

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 October 2024

Petitions Report

Report from: Rebecca Wilcox, Chief Housing Officer
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Summary

This report presents a review of action taken by the Council in response to a petition in relation to parking in Baron Close, Gillingham received by the Council in March 2023.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Committee is requested to review the action taken by the Council in respect of this petition and decide whether to request that officers undertake further work or take no further action.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. In summary, the Council's Petition Scheme requires the relevant Director to respond to the petition organiser, usually within 10 working days of the receipt of the petition by the Council. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are always advised of any petitions falling within their terms of reference together with the officer response. There is a right of referral of a petition for consideration by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the petitioners if they consider the Director's response to be inadequate. Should the Committee determine that the petition has not been dealt with adequately it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to Cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Council.
- 2.2. Where an Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made recommendations following consideration of a petition, the petitioners have the right to call for a review of the action taken or proposed by the Council. This review is undertaken by the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.3. The petition scheme is set out in full in the Council's Constitution at [Council rules](#).

2.4. Any budget or policy framework implications will be set out in the specific petition response.

3. Background

3.1. The Council's Constitution provides that petitions received by the Council relating to matters within the remit of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be referred immediately to the relevant Director for consideration at officer level.

3.2. Where the Director is able to fully meet the request of the petitioners a response is sent setting out the proposed action and timescales for implementation.

3.3. For petitions where the petition organiser is not satisfied with the response provided by the Director there is provision for the petition organiser to request that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the steps the Council has taken, or is proposing to take, in response to the petition.

3.4. Where petitioners call for a review of action taken or proposed following discussion of a petition or an officer being called to give evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this will be undertaken by the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. Petition referred to the Committee

4.1. The following petition has been referred to this Committee because the petition organiser has requested a review of the action taken by the Council following recommendations made by the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2023.

4.2. Parking in Baron Close, Gillingham

4.2.1. A petition signed by 7 people was received by the Council on 27 March 2023, the petition requested action to address parking issues in the Baron Close including the possibility of Council owned garages being removed to improve parking in the area.

4.2.2. A response was provided by the then Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place on 6 April 2023, which explained that it was not feasible to demolish the garages in question. The lead petitioner was dissatisfied with the response, and as a consequence referred the matter to the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The full response by the Council and referral request by the lead petitioner can be found in the report provided to the Committee on 30 June at Appendix 1 to this report.

- 4.2.3. On June 30, 2023, the Committee considered the referral, the minutes of the meeting are as follows:

The lead petitioner and Councillor Price as Ward Member were invited to speak to explain why the Council's response to the petition had been referred to the Committee. The following points were made:

- Residents in Pier Road were unable to park in front of their properties due to the topography and their only available parking and access by vehicle was at the rear of the properties on Baron Close.
- The available space for parking in Baron Close had been eroded by the number of dropped kerbs installed over recent years and this has impacted on residents some of whom were disabled.
- There are several garages in Baron Close and it was requested that a reduction in the number of garages be explored by looking at usage and size of the garages as this could assist in improving the availability of parking in Baron Close.

The Parking Business Manager informed the Committee that to date four dropped kerbs had been installed and whilst this had reduced the kerb space it had allowed the residents of those properties to park on the front of their properties rather than on the road.

The Assistant Director, Culture and Community confirmed that the garages were in decent condition and 12 of the 15 garages were currently being let. No further information about usage of these garages was currently available.

In discussing the petition, the following responses were made to questions from Members:

Members were concerned about the lack of sufficient parking available particularly for disabled residents. Questions were also raised about the garages. It was proposed that a feasibility study should be undertaken. This would consider parking accessibility issues and the garages.

the Committee:

- a) Noted the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report.
- b) Considered the petition referral request in paragraph 4 and the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive's response.
- c) Requested a feasibility study in relation to parking accessibility for residents on Baron Close and Pier Road, including a review of the use of the garages. This would be undertaken in consultation with ward councillors and the petitioner.

- 4.2.4. Officers undertook the feasibility study requested in June 2023. The results of the feasibility study are shown as Appendix 2 of this report which has been

redacted to enable it to be included in the open part of the agenda, the unredacted version is attached as an exempt appendix which sets out information relating to the financial evaluation of a number of options in respect of the garages at Baron Close, Gillingham. Officers engaged with the Council's Planning and Highways teams when exploring what options could be feasible. Officers provided the report to the local ward members who fed this feedback back to the lead petitioner.

4.2.5. The Lead petitioner and local ward member requested a site visit with senior officers from the HRA to discuss the report further. The Head of HRA Property and Development and Head of Tenant Services attended in August 2023 and outlined the reasoning for the recommendation within the report at appendix 2.

4.2.6. The Lead petitioner and local ward member requested a further meeting which was attended by The Head of HRA Property and Development, Head of Tenant Services and the Chief Housing Officer. This meeting took place at the Sunlight centre in Gillingham at 6pm on 18 March 2024.

4.2.7. Officers reiterated the reasons for the recommendation and advised that some of what the petitioners wanted was not within Housings remit. Officers advised the petitioners that Planning and Highways were consulted with during the compilation of the options appraisal, and they would not support the options being put forward for a variety of reasons.

4.2.8. This was outlined to residents and the ward Councillor in a letter which can be found at Appendix 3.

4.3. Comments from the Chief Housing Officer

4.4. The HRA does not have a statutory duty to provide parking for existing or former council properties (HRA or former HRA ownership), this needs to be considered when reviewing the feasibility study as no budget is set aside for additional parking or garage demolition.

4.5. Officers have reviewed all potential options for the area referenced in the petition, highlighting the implications to the site, revenue income and budget pressures.

5. Options

5.1. The Committee is asked to consider whether the Committee is content with the feasibility study as requested by the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee or whether any further action is required, therefore the Committee may decide:

- a) Further work should be undertaken by officers to investigate whether there are any other options which could be explored.

- b) Note the work that the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested has been completed and take no further action.

6. Risk management

- 6.1. The Council has a clear scheme for handling petitions set out in its Constitution. This ensures consistency and clarity of process, minimising the risk of complaints about the administration of petitions.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. Work to date to respond to the petition outlined in this report has been delivered within existing budgets. Any further action that cannot be delivered within existing budgets would require Cabinet and Council approval for budgetary additions to proceed.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. Overview and Scrutiny Rule 21.1 (xiv) in the Council's Constitution provides that the terms of reference of this Committee include the power to deal with petitions referred to the Committee under and in accordance with the Council's petition scheme.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix One - Petitions Report Baron Close 30 June 2023
Appendix Two - Feasibility Study Baron Close Garages, Gillingham (Redacted)
Appendix Three - Letter to Cllr Price
Exempt Appendix - Feasibility Study Baron Close Garages, Gillingham

Background papers

None