

CEC Planning Committee 2 December 2020

Business Bulletin and Motion 11.1

PDR for garden sheds of appropriate dimensions – comments from Spokes

Dear Councillor

We are emailing from Spokes to urge your support for [motion 11.1](#).

Many of the arguments are outlined in the motion, and there is extensive background to the whole issue of garden storage on our website here...

<http://www.spokes.org.uk/documents/advice/bike-storage-gardens/>

There is also a detailed article around the recent Scottish Government consultation here...

<http://www.spokes.org.uk/2020/10/bike-sheds-breakthrough/>

Therefore below we will only mention a few issues of particular relevance.

Background - local

In the early 2010s Spokes assisted a significant number of families who had suffered severe distress over permissions, refusals and appeals for modestly sized garden sheds in terraces and tenements with no access to a back garden, and essential to their ability to get about the city by bike. 'Distress' is not an understatement, as may be seen by quotes on the above web pages. As a result the Council Planning Department (primarily the highly respected [Mr Jack Gillon](#)) worked with Spokes to produce a factsheet, now referenced in the Guidance to Householders, which gives criteria, notably specified dimensions, under which a front garden shed is likely to be granted planning permission.

To the best of our knowledge every subsequent application (i.e. since 2013) which met these criteria has been successful. This 7-year experience must surely mean that the dimensions in the factsheet are wholly acceptable, including in conservation areas.

Given the above, is it really reasonable to charge families £202, and to saddle the department with the concomitant bureaucracy, in order to require permission for applications which are almost certain to be granted? Quite apart from the Council's over-riding need to move local transport from car to active and sustainable travel, and to facilitate this shift wherever possible.

Background – national

The issue of PDR for modestly sized garden sheds was first raised at political level by the [Independent Planning Review](#) back in 2016, who reported, “.. many believe that the scope of permitted development rights could be broadened to free up resources and allow planning officers to focus on where they can add most value. Suggestions for increased permitted development rights include provision of bike sheds ...” and recommended the government pursue this course.

The wheels of government grind slowly, and there have been several subsequent stages, but the Covid crisis (with the climate crisis adding weight) has at last spurred the Scottish Government to propose a range of urgent policy measures to facilitate widespread bike ownership and use, one of which is granting PDR for modestly sized garden sheds.

The granting of PDR is now a clear government wish and intention. Cabinet Secretary **Michael Matheson MSP**, at the Cycling Scotland conference on 5 November, stated that Scottish Government current policy work includes, *"an expansion of permitted development rights to support easier cycling storage options."*

Indeed the government's recent public consultation was much more geared around what criteria (notably, dimensions) to use, rather than on the principle of whether or not to grant PDR.

Visual criteria for PDR

The government consultation seeks opinions on the appearance of a shed, in addition to the question of dimensions. In practice, the vast majority of sheds (even in the many cases where planning permission has not been sought) are in keeping with the surroundings – see for example the Planning Department's own survey of all Flower Colony sheds, referenced below.

However, to deal with any concerns over exceptional cases, PDR could be qualified with a requirement that sheds should be in keeping with their surroundings, and it is clear from the consultation that such qualifications are under consideration. The [Spokes response](#) to the consultation (Q62) states, *"In our view, the use of a discrete colour is more important than the material used in the construction of cycle stores ... We would support a restriction on colours."*

Use of sheds

There appears to be some concern over whether sheds might be used in whole or part for contents other than bikes. Does this really matter? Visually, they are sheds. Anyone wishing a shed to store contents other than bikes has still been able to apply up to now, and we are not aware of any great proliferation of such sheds. There is no reason to suppose that PDR would change this position significantly. Indeed, whilst the government consultation itself often referred to 'cycle storage' it also used other terms such as 'storage sheds.'

Use of sheds also came up in 2012 in a consultation on whether Colony housing should have conservation status. A [submission](#) from the Shandon (Flower) Colonies residents association stated, *"Space for motorised vehicles is limited on Colonies terraces and so Colonies inhabitants often have bicycles (and more than one per household). As the Colonies are in central areas of the city, it makes sense to have a bicycle to get around and this is encouraged by CEC as a sustainable transport form. So we use our sheds for several bicycles as well as everything else that you can't fit in your small Colonies house."*

As a follow-up, the Planning Department surveyed all 18 sheds in the Flower Colonies and concluded, *"the area is characterised, to an extent, by sheds in gardens and although planning permission would have been required, the sheds and other structures were not detrimental to the amenity of [the] area. It was resolved that it was not expedient for the Council, as local planning authority, to use its discretionary powers to enforce the removal of the structures or the submission of a retrospective application to regularise the structures."* [[Planning Cttee 2.10.14, para 3.5](#)]