

Council set to recommend night-time closure of a popular stargazer's car park

Council officers are set to recommend night-time closure of a popular stargazer's car park in West Lothian.

The car park in the Bathgate Hills was recently packed with cars as people drove up to view the Aurora Borealis, with cars lining the narrow road up to the site.

Questioning the likely the closure local councillor Willie Boyle said: "We're told we can expect more and more of these events. I don't think we should be rushing to close a popular site."

Council officers have carried out a consultation with local groups following their announcement late last year that closing the Hilltop car park, also known as Gordon's View was the only practical solution for the council.

It faces big bills for clean-ups at the remote site despite there being bottle banks and a compacting bin on site.

In a report to the latest meeting of Bathgate's Local Area Committee, David Lees, a cleaner communities manager said: "Following completion of the public survey, officers have analysed the findings and responses from the survey along with other data and evidence from past and recent incidents of antisocial behaviour and vandalism in the car park; and officers recommend a decision to close this car park in the

evenings and overnight in an effort to deter any further incidents of antisocial behaviour and/or vandalism.

“A report setting out the findings and evidence supporting the officer’s recommendation to close the car park in the evenings and overnight will be presented to the next meeting of the Local Area Committee.

“The report will include the proposed operating arrangements for the future use of the car park. Following discussion at the Local Area Committee, officers will then seek approval from the Council Executive to close the car park.”

Speaking after the meeting, councillor Boyle questioned the validity of the consultation and whether the council had the right to close the car park on what amounted to anecdotal evidence.

He pointed to other car park areas in the county which were hit by rubbish and fly-tipping.

In January a senior Operational Services manager told the committee that cleaning crews were having to attend the car park three or four times a week. The site is regularly used for fly-tipping and the compactor bin, which costs around £4,000, has been set on fire.

The car park affords uninterrupted views across the south west of the county. Its position, high above the town and on an unlit road, also opens up the night sky to stargazers.

It was first opened after a campaign by the town’s community council, on which Councillor Boyle served at the time. It is named Gordon’s View after a fellow member of the community council.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter