visitor scratch card permits would still be valid.
 - For the pilot area, physical visitor scratch cards already issued would still be valid (until the last date printed on them).
 - Digital permits are only issued to one person, so other household members cannot book visitors.
 - While permits are issued to one person, the digital system provides a centralised platform where all household members can view and manage permits. This ensures coordination and avoids the confusion of multiple physical permits issued to different individuals.
- 3.25. Council officers also made comments on the trial that were received from residents over the telephone:
- The night time and day time was too confusing for residents.
 - The night and day booking system was based on the current scheme of having AM/PM permits and this is proposed to be removed and changed to 24/7 hour booking system as part of the extended pilot.
 - Some residents commented that although they are online, it is their family member who has completed the application and would prefer a physical permit.
 - As above, physical permits can still be generated wherever required.
 - Vouchers can only be issued to one resident, so houses in multiple occupation (HMO) can't share the vouchers, as they can now with the physical scratch cards.
 - Multi vehicle permits can be supplied.
 - Offering book free visitor permit sessions does not help residents of HMO's.
 - The flexibility of a digital system allows for specific conditions in which the use of LLPG data can define and dictate available permit and scratch card options. This comes with much greater control over the standard physical options.
 - The AM/PM still provides the flexibility for customers wanting physical permits.

- We understand the importance of accommodating various permit duration options. The digital system is flexible.
 - It is not easy to book online when not at home.
 - The digital permit solution can be accessed from anywhere using either a mobile device, tablet, or desktop. The solution is device friendly changing its layout based on the native resolution.
 - The elderly residents wanted paper books as they are unable to work around the internet.
 - The digital permit solution gives its users all the advantages of a digital solution with the added benefit of including a physical permit where the specific need is required.
- 3.26. During the trial period, officers are aware of only one Penalty Charge Notice being issued to a vehicle that had a valid digital visitor permit. This was a training issue and the contractor has been reminded of the importance of checking the handheld computers.
- 3.27. Overall, whilst a low response to the consultation was received, it is acknowledged that a higher percentage of objections were made to the scheme. These objections and comments however focussed on the visitors permits rather than Residents Permits and with a new software provider, it is considered that many of these issues can be resolved, so that residents receive an improved service.
- In order to extend the pilot in Zone O2R, officers have made the following improvements:
 - A sharing service that allows others to manage the visitor permits application/issue in HMO properties and non-internet savvy residents (with consent of the resident). This is one of the new features of the permit software system.
 - Providing an offline service to residents who still require a physical permit in extenuating circumstances.
 - Removing the AM/PM and switching to simplify the offer of 120 hours per session to be used at any time.
 - Reminder e-mails issued when permits are about to expire.
- 3.28. The digital visitor permit offer to the resident can be updated to:
- Each household entitled to 240 free hours; this is the same as having two books.
 - Each household will be eligible to purchase 120 hours at £25 per block and they can purchase up to 600 hours, the same as the physical permits.
 - They can request further blocks of 120 hours if needed.
- 3.29. The benefits of the hourly session is that they don't have to use one physical permit for a short stay. It creates greater flexibility for resident.
- 3.30. Of the 463 day time visitor sessions issued, 433 were free and 30 were paid for. There is likely to be a decline in the number of paid for sessions/books given the greater flexibility for residents to use the 240 hours.
- 3.31. If the pilot is extended, officers would continue to monitor feedback and develop solutions to any issues with a view to bringing back a further report recommending a wider roll out of the visitor solution.
- 3.32. In summary the benefits are:**
- Permits are not printed and posted.
 - Scheme no longer requires a permit to be displayed in the vehicle – no issues of permits falling down windscreen and enforcement action being taken, lost/delayed in the post, issuing with scratch cards not being completed correctly (incorrect date scratched out, incorrect vehicle registration written etc).

- Residents are not asked to allow up to 14 days for these permits to be issued – instant issue.
- Residents will be able to manage their permits easily and make changes to their permit without having to make a request to the resident parking team or wait for the new permit to be printed and posted to them.
- Any changes residents make will be instant.

For residents in the Zone O2R pilot:

- Each household will be entitled to purchase in blocks of hours not books, also known as scratch cards.
- Resident will have greater flexibility when using their visitor permit allocation if digital is provided.
- The council can offer a sharing service that allows residents who are less confident with digital to share their account for it to be managed.
- Residents can share their visitor allocation with other household members.
- Resident will be able to use any unused physical visitor permit scratch cards until the last year printed on their permits (currently 2025).

3.33. Recommendations

- 3.34. To roll out digital permits for all permit types except for visitor permits.
- 3.35. To continue to have offline (physical) permits for residents who still need this requirement. Specifically for Resident, Carers and Visitor Permits.
- 3.36. To continue the trial in Permit Zone 02R for digital visitor permits.
- 3.37. To update the permit scheme rules and definitions with these changes.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. This proposal contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan Themes, as set out below:
- 4.2. The parking strategy, procurement of civil enforcement services and changes to resident permit parking sits within the wider context of the Reading Transport Strategy 2036. Parking management and civil enforcement activities supports a number of strategic aims within the Reading Transport Strategy and Reading's Corporate Plan.
- 4.3. **Inclusive Economy** - Parking management of the town centre and local centres support the local economy. As a part of a contract review it was established a number of local authorities have embraced paperless or digital parking permits and many more are considering the advantages a digital permit system offers. As a part of our review into the future parking service the opportunity has been taken to explore what digital permits offers Reading residents. During the pilot any of our offline customers without an e-mail address will not be able to have digital visitor permits, in this instance provision has been made for them to still receive physical permit books. A boroughwide rollout would need to ensure we create an equitable permit provision for offline residents.
- 4.4. **Healthy Environment** - Parking management has a positive impact on the public realm creating a safe and accessible environment for residents, workers and visitors. Parking management is part of the wider management of the road network which contributes to safety, protecting vulnerable users and encouraging walking and cycling.
- 4.5. Illegal parking can compromise safety or result in difficulties for residents and businesses. Many parking issues can create delays or accessibility obstructions for users of the network such as pedestrians, cyclists, domestic vehicles, delivery vehicles, emergency services and public transport.

