

Gloucester Road Trial Parklet

Waltham Forest Council is now in a position to revisit a previous proposal to trial a Parklet on Gloucester Road. Initial discussions began some time ago and we appreciate the correspondence already received and resident's patience on this matter.

For those unfamiliar we have provided some background on the Parklet proposal on Gloucester Road, and its context in terms of a pilot for a wider prospective programme below. A response to any specific issues or concerns raised during the initial engagement is also included for those who have feedback.

Background

Waltham Forest Council is committed to improving air quality, mitigating climate change, and addressing ill health as a result of inactivity. Assisting residents to reduce their reliance on motor vehicles is seen as a key component in all these areas and consequently the Council has, and continues to, implement a range of infrastructure improvements and behaviour change initiatives to help achieve this. Many of these are tried and tested solutions, while others are relatively new or experimental initiatives, and in some cases are in need of trialling to aid policy development.

A Parklet is a small green space, seating area or similar public amenity, located alongside the pavement on former road space. It is intended to improve the public realm through its appearance, its use, and its properties, and to highlight how a relatively small amount of carriageway space can be re-purposed to achieve a wide range of local benefits. There is no fixed shape or form for a Parklet, but the general principle is that it occupies one or two vehicle spaces and provides increased scope for green infrastructure and planting, seating, cycle and micro-mobility parking, and a range of other small-scale activations.

Waltham Forest Council has already introduced two externally commissioned, prefabricated Parklets in the borough, as part of Liveable Neighbourhoods projects in the Coppermill and South Leytonstone areas, as well as a number of micro Parklets in response to the pandemic. Both types have largely been successful but the Council is not in a position to introduce these extensively across the borough, outside of one-off projects.

Building on the success and lessons learned from the Council Parklets delivered to date, and initiatives being piloted by other London boroughs, the Council has been investigating a prospective Resident Parklet scheme. A Resident Parklet scheme involves residents, with input from their neighbours, creating and maintaining low-cost, low-impact Parklets outside their residence with the Council's permission and guidance. The key benefits of resident led Parklets are identical to those associated with Council-led or sponsored Parklets and can include;

- Providing rest stops for people who may normally struggle to actively commute to local destinations
- Growing plants and flowers to improve air quality, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and the aesthetic of an area
- Providing practical applications such as providing space for the storage of bikes and kick-scooters.

Additionally, the cost and resource associated with design, fabrication, installation and ongoing maintenance is significantly reduced compared to Council-led Parklets and the emphasis is on resident/community impetus, involvement and ownership.

Following an initial period of research and benchmarking, particularly with London Borough of Hackney who have been running a successful resident Parklet programme for several years, the Council has been developing a delivery framework/model for a prospective resident Parklet programme in Waltham Forest. The emerging delivery framework aims to set out a sequence of steps through the project lifecycle from initial resident application through design development, technical approval, engagement, installation and subsequent maintenance and monitoring. The framework also sets out the guidance and support to be provided by the Council including technical and health and safety requirements. The delivery framework has been developed with input from a wide range of Council stakeholders including Highways Maintenance, Traffic Management, Waste Services, Risk, Health and Safety, and Parking.

As part of this developmental process the inclusion of a pilot/trial scheme was felt to be the most effective way to incrementally test, inform and refine the delivery framework ready for wider use in the future. This would also provide a test case that once installed would be monitored so that any unforeseen or unexpected operational issues identified, and to ensure the premise was a sustainable one. This would then be used to further inform and refine a prospective future programme. Overall, this was felt to be a balanced, practical and robust approach to the successful development of this initiative

For the pilot scheme the Council has been working with a resident on Gloucester Road in Higham Hill. This particular resident was chosen for the pilot scheme as they had previously, proactively contacted the Council in 2019 requesting permission to proceed with an installation of a small Parklet on the public highway, having seen a number of resident-led Parklets during a visit to London Borough of Hackney. The specific request was to allow introduction of several wooden planters on the carriageway outside the resident's home, in place of a permit parking space. The resident does not own or have access to a vehicle but does own a cargo bike and would use the space to also store the cargo bike when not in use.

