

Report subject	Improvement of the environment in Poole Park through a trial closure of a park entrance to motor traffic
Meeting date	22 May 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>From 17 January 2024, BCP Council began a trial 24-hour daily closure to motor vehicles of one entrance / exit point in Poole Park.</p> <p>On the same day the trial began, BCP Council launched a four-week consultation with the public, to understand the impact of reducing vehicles movements in Poole Park. The consultation results are considered in this report alongside other evidence, the strategic management of the park and the wider impact of a closure.</p> <p>An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) on the closure confirmed that on balance there are no significant impacts on protected characteristic groups, including older people and those with disabilities. The public consultation did show that older people and those with a disability were more likely to disagree with the proposal.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to assess the strategic management of the environment within Poole Park and to seek a decision as to whether the trial arrangement and road closure shall be adjusted or made permanent.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet</p> <p>(a) Agrees that the current trial closure, of the Whitecliff entrance and exit point to motor vehicles, is made permanent in Poole Park.</p> <p>(b) Agrees that current arrangements are retained, and motor vehicles can still access Poole Park and its facilities.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the BCP Council Corporate Strategy priorities of Sustainable Environment, preserving our natural

	<p>environment for generations to come, an eco-friendly and active transport network, tackling the climate and ecological emergency, maximising access to our high-quality parks and open spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the BCP Green Infrastructure Strategy that seeks to help increase health and well-being outcomes for our communities and visitors, thereby reducing pressures on health and social services; reverse biodiversity loss and nature recovery; strengthen the resilience of people, places and nature to a changing climate and support high quality placemaking. • Public Health Dorset supports the proposed change as it enhances Park users' health and well-being by being in an improved space with reduced vehicle movements, improved feeling of safety in accessing the park and its facilities. • This is a strategic improvement of a key destination green space, supporting users from multiple wards, including some in more deprived areas. Follows similar precedent in Bournemouth parks, builds on previous trials and proposals to improve the park's environment and the work of the 2017-21 Poole Park Life Heritage Fund project. • It is recognised that 63% of consultation responses were against the proposal and of those many responses perceived that there are negative effects on older people and those with a disability. The Equalities impact Assessment and independent report by DOTS disability suggest there is no significant impact on any groups with protected characteristics. • There has been an extensive review and understanding of the trial closure, the consultation response and supporting information. This report assesses the responses to the survey, their stated impacts against the long-term improvement for the environment of Poole Park and its users. • With regards to 'Active Travel', a reduction of motor traffic through the park will improve comfort, safety and perception of safety for users of the park who are walking, wheeling, running or cycling for either pleasure or utility. • Routes through the park have previously been identified as Key Walking Routes and/or Primary Cycle Routes within the LCWIP, adopted by full Council in 2022 in accordance with central Government policy
Portfolio Holder(s):	Andy Hadley, Portfolio Holder for the Environment
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton (incoming appointment)

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Wards	Poole Town and Parkstone Wards
Classification	For Recommendation/Decision

Background

1. Poole Park is a heritage listed park in a Conservation area. Opened in 1890, access was originally designed for horse and carriage, but now provides vehicle access to the park, including as a through road between Poole Town Centre and the Whitecliff area.
2. The road in Poole Park is not adopted highway and has had an historic morning closure since at least the early 1980's that prevents parking for town centre workers and eliminates through traffic at that peak time. Various community events also close the road periodically through the year, these do not require a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). TRO's are in place to enable the enforcement of parking restrictions.
3. Since the late 1990's an additional reduction in vehicles using Poole Park has been sought to enhance its setting and use as a destination green space.
4. The 2017-2021 Poole Park Life project trialled a road closure in the centre of the park between 4 and 6pm Monday to Friday. This proved to be effective and consultation responses were evenly split for and against, albeit with notable disagreement from some stakeholders.
5. Reducing vehicle numbers that pass through the park is a strategic improvement that has precedent elsewhere in BCP's parks and supports its role as a destination green space.
6. The Poole Park Life evaluation report and a BCP-wide green space survey (both 2021) highlighted the desire from those respondents to reduce vehicle usage of Poole Park and address through traffic (Appendix 8). Traffic data from surveys in 2016 provide indicative data alongside more recent surveys in 2023 and during the trial. These show some general trends of:
 - a. Peak vehicle movements using the park between 16:00 and 18:00 on weekdays with 877 vehicles (2016 data) and 778 (Sept 2023 data) vehicles recorded.
 - b. 2,980 vehicles used the park roads in a single day (September 2023), reduced to 1624 during the trial.

