

## Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

### Monday, 14 January 2019, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

#### Minutes

#### Present:

Mr C J Bloore (Chairman), Mr P Middlebrough,  
Mrs F M Oborski, Mr C B Taylor and Mr P A Tuthill

#### Also attended:

Mrs L C Hodgson, Cabinet Member with Responsibility  
for Communities  
Ms P Agar, Local Member (for the discussion of the Call-  
In of the Cabinet Member Delegated Decision on the  
Proposal to Introduce Parking Charges at Worcester  
Woods Country Park)  
Mr R M Udall, Caller-in  
Mr R C Lunn, Caller-in  
Mr M E Jenkins, Caller-in

Rachel Datlen, Countryside Greenspace, Gypsy Service  
and Road Safety Education Manager  
Hannah Needham (Assistant Director: Families,  
Communities and Partnerships)  
Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny  
Manager) and Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator)

#### Observing:

Dr K A Pollock, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for  
Economy and Infrastructure  
Mr A Stafford  
Mrs E B Tucker, Group Leader 2017 Group

#### Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 December  
2018 (previously circulated).

(A copy of documents will be attached to the signed  
Minutes).

#### **1077 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting and  
thanked the members of the public for taking the time to  
attend the Meeting.

Apologies were received from Mr A Adams, Mr B W  
Allbut, Mrs J A Brunner and Mrs E A Eyre.

#### **1078 Declaration of**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities  
declared an interest in Item 5: Call-In of the Cabinet

**Interest and of  
any Party Whip**

**1079 Public  
Participation**

Member Delegated Decision on the Proposal to Introduce Parking Charges at Worcester Woods Country Park as a Member of the Board of the Malvern Hills Trust.

There were 5 public participants and 3 written submissions in respect of Item 5 - Call-In of the Cabinet Member Delegated Decision on the Proposal to Introduce Parking Charges at Worcester Woods Country Park

Public Participants

1. Claire Pezzini-Rhodes

Claire explained her view that £60 per year for only 2 hours parking was a dreadful deal for a small community park! It was a flawed plan that would cause harm to the community and it was based on strategically selected half-truths.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities Report attempted to justify the charges by comparing with 7 other attractions including the Malvern Hills, Wyre Forest, Clent Hills and Coombe in Warwickshire, but there were some astonishing omissions. For example, the Report didn't state that local residents could park for free at any of the Malvern Hills car parks for a twelfth of the price – only £5.20 per year or that the Wyre Forest was 60 times the size of Worcester Woods nor that a £30 per year pass would allow free parking at Wyre Forest and all Forestry commission sites. Half the price for 57 parks.

The CMR Report didn't say that:

- National Trust members could park at the Clent Hills for free, alongside free parking and entry to 500 sites
- Coombe Park in Warwickshire offered local residents a substantial discount on parking charges, was five times bigger and designed by "Capability" Brown
- Waseley Hills was the only Worcestershire local authority park mentioned in the Report. It was 50% bigger than Worcester Woods and Worcestershire County Council charge £27 per year for an annual pass. In a local context, this was expensive.

Claire had researched 23 local authority owned parks and green spaces within Worcestershire and all had car parks which were free. None of these made the list within the Report! Not even Arrow Valley in Redditch which was

10 times the size of Worcester Woods and was free to park.

She didn't know of any other park that prevented an annual pass holder from parking all day. The 2-hour time restriction significantly reduced the value of the annual pass and didn't seem to meet the needs of park users.

Claire said she was aware of 100's of people who used Worcester Woods for 3-5 hours at a time on a weekly basis. Those people were all part of communities that positively impact the health and wellbeing of 1000's. The charges proposal would significantly harm than good work.

The Report stated that the County Council had failed in its attempt to manage staff parking on the Country Park, so the high charges and 2-hour time restriction was designed to deter them and Claire suggested that if this was the rationale, why were the restrictions and high charges proposed for early mornings, evenings and weekends?

A 2-hour time restriction would not stop them. Many staff come to County Hall for a couple of hours at a time as they work out in the community. The staff have insufficient parking, so they have little choice. The charges would have little effect deterring County Hall staff but would be very effective at deterring Country Park users.

Local public health reports state that Worcestershire had one of the lowest proportions of people using the outdoors for health and exercise reasons and there was a year on year downward trend. Parking charges would reduce this even further.

Charges would exacerbate existing health inequalities in Worcestershire between rich and poor and would go against current local health advice that inactivity caused many avoidable health issues and prevention was better than cure. The plan was flawed; it was based on strategically selected half-truths and would cause harm to the community.

## 2. Brian Stanton

Brian talked about the potential impact of introducing charges at the Countryside Centre on the residents of Spetchley Road. He explained that at the moment residents suffered parking issues during the week at term

time and looked forward to the respite at weekends when they could easily access their properties. If parking charges were introduced at the Countryside Centre this could change and there would be no respite for the residents of Spetchley Road.

### 3. Hazel Hyman

Whilst Hazel acknowledged that the Council needed to find extra funding, she explained that she had been visiting the park for 30 years and that the park appealed to all generations. Hazel thought that parking charges at the Countryside Centre were not appropriate, as families were hard pressed enough.

Hazel talked about her role as visitor to Centre and Woods and the length of time spent at the woods partaking in various activities and thought that family activities were mainly under 4 hours.

Hazel suggested that the first 3 hours of parking (if not all) should be free. Many in the community couldn't afford more charges and expecting parents to pay for children to play in a public park or walk in a public wood was not acceptable.

### 4. Janet Jarvis

Janet talked about how in this day of confusion and uncertainty about our future, it was good to have a refuge where we can find relative peace, which is so important in soothing our minds and relieving our stress. Such a place was Worcester Woods and what was left of the surrounding countryside. How sad, then, for the benefit to the Council per annum of a price equal to that of a small to average-sized house in Worcester, it had been deemed necessary to introduce parking charges for the privilege of driving to this pleasant location and parking in order to enjoy a walk with the children or the dogs.

This charge would undoubtedly hit the less well-off families who used the facility very regularly to provide exercise and fun for the children and relaxation for the parents, knowing that the children were safe and happy. Elderly people used the car in order to have a little gentle exercise and meet people for a chat. It gets them out of their home, which was such a good thing if they lived alone. Even disabled people would travel to the Countryside Centre and the Woods, and have a jaunt in their buggies, giving themselves a whole new look on life.

The runners visited every Saturday morning for their weekly hurdle in the wood. They were just another group of people who relied on the area to increase their health which was so essential to all ages. Walking and running being two of the most effective methods of warding off heart disease and for some people, lessening stress and mental health issues.

The introduction of these charges would have several adverse effects. The livelihood of the Café would be threatened, the ability for less well-off people to visit the location would be reduced at best and the possibility of neighbouring residential roads, primarily Spetchley Road, may well be used for parking, especially during the weekend. Overall, not a great plan.

#### 5. Carl Freeman

Carl explained that he was not directly affected by this himself as he lived a ten minute walk away but that he could be indirectly affected as he began park running last year (walking there and back) and had significantly improved his health and fitness. He had lost two stone in weight from doing so and was no longer at high risk of various disabling conditions. If it became too expensive for the volunteers who gave up their time each week to bring equipment and set up etc, the parkrun facility may be lost to him and others. There was a huge social return for the Council from this voluntary initiative and yet the Council paid nothing towards it. Waiving parking charges could be its contribution.

Carl said he fully understood the difficult position given the impact of austerity on councils for the past eight years and sympathised and was supportive and would be happy to participate discussions alongside other citizens to try and find alternatives to the proposals as they stood.

Carl shared his views on behalf of other residents of the area who would be negatively affected by this policy and had given up time from work to do this.

#### Additional questions

- 1) In terms of the research carried out to provide insight for the policy, Carl asked
  - a) how many individuals completed comment cards at the visitor centre?
  - b) how many submitted comments using the Q-code option?
  - c) how many visitors (including those using

meeting rooms of the café) gave verbal feedback?

2) Given the Council's acknowledgement that the introduction of parking charges would affect some groups more than others, what steps were taken to ensure that representatives of those groups were included in the research?

3) Furthermore, how many responses were obtained from visitors to the Country Park who a) belonged to one or other of the groups with protected characteristics that were highlighted in the documentation? And b) who would be classified as having low income?

4) Comparisons had been made to other locations such as the Malvern Hills and Wyre Forest as justification for introducing parking charges. What evidence if any did the Council have that the frequency of visits to those places by individuals mirrored that by visitors to Worcester Country Park? Whilst that might seem a strange question, it could well be that vast majority of people going to those other places were only occasional visitors or people passing through. For those people a parking charge would represent a one-off expense. Whereas the majority of people driving to Worcester Country Park may well be regular visitors from the local community. For them, car parking charges would be an additional and frequent expense.

5) When plans for the new hospital were published at a public meeting someone commented that there were clearly not enough parking spaces for staff or visitors. Those behind the plans refuted this, stating confidently that people would use public transport and would be encouraged to car share. The papers accompanying the agenda for this meeting suggested that in the wake of parking charges, some visitors may decide to travel by public transport or may be encouraged to car share. Could the council please outline what had changed in the last 20 years in order to give them the confidence that such predications would be realised this time?

6) Guidance from the National Institute for Care and Health Excellence (NICE) referred to the need for councils to work in partnership with local voluntary groups in "designing and managing public open spaces" as part of its responsibilities in delivering health and wellbeing. The car park was clearly an integral part of this community asset. Could the Council please explain why it chose not involve the community in the formulation of

the car park charging policy?

7) NICE, Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social Care expect councils to reduce health inequalities, particularly in relation to people on low incomes. The Public Health Impact Assessment includes acknowledgement that low income families will be particularly hit. Even a modest car parking charge could be a barrier to taking advantage of this green space for such people. Does the Council honestly believe that such families would have the finance available to purchase a £60 annual permit or indeed be able to afford any of the other potential “mitigating” factors that it had outlined?

8) If this new system was introduced, could the Council guarantee that monitoring of its impact would be seen to be independent or would it be undertaken by the same people who are supporting its introduction?

Written Submissions read out by Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager

1. Councillor Lynne Denham, Worcester City Council

"Dear Officers

I understand that a decision has been taken by a Cabinet Member of Worcestershire County Council to impose car parking charges at Worcester Woods Country Park. I am surprised that this could be done without public consultation and consideration of the potential impact of the decision.

- I have been contacted by a number of local residents, expressing concern about the proposed charges. Please could the following be considered by the Scrutiny Board who will be looking at this decision at a meeting on 14th January 2019.
- Many Worcester people, including myself, have happy memories of playing with our children and family days out at this park. Although my youngest daughter is now 23, it remains an excellent children's playground. Children can play and run around safely and meet their friends. Parents can also meet and socialise. It is a free day out in the country on the edge of the city, for hard-pressed families.
- Worcester Woods is the home of the original Parkrun. A community of runners, entirely organised by volunteers, which has a crucial

role in encouraging physical activity. This supports the Council's own Public Health Prevention Strategy.

- Other community organisations are provided from the Orchard Café and Worcester Woods site - including cubs, scouts and explorer scouts. These activities are also run entirely by volunteers and provide positive activities for young people, including looked after children (LAC). These should be priorities to be supported by the County Council. The imposition of car parking charges could put at risk the pool of volunteers who are able to be part of these activities, as well as challenge the ability of some families to continue participating.
- Worcester Woods provides free open space which is enjoyed by many people - mums, dads, children, runners, scouts, cubs, dog walkers, ramblers and nature walks. It is of enormous benefit to health and well-being and educational progress.
- Worcestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for population health shows a large disparity in lifespan, and years of living in poor health, between people living in areas of economic deprivation and more affluent areas. Charging for access to a free, health promoting environment is likely to worsen such health inequalities.
- The original decision notice only appears to consider income generation and parking problems on the County Hall and Wildwood sites. There is no reference to the communities who love and use the park and therefore no assessment of the possible impact of the proposed car park charges on these activities.

