

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory
Services Scrutiny Committee

Motor Homes Task Group



March 2023

1. Recommendations

The task group asks the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services (CIRS) Scrutiny Committee to endorse and the Cabinet to take action on the recommendations below, with a report against progress of the recommendations to the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee in 9-12 months' time:

	Recommendation	Agency
1	Write to invite District Councils to review their policy on motorhomes and motor caravans in liaison with one another to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the County.	Cabinet Member
2	Devon County Council, in partnership with District Councils to dedicate a webpage to provide clear and accessible information for motorhome users including outlining parking restrictions, good practice and available off street facilities	Communications team in conjunction with Highways
3	The Council's definition of motorhomes / motor caravans within its Traffic Regulation Order be reviewed to more appropriately reflect current parking practices and enable consistent enforcement of rules with regards to vehicles being used in the manner of a motorhome (but which have not been permanently converted).	Highways Team
4	The Council adopts a consistent approach to managing parking for motorhomes and motor caravans for areas that it controls, , to allow for consistent enforcement and clarity for motorhome users. This would include consistent times for restrictions to apply. This would typically focus on key destinations such as seafront locations.	Highways team

2. Introduction

On 22 July 2022 a reference was made by the East Devon Highways and Traffic Order Committee to the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee (East Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee, 2022). At the 22nd September 2022 meeting of the scrutiny committee it was resolved:

“(a) that a Task Group be established (comprising Councillors Bullivant, Hartnell, Roome and Trail to consider a county-wide policy for the provision of longer and short term sites for Recreational Vehicles and Campers etc (with reference to include issues outlined above);

“(b) that this Task Group be included in the Committee’s Work Programme with a view to completion by Easter 2023.”

(Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee, 2022)

The Terms of Reference for the task group were:

- To understand the benefits and frictions that surround motor homes.
- To examine the impact of overnight parking on local residential areas
- To examine the above with reference to seafront areas and other tourist destinations throughout the whole area of Devon.
- To consider what a county-wide consistent and clear policy for the provision of longer- and short-term sites for Recreational Vehicles and Campers with associated amenities and services should include, recognising the unique challenges of different areas of the county in developing the policy.

The group wanted to explore opportunities for the County Council to support motorhome visitors and also take account of the views of residents. A specific idea that the task group had was to understand if there are Devon County Council-owned sites that might appropriate to utilise for the development of motorhome facilities. Members were also keen to understand what regulations could be considered for implementation and the challenges of enforcement.

The Task Group met four times, with officers and members undertaking their own individual research. A number of witnesses were invited to these meetings, or to contribute information for consideration by the task group, including Devon County Council staff, officers from district authorities and wider organisations such as The Caravan Club.

3. Background

The Task Group sought to understand the legislative and enforcement background in Devon regarding how the county approaches motorhomes, what responsibilities Devon County Council holds as an authority and what is delegated to districts.

Residents Parking

On-street parking is controlled by Devon County Council as Highway Authority. One of the issues encountered by the task group was residents storing their large vehicles on streets, particularly during the winter. Devon County Council currently cannot act on vehicles staying long-term on streets that are currently licensed, taxed and hold a valid MOT and are therefore parked there perfectly legally. Motor caravans are conspicuous, but if an authority implements periods of no waiting, or campervan specific restrictions, to try and stop continuous parking activity then those owners would likely simply move their vehicle to the closest area without such restrictions. This would mean the authority would then be 'chasing them around' via costly Traffic Regulation Orders which represents a massive maintenance liability and effort, probably disproportionate to the problem.

Regarding winter storage, the task group did note that the main concerns voiced by residents regard improper facility usage, parking and so on at key areas (seafronts and other visitor destinations) and the impact on residents of this. Members considered that during winter motorhomes tend to be parked on appropriate roads, and are not used, and therefore do not generate the same volume of complaints from residents.

Existing Restrictions

Where there have been issues identified with motorhomes or motor caravans¹ parking in on-street parking spaces (such as seafront locations in Exmouth and Dartmouth) Traffic Regulation Orders have been introduced to prohibit parking either at all times or overnight. The core issue here then becomes enforcement. It has been observed anecdotally by parking enforcement officers, and corroborated by witnesses from districts, that some motor caravans will only park overnight at times that they are reasonably sure an enforcement officer will not catch them due to normal hours, for instance parking late at night and leaving early in the morning, effectively circumventing the existing restrictions.

Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) for motorhomes come under Penalty Charge Notice contravention code 23 which refers to parking by the wrong class of vehicle in a designated space, namely there is no specific motorhome contravention for instance, the same contravention would be used for a car parking in a coach bay. Of the 317 PCNs issued within Devon under code 23 from January to November 2022 (when the data was presented to the task group), only 12 are confirmed to have related to motorhomes.

There is difficulty in enforcement in that often vehicles will not meet the definition of being a "motorhome". The definition of a motorhome currently used by Devon is that included in the Road Traffic Regulation Act. This defines it as a vehicle with living accommodation that has been permanently installed. This could be seen as a limiting factor as some vehicles will have temporary accommodation installed and therefore function in much the same way. For example, a large van with a mattress

¹ The terms 'motorhome' and 'motor caravan' are used interchangeably throughout this report.

in the back would not be classified as a motorhome under the current definition as this does not constitute a permanent conversion, but this van will be being used in the same manner as a vehicle that has been permanently converted. Authorities have the power to use a different definition of a motor caravan if they wish within their Traffic Regulation Order and enforce based upon that definition.

Car parks

It is district councils that manage most car parks across Devon, with the County Council not participating in the daily management of these car parks. However there is a relation between on-street parking and car parks, as in many districts (as covered below) there are adequate off-street provisions to allow motor caravans to park overnight where desired. A core consideration therefore becomes how to encourage motor caravan users to park where they legally can (namely, to divert them to these car parks and prevent them circumventing such on-street restrictions as covered above).

Information availability / signposting

The task group felt that for motorhome users much of the information on available parking and facilities is not easily accessible. This can then mean that motor caravan users rely on third-party apps and websites that may provide advice that is not what the relevant authority would want to be disseminated. Therefore, DCC providing clear signposting in liaison with districts could help with this in line with regulations and enforcement.

4. Provision of Facilities

Councillors recalled concerns raised by local residents and businesses about motor caravan users using their facilities – such as ‘sneaking in’ to use hotel facilities like toilets and emptying their own waste down street drains. They felt that generally most motor caravans should have self-contained toilet facilities, and that it is likely to be a minority of people undertaking these behaviours but that it was worth considering.

The task group queried with the Estates team at Devon County Council around what council-owned land might be available if the task group were to recommend the development of facilities for motorhome users, with nothing suitable being identified.

Members were advised that any conversion of land for a variety of purposes could have large implications. For example, it had been suggested that the Council could try and encourage farmers or those with surplus land to rent it out for winter storage of motorhomes. However, the task group heard that this would not be a simple solution as it would be liable for business rates and may not therefore be an attractive prospect for landowners. Concerns were also raised that there may be issues relating to ensuring the vehicles are secure and not vulnerable to break-ins. This could also lead to improper use of the land such as motor caravan users living on these areas rather than using them for vehicle storage.

5. District Councils

The task group invited representatives from a number of districts and heard from South Hams, East Devon and Torridge. The task group wished to understand the approach of districts and the rationale behind their approaches, taking into consideration the specific policies and the evidence that had informed these.

South Hams

South Hams had recently (1st December 2022) submitted a report to its executive regarding its Motorhome Policy and proposed the permanent adoption of the proposed Motorhome Policy in 5 car parks (Widdicombe, 2022). This followed an 18-month trial scheme on 9 sites and public consultation, the response to which was very mixed.

The policy itself allowed self-contained motorhomes to park for a maximum stay of two consecutive nights with no return within 48 hours. This costs £10.00 per night and is in operation between 6pm to 9am.

- Longmarsh Car Park, Totnes was the most popular by far in the trial period and attracted a number of complaints, including issues of antisocial behaviour / noise and in particular defecating in bushes and emptying waste in the nearby river. The other sites did not receive complaints of this specific nature.
- Positive anecdotal feedback included that people have stopped in towns and used local services such as restaurants and shopping, having spent money that would otherwise not have been spent in the local economy.
- Significant monitoring and enforcement took place during the trial – it has taken investment of time and money to ensure the right recommendations in the report to the Executive. The standard enforcement rota is 7am – 7pm, but important out-of-hours enforcement visits took place (468 of them) which proved key in catching those contravening the rules.
- Services such as showers are not offered to motorhome and motor caravan users because South Hams do not want to compete with local campsites – the car parks are for people who require a short stay while going on to other sites. This is reflected in the vehicles that are allowed to use these parking services – namely that there is an expectation they have their own facilities to use for up to two nights.
- Rules and regulations are clearly advertised in the car parks.