2024 Trial closure and consultation

7. In January 2024, a trial closure was put in place to assess the impact and a consultation ran for 4 weeks alongside the closure to allow residents and park users to have their say about the proposal while experiencing the effect of the closure.
8. The trial closure and parallel consultation began on 17 January 2024. Running the trial closure alongside the consultation allowed people to experience the impacts of the closure, both positive and negative, before sharing their views.

9. Temporary signage was put in place 2 weeks earlier on 3 January 2024 to give users notice of the intended trial closure. The consultation was open for 4 weeks, closing at midnight on 13 February 2024. Signs were put up in the park promoting the consultation. An online survey was available, as well as paper copies in BCP libraries and in the Ark café. The consultation was promoted on the council's social media channels and press releases.
10. A closure to all vehicles already happens on a time limited basis between 7:30 and 10:00 am Mondays to Saturdays. The trial extended this closure to a complete closure to motor vehicles using the Whitecliff Road access point. Access to the park via the other entrances and by active means of travel – walking, cycling and wheeling – was unaffected, with no removal or reduction in any parking spaces.
11. The aim of the closure was to improve the environment and amenity of Poole Park. Previous consultation has established that the enjoyment of the park for some is reduced by the impact of through motor traffic. The intention is to make Poole Park a better place for its users with wider benefits for the environment, climate change, biodiversity and active travel.
12. The roads in Poole Park are not adopted highway and are therefore managed by Environment Services. The following have been considered alongside the public consultation findings:
 - a. Traffic data
 - b. Previous relevant consultation responses,
 - c. The strategic management of green spaces,
 - d. Impact on surrounding highways and the wider network
 - e. An independent disability access audit.

Public consultation Summary

13. The survey received 5,392 responses. Overall, 63% of respondents disagreed with the closure and 36% agreed.
14. The level of agreement to the proposal in the consultation changed throughout the trial period, increasing from 29% on day 1 (758 responses) to 46% in the final week (932 responses).
15. Respondents were more likely to **agree** with the proposal if they:
 - Use the park 6-7 days a week (52%)
 - Travel to the park:
 - On foot (52%)
 - Bicycle (58%)
 - Scooter (51%)
 - Bus (52%)
 - Live in Poole Town ward (61%)
16. The highest level of **disagreement** came from respondents who:
 - Use the park:

- once a fortnight (70%)
- 1-2 days a week (69%)
- once a month (67%)
- Travel to the park:
 - Car / van (77%)
 - Motorbike (84%)
 - Mobility scooter / wheelchair (69%)
- Disability
 - Limited a lot (83%)
 - Limited a little (75%)
- Age group
 - 65-74 (65%)
 - 75+ (73%)
- Live in
 - Creekmoor (78%)
 - Canford Cliffs (77%)
 - Broadstone (74%)
- did not specify their postcode or personal characteristics (either by answering 'prefer not to say' or skipping the question).

17. Respondents were asked what their reasons were for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal. Overall, the largest number of respondents said that they wish to continue driving through the park, along with concerns about an increase in traffic congestion around Poole Park and longer journey times. It was also cited that the closure removes a popular scenic route.
18. The responses in favour of agreeing with the closure felt it would improve the park environment and sense of place, it would be safer for children and quieter and therefore more enjoyable.
19. 2,276 free text comments were received that disagreed with the trial and expanded on the impacts of the road closure, these were focussed on traffic congestion on surrounding roads, increases in journey times and an impact on disabled people.
20. 1,517 comments were made in support of the trial, suggesting a safer park environment, less dangerous place and more pleasant as there is too much current traffic.
21. The responses to questions and free text comments were consistent in views and the strongly divided opinion for and against the road closure.
22. Comments were made about the ability to make multiple submissions to the consultation, and social media posts were seen which encouraged multiple responses. It is possible that both those for and against the trial attempted to gather support and made multiple entries, but this cannot be assessed or verified and the consultation operated according to standard BCP procedure. The results of the consultation are therefore viewed as not being final but as one element of the overall decision-making process.

