



Housing and Growth Committee 23 March 2023

Title	Petition to remove the Golders Green Parklets
Report of	Cllr Ross Houston, Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee
Wards	Childs Hill Ward
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	Non-key
Enclosures	Appendix A – Golders Green Petition Appendix of Explanation Appendix B – Detailed points raised in the petition and council responses Appendix C – Impact of Parklets on parking transactions and income: Golders Green
Officer Contact Details	Cath Shaw, Deputy Chief Executive cath.shaw@barnet.gov.uk Jamie Robinson, Head of Economic Development jamie.robinson@barnet.gov.uk

Summary

This report considers a petition against the Temporary Streetspace Fund parklets in Golders Green Town Centre (Childs Hill ward). The petition has been submitted by Councillor Dean Cohen (Golders Green ward) and signed by 321 people.

Officers Recommendations

- 1) That the Committee rejects the Petition to remove the Golders Green Parklets on the basis that:
 - a) one of the actions proposed by the petitioners has already been taken; and
 - b) claims regarding the impact of parklets on local traffic and customer footfall are inaccurate and unsubstantiated.
- 2) That the Committee agrees for officers to conduct an evaluation of the Temporary Streetspace Fund to analyse its impact on town centres across the borough.

1. Why this report is needed

- 1.1 In January 2020, the council adopted the Golders Green Town Centre Strategy. The strategy had three aims: celebrate the unique qualities, make room for people and adapt to the 21st Century. Among the suggested projects and opportunities was the idea of incorporating parklets into the high street and, specifically, to:
- Increase pedestrian and cycling/public space and reduce road and car parking. Additional pedestrian crossings and traffic-calming features.
 - Trial temporary 'parklets' and spaces for planting, sitting out (south facing) and bike racks – develop a special street furniture collection and sell it – use the public realm as a display space and provide space for pop-up markets.
 - Short term trials and street closures on a Sunday – markets, festivals, cycling space, BBQs and family feasts.
- 1.2 The Town Centre Strategy was developed through extensive consultation and engagement with local communities and businesses, including over 270 survey respondents and close to 300 people engaged at various pop-up events.
- 1.3 Shortly after the Golders Green Town Centre Strategy was adopted, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, leading to widespread impacts across local communities and economies. As part of the council's response to the pandemic and the impact of lockdown and social distancing measures on hospitality businesses, the council set up the Temporary Town Centre Streetspace Fund, also known as parklets. The Fund provides:
- A Temporary Pavement License;
 - Wooden, planted barriers to create pleasant and safe trading space in front of premises, these are located in reallocated car parking spaces.
- 1.4 The council enters into contracts with businesses that successfully apply to the Fund. The parklets are initially provided at no charge to participating businesses, with the annual Pavement License then charged thereafter.
- 1.5 Installations commenced in September 2020. Approximately 25 parklets have been installed across nine of Barnet's town centres. There have been two phases to the programme: the first saw the installation of temporary, low-cost planters in parking spaces and the second, still temporary, comprised upgraded parklets with integrated seating and modifications to make them level with the pavement, thus improving accessibility.
- 1.6 Businesses were only offered Phase 2 parklets where they had met the terms of the contract and the parklets were observed to be well-used. Parklets have been removed from businesses where they are not well-used or not appropriately cared for by businesses.
- 1.7 In Golders Green Town Centre, five parklets were installed, occupying ten parking spaces. Upgraded parklets were then installed in June 2022, occupying the same

spaces. Overall, the car parking space taken up by parklets in Golders Green is relatively small when looking at the full extent of parking in the town centre.

