

Proposed change to virtual parking permits

Summary of comments and objections

March – August 2023



SURREY

On Street Resident and Visitor Parking Permits

Advertised change to allow for the issue and use of virtual permits. Summary of comments and objections received between March and August 2023.

Background and introduction

The Cabinet agreed a number of changes to on street parking at their meeting in January 2020. One of the agreed changes was to phase out paper permits, with a shift instead to 'virtual permits' to reduce waste and improve convenience. The implementation of this change was initially delayed by Covid and then by the planned change of responsibility for on street parking management and enforcement from the borough and district councils to the county council, which took effect on 1 April 2023.

Since 2020, the traffic regulation orders (TROs) covering most of the districts in Surrey had been amended to allow the use of virtual permits as part of the ongoing parking review process, but there were four districts where this had not happened, namely Guildford Borough, Runnymede Borough, Tandridge District and Waverley Borough.

We therefore formally advertised our intention to amend the TROs for Runnymede, Tandridge and Waverly between 30 March and 27 April and for Guildford between 28 July and 25 August. This was by way of notices published in local newspapers and on our website.

The main change that we proposed was to remove the need for a physical paper permit to be displayed in vehicles, instead of which the vehicle registration number (VRN) would be the unique identifier for an eligible vehicle within a permit scheme. Civil enforcement officers (CEOs) would no longer look to see if a permit was displayed but would check the VRN against an electronic database of vehicles with permits. This change is to apply to resident permits resident visitor permits, business permits, childcare permits, operational permits and waiver certificates. The possible use of physical permits would remain as an option to allow for exceptional circumstances.

The intention is to reduce the amount of paper involved with these schemes and provide a more convenient and faster service for people applying for permits and waivers.

In addition to the change to virtual permits, we advertised other minor changes to the TROs to reflect the change of on street management and enforcement responsibilities, but these made no effect to the material operation of the TROs.

Responses to the advertised proposals

There were no comments or objections to the changes relating to the transfer of responsibilities in any of the areas and there were no comments or objections to the proposed changes to virtual permits in Runnymede and Tandridge.

In Waverley, in relation to the changes to virtual permits, there were 23 responses:

- 21 (91%) responses made an objection to the proposals
- 2 (9%) responses made other comments

In Guildford, there were 125 responses:

- 70 (56%) responses made an objection to the proposals
- 27 (22%) supported the proposal
- 28 (22%) responses made other comments

These are the main themes in the responses in Waverley:

Comments	Response
11 (52%) of the objections mentioned that there is not enough enforcement taking place currently and/or the need for more enforcement in future, especially if no physical permits will be on vehicles.	When the contract first started, which coincided with the period when people could comment on the proposals, the number of CEOs and enforcement patrols was acknowledged to be significantly lower than required. However, recruitment has been ongoing relentlessly since then and the number of CEOs have now reached a level where NSL can be expected to fulfil their contractual obligation and carry out a comprehensive, and if need be targeted, enforcement regime, which should be reflected in driver compliance with the parking regulations.
10 (49%) of the objections mentioned that visible paper permits allow residents to identify illegally parked vehicles and either accost the driver or report them to the parking enforcement team.	As one of the respondents said, the council should not expect residents to police its own policies, and this is certainly the case. While residents may get to know which cars belong to other residents in the road, enforcement should remain the responsibility of the council, not residents. We also expect there to be a robust enforcement regime in place.

<p>6 (29%) of the objections suggested that visible paper permits act as a deterrent to people considering parking illegally.</p>	<p>Alongside these comments, a number also said that people already park illegally despite the presence of visible permits. All the permit parking places are marked with appropriate signs and road markings, which serve better to advise visiting drivers what restrictions are in place.</p>
<p>6 (29%) of the objections suggested that moving from paper to virtual permits would make it easier for people to park illegally and more likely that they will do so.</p>	<p>There is no reason why it should be any easier to park illegally because of the removal of paper permits - it just depends on the efficiency of the enforcement regime. People who choose to park illegally ignore the signs that explain what the prevailing restrictions are - they know they are doing wrong regardless of what is, or is not, displayed in other vehicles.</p>

These are the main themes in the responses in Guildford:

Comments	Response
<p>17 (24%) of the objections mentioned that there is not enough enforcement taking place currently and/or the need for more enforcement in future, especially if no physical permits will be on vehicles.</p>	<p>Same as for Waverley</p>
<p>26 (37%) of the objections mentioned that visible paper permits allow residents to identify illegally parked vehicles and either accost the driver or report them to the parking enforcement team.</p>	<p>Same as for Waverley</p>
<p>10 (14%) of the objections suggested that moving from paper to virtual permits would make it easier for people to park illegally and more likely that they will do so.</p>	<p>Same as for Waverley</p>
<p>10 (14%) of the objections said that paper permits were simpler and/or more convenient</p>	<p>It will be a change for people, but once people have accounts and are used to the system, it should not in general prove too challenging. In some ways it should be better, for example visitor permits can be obtained and become effective immediately,</p>

	so no need to ensure having some sitting in a drawer.
22 (31%) of the objections expressed concerns about the technology, in particular how it may affect people without internet access, or who are not very confident or proficient at working online.	This is of course a very real concern and has been from the start. While a lot of people who are not confident online, or do not have access to the internet, have family or friends that can help, there are always going to be some for whom this is not an option. We have therefore been firm in insisting that staff at NSL's service centre will talk through the process and create accounts for people over the phone, with copies of any necessary documentation being sent in by post. There will also be a stock of paper visitors permits, which will be issued to people, for whom activating them online when needed would not be an option.

Additional comments

There were other comments that were made in smaller numbers, a lot of which were not relevant to the proposed change to virtual permits (for example wanting changes to the hours of operation, or changes to permit eligibility). However, five Guildford residents queried how changing to virtual permits would affect permits with 2 vehicle registration numbers on them, which is allowed under the terms of the Guildford CPZ TRO. These will need to be accommodated within the residual paper permit system. Concern was also expressed about carers' permit and how they would work virtually but these will remain in paper form as they need to be transferred between different vehicles. A few people objected because they thought it would be slower and more difficult to carry out enforcement, but NSL have confirmed that their CEOs find it quicker with virtual permits than paper ones.

There were also obviously a number of comments in support of the change to a virtual permit system, citing in particular both efficiency and the environmental benefits.

Summary

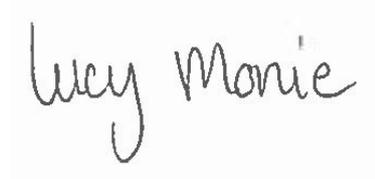
Changing to a virtual permit system will provide a quicker and more efficient permit system, with less waste. Although there will be some people that find it impossible to use a virtual system, there will remain an option to issue paper permits in exceptional circumstances, and these people would be helped through the process. In general though, people are increasingly used to carrying out transactions online (for banking, shopping, car tax and insurance etc) and it is something of an anachronism to issue bits of paper to identify vehicles with a valid permit. It will be important that enforcement is closely monitored to ensure only vehicles with valid permits are parked in the permit bays.

Decision

Surrey County Council will go ahead with the changes to virtual permits as advertised in Guildford, Runnymede, Tandridge and Waverley.

Authorised by:

Director for Highways and Transport:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Monie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'L' and 'M'.

In consultation with Cabinet Member for Highways and & Community Resilience

Kevin Deanus.

Date: 06/09/2023