As the Chair of Healthy Worcester and a member of the County Health Improvement Group, I am conscious that Worcester Woods has a significant role in the health and well-being of Worcester and surrounding areas. Any decision which may affect this must be adequately scrutinised so the full risks and benefits can be fully examined.

best wishes  
Lynn"

2. Amanda Bonnick

"To impose car parking charges at Worcester Woods Country Park is extreme short-termism. The benefits of free parking for the community far outweigh any miserly income the Council may get. In a topsy turvy world where it is being envisaged that doctors will have to 'prescribe' country walks and visits to the theatre, you are making it more difficult for those in need to access those life-giving and life-affirming activities. Worcester citizens (those who vote in Local elections and remember such betrayals) learn and enjoy so much from this place. It is a haven for wildlife, a place for children to safely explore the natural world and a joyous encounter with a certain freedom that city living does not provide. If children are not encouraged to play and run here, the long-term probable consequence is unfit adults (the rise of diabetes and obesity contribute to those money-swallowing hospitals, do they not?). Please stop acting like 'politicians' who are in it for the quick buck and start acting like responsible, thoughtful representatives who have their voters' interests at heart.

Thank you"

3. Barbara Hopper

"The Lyppard Grange Walking for Health Group use the Countryside Centre as a starting point for walks about every six months. There can be anything between 20 and 35 people. After the walk we use the Orchard Café for refreshments. Some people have their lunch there. We may have a rethink about using the Countryside Centre in future. I am in touch with other walks leaders and we shall have a discussion on the subject. I have omitted the Countryside Centre as a starting point in our rota up to May. If every person spent between £3 and £5, that is quite a loss of income by Orchard Café. One of our leaders has already suggested that we go to the new pub over the ring-road where we can park for nothing and have our refreshments there instead.

Barbara Hopper"

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their contributions

**1080 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 December 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## Meeting

### 1081 Call-In of the Cabinet Member Delegated Decision on the Proposal to Introduce Parking Charges at Worcester Woods Country Park

In accordance with the Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) was asked to consider a decision taken by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities on 21 November 2018 in relation to the Proposal to Introduce Parking Charges at Worcester Woods Country Park. This decision was called-in by the required number of Members and a copy of the call-in was attached to the Agenda.

In accordance with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Scrutiny practice the following were invited to attend the meeting:

- Signatories to the call-in
- Mrs L C Hodgson, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
- Representatives of organisations named in the Call-in (Worcester Parkrun, British Military Fitness (Central), 20th Worcester Scouts and Orchard Café)
- Assistant Director: Families, Communities and Partnerships

The following order for proceedings had been suggested:

- Presentation by Members of the reasons for calling-in the decision
- Questions and Clarification
- Presentation by the representatives of organisations named in the Call-in
- Questions and Clarification
- Response by the Cabinet Member/officer
- Questions and Clarification
- Any closing remarks by the Cabinet Member/officer
- Any closing remarks by the representatives of organisations named in the Call-in
- Any closing remarks by those Members calling-in the decision.

Once it had heard from all parties and considered the decision called-in, the OSPB would need to consider whether to:

- a) accept the decision without qualification or comment (in which case it can be implemented immediately without being considered again by the Cabinet or CMR); or

- b) accept the decision (in which case it can be implemented immediately without being considered again by Cabinet or Cabinet Member) but with qualification or comment which the relevant CMR must consider and respond to; or
- c) propose modifications to the decision or require a reconsideration of the decision (in which case the implementation of the decision is delayed until the Cabinet or CMR has received and considered a report of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board); or
- d) in exceptional circumstances ask the Council to consider whether option (a) (b) or (c) is appropriate (in which case the implementation is delayed until after the meeting of the Council to which it has been referred and, if Council resolves option (c), the Cabinet or CMR has reconsidered the matter having regard to the Council's view).

Members were reminded that the debate should focus on the decision-making process.