- 4.6. Our parking permit scheme prioritises parking for residents, businesses and their visitors. Parking is limited to permit holders within these controlled parking zones. This helps to prevent commuter parking and makes it easier to find a parking space close to your address. Any vehicles parked in contravention of the rules of the highway may be issued a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN). The pilot aims to build on our current offer specifically around visitor permits.
- 4.7. **Thriving Communities** - Good parking management ensures homes, business and leisure are accessible. Parking schemes such as resident permit parking and specific restrictions such as disabled parking contribute positively to our community.
- 4.8. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.
- 4.9. This proposal contributes to the TEAM Reading Values, as set out below:
- 4.10. **Together** – The Digital Parking Permit Pilot Project will seek to improve resident and visitor satisfaction by moving from a paper-based permit scheme for resident permits and resident's visitors permits within Lower Caversham for the period of the pilot. By conducting a pilot will enable us to work together with our residents and gain valuable feedback. In addition, RBC will work together with our suppliers to ensure the visitor permit software is fit for purpose and fully meets the needs of our residents.
- 4.11. **Efficiency** – Reduce significantly or stop printed permits supporting our climate change emergency agenda and in addition making financial savings due to the reduction in the cost of postage during the pilot.
- 4.12. **Ambitious** – Aligned to the Customer Experience Strategy we aim to be responsive to the fast-changing environment of digital and what our customers expect as their customer experience.
- 4.13. **Make a Difference** – Design and implement digital services to ensure that everyone who interacts with the Council has a better day as a result.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. A climate impact assessment has been completed which suggests that Digital Parking Permits have a net low positive impact on the Climate Impact Assessment Carbon Emissions: there will be a minimal amount of energy used in creating the notices in the form of energy used to print and computer usage. Therefore, a provisional rating of Net Low Positive has been awarded for Energy Use. Use of Transport has been awarded Low Negative: where possible Officers will use council owned electric vehicles for the installation of notices, if applicable. It is not believed that this project will have any effect on creating Heatwaves/Drought/Flooding/High winds or storms, so the rating of Nil has been achieved.
- 5.2. The council will always try to use local contractors/suppliers, hence the reason for giving a Nil rating for Disruption to Supply Chains. Overall, however, the short-lived and minimal negative impact for the implementation of the pilot is expected to be more than mitigated by the long-term benefits of replacing paper permits with a digital process specifically if the pilot is a success and can be rolled out to all zones for all of our parking permit types.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. A statutory consultation was carried out from 4th August 2022 to 25th August 2022. Notices of intention were advertised in the local printed newspaper and erected on lamp columns within the affected area. The Police are a statutory consultee and were directly notified. The consultation was also hosted on the Council's website (the 'Consultation Hub'), where details and plans are available. There was also a presence on social media to raise awareness of the consultation. In addition, we published frequently asked questions on our web page.

- 6.2. Policy Committee and Traffic Management Sub-Committee are public meetings. The agendas, reports, meeting minutes and recordings of the meetings are available to view from the Council's website.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, 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.
- 7.2. Officers have assessed as to whether an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is relevant for the pilot and whether the pilot could have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief; and the Armed Forces community. It has been concluded that an Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant for the pilot because it is not deemed to be discriminatory to persons with protected characteristics. However, as a result of the statutory consultation and feedback from the pilot, officers have identified equality impacts and sought to mitigate those before rolling out digital permits boroughwide.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. There are none.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The Order for the digital scheme will be made in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 as amended and the procedure laid down by Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.
- 9.2. The effects of which is to allow the issue of digital parking permits.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. The cost of implementing a fully digitalised scheme will form part of the renewal of the enforcement contract.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. The new permit software system will be going live on 01 November 2023
- 11.2. There is a project plan that is underway for the configuration, testing and acceptance of the new permit software.
- 11.3. There is a communication plan to advise residents of the upcoming changes, including newsletter, lead Councillor newsletter, website information and permit reminder e-mails.
- 11.4. Permits that are expiring from 1st November 2023 to 31 October 2024 will be sent their reminders to renew but will have explanation of what they need to do to receive their new digital permit. Officers have streamlined the process but there will be a requirement to set up a new account on the new permit software system to manage their permits moving forward. Whilst permit data will be migrated over, this will still necessitate the requirement for a new account/password to be set up.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

1. Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Employee costs (see note1)			
Other running costs	145,000	145,000	145,000
Capital financings costs			
Expenditure	145,000	145,000	145,000
Income from:			
Fees and charges (see note2)	900,000	900,000	900,000
Grant funding (specify)			
Other income			
Total Income	900,000	900,000	900,000
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)	755,000	755,000	755,000

4. Risk Assessment.

- 4.1 The long term roll out of digital permits could reduce income as a result of more flexible visitors permits.