- 1.8 It is important to note that, although the parklets were installed in response to COVID-19, they were first identified and consulted on as part of the adopted Golders Green Town Centre Strategy.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 In Autumn 2022, a petition was submitted calling for the removal of the parklets in Golders Green Town Centre. The lead petitioner is Cllr Dean Cohen, ward member for the adjacent ward of Golders Green. The petition has been signed by over 300 people. An Appendix of Explanation was later drafted to support the petition (see Appendix A).
- 2.2 The petition makes a number of arguments, which can be summarised as ‘parklets have a negative impact on local traffic, parking availability and customer footfall’ and ‘the cost to the taxpayer of parklets is not justified’. Appendix B provides a more detailed breakdown of the specific arguments and responses.
- 2.3 It is important to address this issue within the wider context of high streets. In Barnet, as elsewhere across the country, high streets have been struggling in recent years. Whether measured by footfall, retail vacancies or customer spend, the general pattern is one of decline. The COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately exacerbated these long-standing trends.
- 2.4 To address this decline and support businesses, the council has been taking action on a number of fronts across town centres. This includes: investing in new public realm to make Barnet’s town centres more attractive, thus encouraging people to spend more time and money there; working with Town Teams and other local groups to fund and deliver business-led activities that attract people to town centres; providing one-to-one support to businesses to help them with issues such as marketing and communications; and working to sustainably reduce the amount of retail floorspace in town centres to make way for alternative uses, such as leisure and housing.
- 2.5 Although parklets were intended to support individual businesses in recovering from the pandemic, they also contribute more broadly to town centres by making them more people-friendly, by adding plants and greenery and by providing seating in areas that generally lack benches. This feedback was gathered through an initial evaluation of the parklets, undertaken in September 2021.
- 2.6 With respect to the primary contention of the petition that parklets have a negative impact on local traffic, parking availability and customer footfall, no evidence has been provided to support this assertion. Officers have, however, analysed the data that is available from the Parking Service to understand whether this might be the case.
- 2.7 Looking across a number of town centres, including Golders Green, parking use has fluctuated greatly in recent years. Overall, the level of parking in Barnet’s town centres is now lower than it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the data do not show any relationship between parking activity and the installation of parklets.

This is the case when looking both at income from parking (i.e. the level of revenue generated) and the number of transactions (the overall number of times people pay to park). It is also the case when looking at the core town centre area and the fringes that serve it (see Appendix C).

- 2.8 On the point raised in the petition that the council is losing income due to the parklets, it is important to note that monthly income is regularly higher now than prior to their installation.
- 2.9 The petitioners also request the specific removal of one of the parklets, outside a business that has closed down. This action was taken in December 2022.
- 2.10 Housing and Growth Committee is therefore recommended to reject the petition calling for the removal of the Golders Green parklets.
- 2.11 It is recommended, however, that a more fulsome evaluation be conducted of the Temporary Streetspace Fund across the borough, including Golders Green. As with the evaluation of the first phase of the parklets, this will consider available parking data, survey those businesses that have parklets as well as their neighbours, and seek feedback from users of the parklets and other visitors to high streets.

3. Alternative options considered and not recommended

- 3.1 The council could opt to remove the parklets, in line with the petition, however, this decision would not be evidence-based and would undermine the gains made in supporting businesses and improving the high street.

4. Post decision implementation

- 4.1 Following this decision, officers will:

- Continue to work with the parklet businesses in Golders Green to optimise their use as the weather warms up; a recent survey of the businesses demonstrated that they are already actively considering this;
- Review the state of the plants and take action to refresh/renew these where required;
- Consider ways in which parklets can be more actively used during colder/wetter months when visitors to the town centre are less inclined to sit outdoors; for example, serving as bicycle parking areas;
- Conduct a second evaluation of the Temporary Town Centre Streetspace Fund to update understanding of its benefits and impacts and to learn lessons on how to further improve the initiative; this will include gathering feedback from businesses and visitors and further analysis of parking data;
- Seek to undertake a review of parking policy and pricing in Golders Green Town Centre to ensure that it is consistent with the council's objectives for supporting town centre businesses;

- Continue to work with the recently-formed Golders Green Town Team (made up of local community members) to develop ways of improving the town centre in line with the adopted Town Centre Strategy and the aspirations of local communities and businesses.