#### Presentation of the reasons for calling-in the decision

#### **Cllr Udall**

- Cllr Udall asked the Board to consider the request to suspend the Cabinet Member Decision and establish a Scrutiny Task Group to consider the proposal in much more detail. He suggested that the costs and implementation should be looked at, including the impact of implementation on individuals and user groups and alternative ways to generate income
- He acknowledged that although legally consultation was not required, he suggested that morally it would have been the right thing to do as the public outcry was deafening. The decision had generated significant public interest across generations with 5000 people signing a petition. In addition, there had been cross party-political interest
- More information was required in respect of the background, enforcement costs and the basis on which the predicted revenue was calculated
- It would also have been helpful to understand the method of calculating the reduced usage, the impact of reduced usage on the site, and whether this would put the viability of the site into question
- Detailed consideration should have been given to the impact of the reduced usage on the viability of

the Orchard Café, which was a well-used local business

- Consideration of the impact on residents around County Hall if users of the Country Park parked in the local residential area and an understanding of how the Highways Department would respond to complaints from residents when received would have been helpful
- Cllr Udall pointed out that the impact on disabled drivers, families, dog walkers, schools, user groups and volunteers needed more detailed exploration as parking charges could be a disincentive to using the facility, which in the long term would have public health implications too
- Whilst understanding the difficult decisions that the County Council had to make, Cllr Udall believed that other options should have been considered before deciding to introduce parking charges, including other revenue generating opportunities
- Whilst not ruling out parking charges the proposal was premature, badly thought through, out of touch and wrong with a far-reaching impact of damaging the poorest the most. Cllr Udall urged the CMR to reconsider her decision, consider compromise and work with Scrutiny.

#### **Cllr Lunn**

- Cllr Lunn suggested that there were many reasons for the call-in. He began by highlighting paragraph 16 of the Cabinet Member Decision, which said "*It is not proposed that a formal public consultation takes place regarding the proposal to introduce charges at the Country Park, but that a public Information exercise is carried out instead once any decision is taken.....*" which he believed was profoundly un-democratic, the suggested process was not consultation but an edict and not how it should work
- There had been no interrogation of the alternative options and a complete lack of Scrutiny, when this was an ideal area for Scrutiny to assist with. Scrutiny should have been asked to look at and analyse potential alternatives
- This decision had no publicity around it and was circulated by email and Councillors stumbled on the decision purely by accident
- When over 5000 people signed a petition, the least the Council should do was to study the issues brought forward

- Cllr Lunn asked where the proposed charges came from as the figures seemed arbitrary and there was no rationale for them. There was no explanation of minimum levels of charging eg 2 hours free parking, which would have alleviated some of the issues being discussed
- Apart from paragraph 12 of the CMR Report, there was no reference to the impact of the charges on the Orchard Café
- There was lack of thinking about the unintended consequences of the decision, which was why it was important to be considered by Scrutiny to come up with a better end product.

### **Cllr Jenkins**

- Cllr Jenkins thanked the public speakers for expressing their views so eloquently
- Whilst acknowledging the financial difficulties faced by the Council, Councillor Jenkins believed that introducing parking charges at Worcester Woods was the wrong answer
- Sites such as Worcester Woods should be promoted to visitors due to physical and mental health benefits they provided as per the Public Health Strategy. Charging for parking would do the opposite
- Worcester Woods was doing exactly what the Director of Public Health advocated in terms of prevention being better than cure, enabling hundreds of people through the various activities available to improve their physical and mental health. Introducing parking charges would have a negative impact on this especially for those on low incomes.
- The small income generated from introducing parking charges may well be offset by the additional demand on NHS and other services elsewhere due to poorer physical and mental health of those people who no longer used the Countryside Centre
- The Worcestershire Equality and Public Health Impact Assessment noted the negative impact on the physical and mental health, particularly for those people on low incomes
- It was suggested that the long stay parking of Council and other staff should be addressed, and the proposal needed a rethink.

### **Cllr Agar (Local Member)**

- Cllr Agar thanked the public speakers
- It was suggested that introducing parking charges was a short-term solution and a more complex problem than first thought. More creative thinking was required around the funding gap
- Given the obesity epidemic and mental health crisis being suffered by the population, the Council should be supporting the community to improve their health and wellbeing. Introducing parking charges would have a negative effect in this respect
- The proposal didn't make sense in budget terms and would have a knock-on effect on other budgets further down the line
- The residents of Spetchley Road already suffered parking during week days; this proposal was like to extend this to weekends too.