East Devon

East Devon had recently submitted a report to its Cabinet for the adoption of a framework policy for campervans, vans and motorhomes using East Devon District Council pay and display car parks. This had been on trial for a number of years.

Where previously there was a 3-day maximum stay, this had been removed following public consultation and feedback. The EDDC planning team has raised concerns about how this impacts the use of parking services and brings car parks more into campsite territory amidst concerns they should not be competing with campsites.

The cost of the Exmouth pilot is £11 per night – deliberately inexpensive to ensure that overnight motorhome, van and campervan users were not deterred from using the allocated sites. Discussions have been had around increasing this to, as an example, £20 and including some facilities beyond the currently available 24-hour toilets but plans had not come to fruition at that point.

Problems faced include reports of antisocial behaviour as well as approximately 20 ‘van lifers’ currently residing in one of the car parks in Exmouth (Estuary) but in the absence of alternative places for them to go there is little appetite to remove them. It has been considered to attempt to ‘spread out’ the issue i.e. encourage the ‘van lifers’ to use multiple car parks, decreasing the amount in each.

East Devon’s approach to what constitutes a motorhome or motor caravan is ‘active sleeping’ – namely if it is being used for domiciliary functions then it counts, in spite of any official classification of the specific vehicle:

“3.4 The intention is that this policy will apply to ANY vehicle that is being used to provide accommodation for an overnight stopover. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes any lorry, truck, van or car that is being used for sleeping in one of our public car parks between the hours of 22:00 - 08:00.” (East Devon District Council, 2022)

Torrige

Torrige has had a motorhome parking policy operating for a number of years. The policy covers five car parks and allows for overnight parking on two consecutive nights. This period has been set by Torrige because for longer periods, rubbish and waste water tends to accumulate. Torrige do not provide facilities and have no plans to change this. They are clear that they do not wish to compete with campsites, taking the same approach as South Hams.

Except in one location, Torrige does not use dedicated motorhome bays – instead they utilise normal bays and rule that motorhome users must pay for the number of bays used if the vehicle is longer than one bay. The cost is £8 per bay per night for most of the car parks; Churchfields, Appledore is the exception which, as the most popular in the District, costs £15 per bay per night.

The charging period is 6pm to 10am. Their website stipulates:

- NO Barbeques or Open Fires
- NO Awnings/Extensions to be erected

- NO Tables & Chairs to be used outside of the vehicle.

Points highlighted in discussion included:

- Problems with waste for those staying longer than 2-nights, and therefore it has been proven important to be strict on these limits.
- Monitoring has proven difficult with people often arriving at 8pm and leave at 7am, which is outside of standard monitoring hours, and hard to catch out. There is a cost implication to getting enforcement officers to check outside of standard hours.
- Local businesses know regular motorhome users and have expressed that they are good for the local economy.
- Motorhome users have also written to the Council to express that they like the parking system and are incentivised to spend money in local businesses (often preferring this over using their own on-board cooking facilities for example).
- There is clear signage that is moved around sets out expectations of payment, behaviour and so on clearly.

Key takeaways from Districts

Residential Parking

Questions were asked to district representatives regarding problems with residential streets. Although parking on these streets is the remit of the county council, districts are well placed to comment as they receive much of the feedback from service users and residents. From these questions there was no clear solution posed and it was seen that there were two similar but distinct problems:

- people with motorhomes who have no place to park them so do so on residential streets as storage; and
- visitors parking on residential streets.

These would be in many areas already covered by residents parking schemes. In those schemes a resident that is entitled to residents parking permits may choose to use these on a motorhome if they own one. Complaint is on occasion received by other residents as it is often felt that larger vehicles that take up more space to park should not be allowed a permit. For those without residents parking permits, enforcement will be carried out.

However, in the case of unrestricted areas a case-by-case approach would be needed – namely to address problem areas as and when they develop. Care must be given to not fall into a costly cycle of implementing parking restrictions on a ‘problem street’ to only move the problem along and continue this – essentially ‘chasing the problem’ from street to street.

The observations from the districts regarding problems within residents' parking scheme areas were reflective of the earlier views of the task group.