Working with the resident in question the proposal has been taken through an initial version of the proposed delivery process. This has included a formal submission of the proposal, providing demonstrable engagement and support from those in the local vicinity, agreement on the use of materials, consideration of its objectives, planned upkeep and risk management as well as proof of insurance. At every stage a review was conducted with responsible Council Officers to ensure the process was appropriate and the proposal reflected the design and health and safety guidance. This culminated with the wider resident notification letter that was sent to all residents in Gloucester Road advising of the Council's intention to proceed with a resident Parklet on a fixed duration trial of 12 months, as a pilot case for a potential wider programme in the future.

We hope this provides further information on the background behind the resident Parklet proposal, the context in terms of a wider future programme, and the process we have been through including the rationale for developing an initial pilot/test site.

Local engagement

The engagement process for this proposal was developed to help test and refine a pre-implementation engagement process for a wider programme in the future, while also reflecting that this was a new initiative and a pilot/trial site aimed at understanding and assessing any operational issues once installed. As such the engagement process had a number of phases, both before and after implementation. This included but wasn't limited to:

- Initial local engagement performed by the resident
- Formal information/notification by the council
- Trial installation and subsequent monitoring
- Dedicated inbox to receive correspondence from residents
- Engagement at the completion of the trial and subsequent decision on its permanency

Whilst on many schemes it may be appropriate to have a formal consultation prior to installation, it was felt in this instance that a fixed duration trial would be the most effective and efficient way forward given the scale of the proposal and that it is something previously untried in the borough. A trial would allow residents to observe the impact of the Parklet once installed, providing the most amount of information with which to make an informed decision, rather than speculating about the potential impacts – positive or negative. This is in keeping with the approaches available to the Council for highways and transport initiatives, where some measures are implemented following advance consultation, and others are delivered on a trial basis initially with further engagement once installed.

Health and safety

The proposals have been developed and assessed with concerns around both road safety and personal safety/security carefully considered and addressed through its design. Informed by the measures implemented at other Parklet sites across London and with the input of internal Council experts as set out in the background section above, all necessary precautions have been taken to ensure risks have been considered, plans have been scrutinised and the proposal is implemented according to strict design guidance.

Whilst we are aware of the potential for anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues our research has indicated that the risk of such problems is incredibly low. As it would be installed as a trial, the Council would monitor the Parklet closely and all residents would be able to report issues to the Parklet inbox for investigation. The Council reserves the right to remove the Parklet immediately if it feels it is either not fulfilling its requirements or it is having a negative impact on the neighbourhood including ASB.

Parking Impact

A Parking assessment has been completed and we are satisfied that the reduction of the road by one parking space would not adversely affect the ability of people to park their car, or emergency vehicles to access resident properties. As car ownership in the borough continues to decrease, we're able to address the balance of parking allocation to support alternative and more sustainable modes of transport. As such proposals like this represent a more equitable utilisation of roadside space than existed previously and as part of a wider strategy to reduce car ownership, they can in the long-term, help more people to choose active travel solutions to their transport needs, reducing the need for these residents to own a car and in turn freeing up space for those who do need it.

Furthermore, this Parklet proposal will have no impact on Blue Badge holders applying for a designated bay in this area.

Policy

As detailed above, this is a new initiative for the Council and as such we have been developing a process and procedural framework, using a trial/pilot site to inform and refine the process. Both the policy and process have been given careful consideration as they have been developed, including engagement and involvement with a range of relevant departments and services across the Council. Incorporating a trial/pilot site has also allowed the emerging processes to be tested more thoroughly with resident input and feedback, and also provides the opportunity to monitor and assess the impacts once installed before committing to a wider programme.

Increasing public amenities, reimagining underutilised spaces, and encouraging residents to think and travel more actively is a key policy area for the Council. Proposals such as Parklets provide a number of benefits in this respect. We of course understand the concerns that some residents have, and we believe that a trial is the most practical and reasonable approach to try new smaller scale proposals and assess their merits and disadvantages through real world observations.

Next Steps

Coinciding with the warmer, lighter summer months, our intention is to proceed with the trial as originally planned. Once installed, residents will be able to provide feedback through the dedicated channels set up for the Parklet programme, as well as the normal wider Council channels.

All residents within the vicinity of the proposal will receive an update informing them of this.