Impacts of the trial

23. The top two comments from those that opposed the trial being made permanent were concerned about there being more traffic and longer journey times on surrounding roads.
24. Automatic traffic counter data collected on Parkstone Road indicates that the average daily vehicular traffic on Parkstone Road increased by 2.07% during the trial, amounting to an additional 432 vehicles using it across a 24Hr period (when comparing September 2023 with February 2024) (Appendix 10).
25. Journey times to travel around Poole Park on the highway network were captured during the trial. The journey via Parkstone Road around the park varied between 3-6 minutes in the morning and 4-8 minutes in the afternoon suggesting that average travel times around Poole Park are not significant.
26. A manual traffic count was undertaken on 7 February 2024 (during the trial) and shows that the hour with the most vehicle movements was 17:00 to 18:00 with a total number of 193 vehicles entering and exiting the main park entrance (Seldown). 86 vehicles entered and 107 exited.
27. September 2023 data (no trial) showed that the hour with the most vehicle movements was also between 17:00 and 18:00 when 430 vehicles entered and exited the park at the main park entrance (Seldown). 287 vehicles entered and 143 exited.
28. Comparison of the February 2024 data with the September 2023 data indicates that the trial measure has significantly reduced the volume of traffic travelling through the park in an eastbound direction (Appendix 10).
29. The council's adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) sets out how the council shall establish a walking and cycling network to achieve the central government set target in Gear Change that half of all journeys in towns and cities shall be cycled or walked by 2030.
30. The east/west route through the park between the Seldown gates and civic entrances is designated as part of the key walking route network in the council's LCWIP. Furthermore, this route and the north/south route between the park entrance adjacent to Twemlow Avenue that intersects with the east/west route is designated as part of the Primary Cycle Network in the LCWIP.
31. Any measure that reduces the volume of traffic along both walking or cycle routes significantly improves the experience for the users and therefore is aligned with the LCWIP and the motion approved at Council in November 2022 that 'In order to meet our climate emergency declaration, we will work to decarbonise the transport network in the BCP area. In order to do this we will aim to get to 50% of journeys within the BCP area to be done by walking, scooting, cycling or public transport by 2030, in the spirit of the government's 'Decarbonising Transport. A Better, Greener Britain 2021 report'.
32. The emergency services were notified and asked for comment on the consultation without reply. Given the traffic calming features, it is unlikely that the park would be used as a through route for emergency vehicles.
33. Concerns were raised in the consultation that the closure impacted the elderly and disabled more than other users. The responses suggested that accessing the park, by all entrances, was important for the elderly or disabled as they enjoy the

scenic views whilst driving through and the peaceful nature of the setting. There were concerns raised that those affected in this way would not want the longer journey times to access the park, or they would be less inclined to visit.

34. There was no change in existing provision of disabled spaces within the park, so when people did visit their experience should have been the same as before or enhanced with fewer vehicles on the roads.
35. Elderly and disabled people are less likely to have access to a car than other groups. The reduction in vehicle numbers supports the less mobile or those with accessibility issues to access and move around the park in a safer way, for example when crossing roads.
36. The concerns on longer journey times and congestion are mitigated by the traffic data (Appendix 10) that suggests no significant increase in vehicle numbers on Parkstone Road, and that journey times around the park are typically short.
37. Alongside the consultation, BCP Council engaged DOTS Disability, a community interest company arm of Access Dorset, who specialise in Disability access audits to undertake an independent review of the trial traffic management proposals in Poole Park. The group were all familiar with the park, used it frequently and understood the basis for the trial closure and public consultation.
38. The group of six members, all with a range of disabilities, surveyed the park and considered their responses following a site visit and assessment of the impact in accessing the parks facilities, the parking areas and trying to appreciate all users' needs.
39. The visit was undertaken in February 2024 when the trial closure was still in place. Their summary comments are:
 - a. Poole Park was described as a popular destination for disabled people.
 - b. Any additional journey times resulting from the closure of Whitecliff entrance, were not seen as an issue by the participants.
 - c. The Disabled participants who took part in the visit had no objection to a permanent closure of the entrance - from an access perspective.
 - d. Disabled drivers who make through journeys will be disadvantaged by a slightly longer journey time – in the same way as non-disabled drivers.
 - e. Reduced through traffic – if the closure is made permanent, will benefit the park environment including disabled visitors in exactly the same way as it will for visitors who are not disabled.
40. The closure does not affect any Right of Way, with pedestrian and other non-motorised access remaining through the closed entrance.
41. Since the closure there are anecdotal reports of wildlife making more use of some areas of the park since the closure, for example swans nesting in the Tamarisk shrub beds alongside Whitecliff road.