4.2 Officers will keep all parklets under review.

5. Implications of decision

Corporate Priorities and Performance

5.1 The Temporary Streetspace Fund supports the Corporate Plan priority of 'Caring for our places', specifically:

- a vibrant and fun place to live, work and visit;
- champion and develop our town centres and neighbourhoods;
- be a destination, a place to visit, live and enjoy ourselves, where people connect to each other.

5.2 The initiative also contributes to the goal of Caring for the planet, in particular, Enhance our green and open spaces so they are attractive places with excellent biodiversity and tree cover. Importantly, the parklets demonstrate that parking spaces can be given over to alternative, more environmentally-friendly uses without necessarily compromising parking availability.

5.3 **Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.3.1 There are no resource implications at this stage. The recommendations can be actioned within existing resources.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

5.4.1 The Council's Constitution (Article 7 – Committees, Forums, Working Groups, and Partnerships) sets out the responsibilities of the Housing and Growth Committee which include:

(1) Responsibility for:

- housing (including housing strategy, homelessness, social housing and housing grants, private sector housing and leasing, housing licencing and enforcement, HRA Revenue Account and Capital Programme).
- Regeneration Strategy and Overseeing Major Regeneration Schemes
- Asset Management
- Development of Council Land
- Fire Safety

- Economic Development including: Employment Strategy; Business Support and Engagement; and Town Centres

5.4.2 The Council's Constitution, Article 3 – Residents and Public Participation includes that where the petition relates to the matters outside the functions and responsibilities of an Area Committee, the petition will be reported to the relevant Theme Committee.

5.5 Insight

5.5.1 Officers have used data and intelligence from the Parking Service in making the recommendations included in this report.

5.6 Social Value

5.6.1 Not applicable.

5.7 Risk Management

5.7.1 Standard council risk management procedures have been followed in delivery of the Temporary Streetspace Fund.

5.8 Equalities and Diversity

5.8.1 Officers have worked to embed equality and diversity into the Temporary Streetspace Fund. The initiative has been open to any business in any town centre that could demonstrate that it would benefit from the support. As such, businesses from a variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds have been supported, reflecting the diversity of Barnet's high streets.

5.8.2 Furthermore, in Phase 2 of the programme officers designed in measures to better accommodate those with physical disabilities and mobility issues by making parklets level with the pavement and integrating seating.

5.8.3 In making its decision the committee must observe the public sector equality duty. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

5.8.4 The relevant protected characteristics are:

- age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation and to a degree, marriage and civil partnership.

5.8.5 The public sector equality duty was addressed in the report to Committee as to the Golders green Town Centre Strategy, mentioned at paragraph 6 below.

5.9 Corporate Parenting

5.9.1 Not applicable.

5.10 Consultation and Engagement

5.10.1 As noted above, the Golders Green Town Centre Strategy was developed through extensive consultation and engagement with local communities and businesses. Over 270 people responded to surveys and almost 300 people were engaged at various pop-up events on a range of issues and proposals, including the proposed parklets.

5.10.2 While the petition is signed by over 250 people, it is not clear whether this includes businesses nor whether community members were also asked about the positive impacts of the parklets.

5.11 Environmental Impact

5.11.1 In general, efforts to replace car parking spaces with plants and vegetation will have a positive environmental impact. Importantly, analysis to date demonstrates that parking spaces can be removed in town centres without significantly impacting parking availability and therefore reducing visits to town centres.

6. Background papers

6.1 Housing and Growth Committee - January 2020: Golders Green Town Centre Strategy and update on Finchley Central Housing Infrastructure Fund:

6.2 <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s57507/Golders%20Green%20Town%20Centre%20Strategy%20and%20update%20on%20Finchley%20Central%20Housing%20Infrastructure%20Fund.pdf>