

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 22 MAY 2018
title: EDISFORD RIVERBANK
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 This report provides information on the control of both parking and open fires at Edisford River Bank.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley, encompassing our objective to encourage economic development throughout the borough, with a specific emphasis on tourism.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Edisford River Bank area is very popular with residents and visitors to the area, especially in warm weather. The area is a large open space with a children's play area, miniature railway, public toilets, ice cream concession, benches and picnic tables.

2.2 The car park at Edisford Road is the Council's largest, though at peak periods it becomes full, leading to people parking along the road. Vehicle access to the river bank area itself is restricted to authorised vehicles, i.e. emergency services, Council vehicles, the ice cream and snack concession seller, plus blue badge holders. Access along the road which leads to the car park which is for blue badge holders only, is via a locked gate which is opened and closed using a radar key.

2.3 Open fires in the form of barbeques have become very popular with the sale of disposable units, allowing people to take them to the river bank area. We have recently received two complaints from residents, who felt this should not be permitted.

3 THE CURRENT POSITION

3.1 The control of access is subject to any vehicle driver unlocking the gate and ensuring it is locked again after they pass through it. To get access to the river bank and to exit requires the driver to pass through the gate and carry out this procedure on both occasions. However, this leads to the gate being left open, allowing people to simply drive down to the river bank who do not possess a blue badge. Occasionally unauthorised vehicles get locked in as a result of going through the gate which has been left open, but then locked by another visitor. This often involves a frantic call to the Council offices or the CCTV office during out of hours to help them get out.

3.2 Pedestrian access to the grass area is via a footpath which leads from the Edisford road car park. People using this then cross the road just after where the gated vehicle access point is, to get to the play area or the grass area.

3.3 The river bank area attracts all ages, many of whom take picnics, including disposable barbeques to the site. These open fires are placed directly on the grass or occasionally onto the park furniture.

3.4 General litter from visitors has always been a problem, during warm weather the site is visited by Council staff who litter pick each morning and empty bins. However, the

amount of waste material and litter produced from the significant numbers visiting the site means that at the end of each busy day, like many other open spaces across the UK it can be a mess, sometimes leading to complaints. Of course, if everyone took their rubbish home, it would leave the area in a much better state, but unfortunately, the Council will continue to have to clean up the mess created with the resources we have available. (Every weekend we have 2 staff working, who cover Clitheroe, Whalley and Longridge during a limited morning shift).

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 Over the last Bank Holiday, 7 May 2018, over 40 cars parked on the river bank grass area. This caused 2 principal issues. The cars themselves took up space which would ordinarily have been used by the public to enjoy the area and the movement of vehicles over this area presented a very real risk of injury to the people, many of whom were children, who were also using the area.
- 4.2 Apart from this indiscriminate parking, the Council regularly receives reports from the caravan site operator that young people take their cars down to the river bank during the evenings, when the gate has been left open. This leads to anti-social behaviour and reckless driving activity at times.
- 4.3 Control of vehicle access could be better achieved through installing an automatic barrier, the cost of a suitable barrier system would be around £5,000. There is currently no provision in the capital programme for this project. A bid for funding for the works would need to form part of the budget process for 2023/24.
- 4.4 Continuing to use the padlocked gate with a new parking order for the whole area including the grass, would give us the authority to fine people for parking on the grass. This would help to mitigate the problem of parking and access until a longer term solution is determined. Combined with larger signage to warn people about unauthorised parking.
- 4.5 The control of open fires is more problematical. Barbeques lead to scorching of the ground where they are placed. Also because we use recycled plastic for benches and tables and where these units have been placed onto this furniture, the plastic has melted due to the intense heat they create. The users of the units are unlikely to possess fire safety equipment, e.g. a fire blanket or extinguisher, therefore if anything other than the unit itself catches fire their only resort short of trying to get water from the river is to call the fire brigade. The disposable units give off carbon monoxide, smoke and require cooling ideally with water after use, few people are likely to take the necessary precautions to ensure risks are minimised either to themselves, other visitors or pets nearby, when using these barbeques.
- 4.6 The Council could erect signs to prohibit their use. Or provide purpose built areas where people could use their disposable barbeque units. The former would require a bylaw to have the force of law behind it and the latter would require several such areas to be created as people are unlikely to use just one which is sited away from where they are picnicking. If the Council were to create the spaces for people to use then the Council would have to ensure that only these areas were used, which would require staffing resources to enforce. These resources are not available without taking staff off other duties or creating an additional resource which could be called upon when warm weather was forecast. Even the creation of spaces does not of itself absolve the Council from the safety of visitors to the area.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council has limited staff resources to remove the litter created by visitors, using these members of staff to also control access would not be possible within the scope of the work they need to attend to. For the forthcoming summer period, improvements to the signage will help to advise drivers of their responsibility, both to lock the gate after use and to stop parking on the grass. A parking order has to be advertised for a prescribed period before it can be implemented. There is current budget provision to install paved areas where barbeques could be placed, to avoid scorching of the grass or damaging the park furniture.
- Political – No implications identified.
- Reputation – The Edisford Riverbank area will continue to be a very popular weekend and holiday destination. Some visitors may resent being told that they cannot take motor vehicles onto the grassed area or should not light barbeques, but all our visitors should be reassured to know that the Council is concerned to secure safe enjoyment of the area for all.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified. Provision is made for disabled access to the river bank area.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Agrees to the designation of the grassed area by the river bank as restricted with no parking allowed.
- 6.2 Agrees to the installation of signs asking people not to use barbeques or open fires at Edisford Riverbank.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – None

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