Options Appraisal

42. Options to create a restriction to vehicles using Poole Park were brought forward by the public in the consultation. These are explored fully in Appendix 5 and the most viable of those options are summarised here, along with the option to

remove the closure point. These options have been used to appraise the impact on Poole Park and to formulate the recommendations.

a. Do not support the closure and re-open the access point.

This would not create any traffic calming or reduction in vehicles using Poole Park. This option supports the desire of those using the park for their journeys within the wider highway network alongside those that visit the park via Whitecliff/the east and for scenic journeys. This option has most support in the consultation responses.

b. Retain the trial closure point at the Whitecliff entrance.

This is a simple and easily understood solution, consistent with the trial closure and people's experiences. No additional infrastructure required and no immediate expense. Further redesign and costings to be brought forward if adopted, particularly regarding the disabled spaces and vehicles turning in the road.

c. Close the exit and entrance at Whitecliff at 4pm and stay closed over-night, re-opening as it currently does at 10am.

Uses existing infrastructure and does not significantly add to the impact on staff, other than on Friday afternoons. Reduces vehicles at the peak time and overnight but not during peak times for use of the park.

d. Introduce one-way at the Whitecliff entrance into the park only.

An effective measure in reducing outbound vehicle numbers, with minimal impact in Poole Park as existing infrastructure is in place. Limits eastbound traffic only.

43. The conclusion of the options appraisal is that the method of closure used for the trial is the most effective in delivering an improved environment in Poole Park. It allows the park to function as normal for its stakeholders, concessions and for public use, alongside being cost effective to implement.

Summary of financial implications

44. The public consultation and trial closure was undertaken at minimal expense to the Council. Alongside officer time from relevant service units (Environment, Highways, Legal, Communications, Research and Consultation) actual costs were:
- a. Signage. Metal frames, signs, sandbags etc. £252
 - b. Consultation report by external supplier. £4,850
45. Future costs of implementing a closure have been considered in the options analysis, the favoured option uses the existing closure points and therefore implementation is low cost.
46. Future design improvements to maximise any newly available green space, creating alternative parking solutions, accessibility issues requested in the survey or other changes are currently unfunded and have yet to be developed for costings.

Summary of legal implications

47. Poole Park was given to the Borough Council in the early 1880s for the benefit of the inhabitants of Poole and to be laid out as a public park. It was set out from the original conveyance that Poole Park was intended to be a permanent gift (see Appendix 9).
48. The Conveyance provides that the donor, being "desirous of making a gift of [the land] to [the Council] in order that the same may be laid out and forever hereinafter maintained as a Public Park or Pleasure Ground.... for the benefit of the inhabitants thereof and others who may use the same and that the same may for ever hereinafter be maintained for such purpose...".
49. The potential risk to the Council is not being able to use Poole Park in conformity with the original intention of the donor (to be maintained as a public park or pleasure ground). The proposed closure of Poole Park at the Whitecliff Road entrance/exit point, would not breach the original intention to maintain as a public park or pleasure ground. The risk in this context is therefore low.
50. Whilst a road network runs through Poole Park its status as a park (for public use and benefit) remains unaffected. This road network is not adopted and the Council does close the road to vehicles between 7.30 am – 10am Mon-Sat. This closure is understood to have been in place since at least the early 1980s. This indicates that the Council allows vehicular traffic to access and egress Poole Park under implied licence. The status of the road network across Poole Park is private and the Council being the custodian.
51. The consultation has been carried out in line with established practice and procedures.

Summary of human resources implications

52. There is no impact on BCP Council jobs/roles and does not change ways of working. The option of a timed closure will impact staff working in Poole Park at specific times, see Appendix 5).

Summary of sustainability impact

53. The proposal to reduce vehicles using Poole Park supports BCPs future sustainability through:
 - a. The natural environment is improved, creating quieter, safer spaces for people to use in the park setting where recreation and relaxation should be the primary activities. The improvement in safety and reduced pollution will also help protect wildlife and benefit biodiversity in accordance with the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration.
 - b. The encouragement of cycling and walking in Poole Park is a direct benefit from reducing vehicle numbers. A shift to active transport is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing transport emissions that worsen local air quality and pose a risk to health. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions directly supports the commitments made by the Council in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration of 2019 and the Corporate Strategy to tackle climate change.
 - c. Decision Impact Assessment no. 644 has been completed and the carbon footprint of this proposal is estimated as Low.