Problems and Concerns

Enforcement and monitoring propose problems. Flexibility was highlighted as key in:

- Rules regarding distance between vehicles – there may be rules specific to car parks for fire and other safety reasons, but no contravention code exists around 'vehicle closeness.' As an example, Torridge stipulates 6m distance between vehicles but this allows parking officers to seem fair in requesting a distance less than this but still safe.
- Monitoring and enforcement, in terms of shift patterns and adjustments made to ensure that contraventions are caught and people are following the rules.

Concern was raised around the role of Devon County Council in imposing rules and regulations on districts, who are the ones who know what works for them and run their own car parks, which the task group has strongly noted in the development of its recommendations.

Provision of Facilities

The consensus on providing authority-managed facilities for long term use by motorhomes was that district councils were reticent to do this. They stressed that, from their perspective, they did not want their car parks to 'compete' with locally run campsites by providing similar services and facilities such as showers and electric charging points. The car parks that allow limited overnight stays (such as a two-night maximum) are designed only for motor caravan users to use short-term with the expectation that if they wish to stay somewhere longer term (three nights or more, for instance) they will go to a campsite specifically designed for this.

Advertisement

Advertisement of policy and restrictions – both online and via signage in the specific car parks – were considered important. Officers and councillors observed that it was difficult to find accurate information on motorhome facilities online and that what information was available was often inconsistent across the county, with some districts providing far more detail than others. Additionally third-party sites often relayed incorrect information, with online forum users providing anecdotal advice that did not always line up with official restrictions or that might be out of date. The task group felt, therefore, that there is work to be done to link up motorhome policies to allow for a coherent message across the county, to ensure motorhome users could access this information easily, and that it was clear for every motor caravan user across Devon.

6. Other County Councils

It was initially planned to invite representatives from other county councils to speak to the task group about their experiences with enforcement regarding motorhome and motor caravan users for insight and to help the task group pave a way forward for Devon. However, upon contacting the County Councils Network and undertaking independent research, the task group was unaware of any other two-tier county council that had a specific motorhome or motor caravan policy of a form that may have been useful for investigation.

Appendix 1 to this report highlights the independent research done, with the conclusion that all other two-tier councils delegate car park functions in their near totality to district councils. It was noted that the development of any county council policy would be new ground. The strong views of districts regarding their hesitance for county council involvement were also given strong consideration.

7. Conclusion

The economy of Devon relies heavily on tourism, with visitors from outside the county – as well as those travelling within its boundaries – valuing the unique sites of the county. As such, members of the task group were conscious that a balance must be struck between the expectations of motorhome and motor caravan users (who, the task group heard, contribute more to local economies when they feel welcome and provided for) and the residents who have concerns about the behaviour and presence of motorhomes in their local areas, particularly antisocial behaviours such as public waste disposal. The task group recognises that there is no easy solution to the issues surrounding motorhome parking in residential areas, which is the remit of Devon County Council, with the issues presented particularly around residents and on-street parking proving problematic. Road-legal motor caravans parked in these areas with a valid permit are therefore doing so legally; and to impose restrictions on specific streets may only serve to move the problem along.

In its recommendations, the task group has tried to propose realistic, practical measures in its immediate remit in order to provide consistent and clear information for motorhome and motor caravan users, as well as expanding the definition to allow clarity and consistency for enforcement of regulations. It is the hope of the task group that wider collaboration between Devon County Council and the districts in the area on their policies and the information provided can increase the quality of provision for motorhome users. The task group does also recognise that districts have first-hand experiencing of managing the concerns of residents and the concerns of motorhome and motor caravan users, and that their expertise and local knowledge should be acknowledged.

8. Sources of Evidence

The Task Group heard testimony from a number of witnesses and would like to express sincere thanks to the following people for their contribution and the information shared.

Christopher Rook	Traffic Management Team Manager	Devon County Council
Emma Widdicombe	Senior Specialist	South Hams District Council
Richard Easthope	Parking Services Manager	East Devon District Council
Steve Macey	Parking Services Supervisor	Torrige District Council

Thanks also to Emma Ingle (Corporate Asset Manager, Devon County Council) who explored possible council-owned lands that could be developed for motorhome facilities.