Summary of public health implications

54. The objective of the closure to vehicles was to enhance the park environment. One of the key benefits of doing so was to enable users to feel safer, more able to use and access Poole Park and take advantage of the benefits of being in greenspace. This is especially important for a destination space, near to a deprived ward, and one that serves such a wide catchment area and high visitor numbers.
55. The responses to the consultation were highest from wards closest to Poole Park. Those who agreed with the closure were predominantly from the Poole Town ward where people have less access to gardens and green space, deprivation is higher and car ownership and use is lower than for other wards.
56. Those who disagreed with the proposal were more likely to be from Penn Hill and Canford Cliffs wards.
57. Public Health Dorset provided the following comment in relation to the closure:
- a. Public Health Dorset (PHD) supports the retention of the 24-hour closure of Whitecliff Gate to vehicular traffic. Access to greenspace is increasingly recognised as offering significant benefits for health and wellbeing. Greenspace quality (including perceived safety) is an important determinant of access, and the extent of benefits people draw from spending time in those spaces i.e. higher quality greenspaces encourage people to spend more time in them and deliver greater benefit from that time than lower quality spaces. Poole Park is a key greenspace asset that supports the health and wellbeing of a significant number of local people. Retaining the closure offers the opportunity to enhance the quality of the site and the positive contribution it makes to the health and wellbeing of the local population.
 - b. This could be delivered through the following:
 - i. Elimination of vehicle movements increasing perceived safety of Poole Park and decreasing any actual risk posed to park users by vehicle movements. Higher perceived safety of greenspace is associated with increased use.
 - ii. Removal of vehicle noise from Poole Park increasing the benefit it provides for users as an area of relative quiet compared to the surrounding urban areas and increasing use of the park through an overall reduction in noise levels adding to its perceived quality.
 - iii. Removal of vehicles from Poole Park could improve air quality within the site reducing exposure to air pollution and its impact on health and wellbeing particularly for vulnerable users e.g. younger children, older people and people living with a respiratory health condition.

Summary of equality implications

58. A full EIA document has been completed and has been approved by the EIA panel. (See Appendix 3)
59. The EIA summary of equality implications states:

There may be some negative impacts on the more elderly and disabled if a road closure is made permanent, such as longer journey times to Poole Park, however the evidence and analysis of the responses suggest this is not significant in terms of journey time/congestion, and the park does remain accessible for all users. The traffic data evidence supports these findings, for instance only increasing vehicles on Parkstone road by 2%, or 432 vehicles.

Similarly, the assessment by DOTS disability and consideration of the impacts on the more elderly or disabled suggests any negative impacts on some users, such as longer journey times and congestion, but these are outweighed by the improvement to the park environment that comes from reducing traffic volumes.

The alternative option is to re-open the Park to through traffic, however this does not align with the aims of the trial, findings and strategic intent. A range of options within Poole Park to create a reduction in through traffic have been analysed and considered with the trial closure point favoured. The consultation has not revealed any further impacts on other groups with protected characteristics and therefore summarise that the road closure does not have a significant impact on users of Poole Park.

Summary of risk assessment

60. If a permanent road closure is adopted:

- a. The consultation summary shows that 63% of people disagreed with the proposal, therefore suggesting a risk that the road closure will be unpopular if adopted.
- b. It has been suggested in the public comment on the trial closure that formal protest and potentially legal challenge may be brought against a closure. There is therefore a risk of reputational damage to the Council, resource required to consider any response and subsequent action.
- c. Design work and alterations to Poole Park would be required (in line with the EIA and consultation findings) and these are currently unfunded and would need to be considered.

61. If the road closure is not made permanent:

- a. The consultation summary shows that 36% of people agreed with the proposal and would consider the park environment is not enhanced and therefore is worse off for having continued through traffic.
- b. BCP Council would need to consider a new consultation and trial should new proposals come forward to mitigate traffic volumes in Poole Park.

Background papers

None

Appendices

1. Consultation report
2. Consultation Summary
3. Equalities impact Assessment
4. DOTS Disability Poole Park Consultation report 2024

5. Options Analysis
6. Consultation poster
7. Written responses (redacted)
8. Summary of relevant previous public engagement
9. Conveyance from Lord Wimborne to the Council dated 3rd March 1886_Text and Image
10. 2023_24 Traffic Count Survey results Poole Park
11. 2016 Traffic Data Summary Poole Park
12. Photo sheet
13. Map of Poole Park and key locations