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10. Task Group Membership

The Spotlight Review was chaired by Councillor Jeff Trail BEM and membership was as follows:

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee	
Councillor Jeff Trail	Councillor Phil Bullivant
Councillor Alistair Dewhurst	Councillor Marcus Hartnell

Councillor Ian Roome	
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11. Contact

For all enquiries about this report or its contents please contact

Fred Whitehouse, Scrutiny Researcher (fred.whitehouse@devon.gov.uk)

12. Appendix 1 – Approach of Other County Councils

Local authority	Does the County Council manage parking?	Notes
Cambridgeshire County Council	No – at District level.	http://www.park-my-motorhome.co.uk/english/Cambridgeshire/ - “There is no information on this website for motorhomes” – referring to the Cambridgeshire County Council website. Example of district parking: https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/parking/car-parks-ely
Cumbria County Council	https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/544/43502155832.pdf This is for 4 County Council-owned car parks. All other car parks managed at District level.	http://www.park-my-motorhome.co.uk/english/Cumbria/ - “There is no information on this website for motorhomes. It directs you to the websites below for car parking information.” – referring to Cumbria County Council website. Policy to the left defines: “motor caravan or camper – a vehicle which provides fixed sleeping arrangements”. Also says (Part III) – “25. No minibus or motor caravan shall use a parking place unless otherwise authorised” County Hall Car Park, Kendal seems to be the only car park that does not explicitly ban the parking of motor caravans (vehicle category G) as seen in the various ‘Schedule 3’ tables.
Derbyshire County Council	No – at District level.	https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/transport-roads/roads-traffic/parking/car-parking.aspx Directs to district websites.
East Sussex County Council	No – district level.	https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/parking/pay-display/car-parks Directs to District websites.
Essex County Council	No – district level.	http://www.park-my-motorhome.co.uk/english/Essex/
Gloucestershire County Council	No -district level except Park and Rides.	Unclear if Park and Ride allows motorhome parking. Other car parks managed by Districts.
Hampshire County Council	Most run by Districts.	https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/parking/durngate-car-park -- Durngate, County Council run. Not clear if allows Motorhomes. Parking policy (here) does not refer to motorhomes, motor caravans.

Local authority	Does the County Council manage parking?	Notes
Hertfordshire County Council	Most run by Districts.	Does not seem to be a link to Districts on their website; overall absence of parking information, and am able to find district parking info via Google.
Kent County Council	No – run by districts including Park and Ride.	https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/parking/nuisance-parking - ‘Nuisance parking’ – again, dealt with by districts.
Lancashire County Council	No – districts, some exceptions.	https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-travel/parking/preston-bus-station-car-park/ - Bus Station car park; height restriction. https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-travel/public-transport/park-and-ride/ - Park and Ride info - None explicitly refer to motorhomes; some do have height and weight restrictions.
Leicestershire County Council	On-street only. Off-street is districts.	“We control no marked out off-street parking spaces available for public use.” https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cars-and-parking/controlled-parking-spaces
Lincolnshire County Council	On-street and coastal countryside. Districts do car parks.	https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/news/article/800/new-regulations-for-coastal-car-parks-from-november - Banned overnight stays in ALL coastal car parks - Negatively received by CAMBRA (https://campra.org.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?t=755)
Norfolk County Council	No – local councils.	https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads/parking/civil-parking-enforcement-and-legal-orders
North Yorkshire County Council	No – local councils Does run on-street.	https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/council-car-parks https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/controlled-parking-zones - There is an FAQ at the bottom which asks about motorhomes; the answer refers to Park and Rides and streets. Park and rides are NOT overnight. Everything else will be district level.
Nottinghamshire County Council	Notts Parking Partnership	https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/transport/parking/parking-enforcement ; ‘About Notts Parking Partnership’ still directs to districts for off-street; on-street is County.
Oxfordshire County Council	Car parks are district councils; 2x Oxford park and rides Council run	https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/parking/where-park/car-parks

Local authority	Does the County Council manage parking?	Notes
Somerset County Council	District run	Soon to be unitary
Staffordshire County Council	Off-street is districts	No clear motorhome info except referencing residents schemes.
Suffolk County Council	Districts	East Suffolk District -- https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/news-archive/larger-campervans-to-be-allowed-in-12-car-parks/ - Reversed a ban, campervan over concerns.
Surrey County Council	Districts	
Warwickshire County Council	Districts	
West Sussex County Council	Districts	http://www.park-my-motorhome.co.uk/english/w-sussex/
Worcestershire County Council	Districts	