### Questions and Clarification

- It was clarified that one of the user groups was cyclists who often parked at the Countryside Centre prior to going on a bike ride/cycling through the Woods
- It was confirmed that the callers-in were looking for the proposals to be scrutinised in more detail for the CMR to make more of an informed and workable decision for everyone
- The focus of the Call-in was about the principles of decision making and the lack of due regard for all material considerations
- The Chairman observed that this was the most well attended meeting of Scrutiny that he had ever been to. It was obvious that a lot of people would be affected by this decision and suggested that it may have been better for the CMR to have carried out some consultation before making the decision, as the rationale for the decision was unclear and it didn't appear that the information on which the decision was based was available either.

### Representatives of Organisations named in the Call-in

#### **Be Military Fit (formerly British Military Fitness (Carla Williams))**

- Currently members of Be Military Fit paid to use the park 5 days per week and it wouldn't be cost

effective to pay for parking too, it would be likely that Be Military Fit would lose members

- Some members also did Parkrun
- If parking charges were introduced, the Members that used the Café following their exercise sessions for socialising would probably park on the Bluebell Farm Pub (opposite the Worcester Woods park) and then socialise there rather than using the Orchard Café
- The decision was likely to affect those people on low incomes
- It appeared that the Council were assuming that the users of the park were casual users, when in fact some people used the Park 3 or 4 times per week
- Most people were likely to stay 2½ - 3 hours at the Park, introducing charges would be a prohibitive measure which would impact on the physical and mental health of those using the Park
- Understanding how the charges would be policed would be helpful
- It was suggested that the charging regime may not result in the income envisaged.

#### **Orchard Café (Nett Ward)**

- Nett Ward had been the Café tenant for 12 years and had worked very hard to build up her business. The Café served homemade food, which was locally sourced, seasonal and sustainable and adapted to changing trends
- There were many different groups of customers who used the Orchard Café and would be affected by parking charges
- There was a concern about the impact on the Café of introducing parking charges. Currently 24 staff were employed, this would increase to between 33 and 35 during the summer months
- Nett understood that the Countryside Service needed to be self-sufficient by 2020
- If parking charges were introduced, there was a concern that users of Worcester Woods would take the free parking option at the Bluebell Farm Pub, whilst still using the Woods and would then purchase refreshments at the Bluebell Farm Pub instead
- The Lease on the Orchard Café had recently been renewed and had received a large rental increase, which also needed to be sustained
- Parking charges were likely to affect the length of

time that users of the Woods stayed at the Park, a possible knock on effect of this was less use of the Café

- Increasing parking fees may discourage hospital users but also discourage Café users as some of the hospital users also used the Café
- Whilst appreciating that the Council had difficult decisions to make, it was important that the Café wasn't adversely affected.

### **20th Worcester Scouts (Ben Smith)**

- The Scouts Group had grown from 55 – 126 members (with a waiting list) and volunteers helped to run the Group
- If parking charges were introduced, parents would feel rushed and would be less likely to volunteer to help out
- Although the Scouts were a voluntary organisation, they were a tenant paying £2.5k in 2019
- 15 minutes free parking wasn't a sufficient period of time for parents dropping off their children. Often Scout Leaders needed to discuss things with parents and would do this at drop off and pick up time. Some families also had several children in different scout groups and had several drop off and pick-ups. Parking charges would encourage parents to park at the Bluebell Farm Pub and walk children across a busy dual carriage way, which was a safety issue
- There was a lack of clarity about the rules around the parking charges.

### **Parkrun (Richard Ralphs and Gerry Rudolph)**

- Parkrun was a Community and volunteer led free 5km run/walk, every Saturday at 9:00am
- It was founded on 18 June 2011, with support of Greenspace Team
- To date 401 events had been completed, 149,755 runs completed by 14,130 runners
- There were 13,679 registered Worcester participants which was still growing. There had been 69 new first-time runners this week, 702 runners and 44 volunteers
- The Council and the people of Worcester should be very proud of this success
- Parkrun had improved the health and wellbeing of health care staff, patients and carers through social prescribing of participation in parkrun

- reducing the need for lifelong medication
- In 2017, 1.11 billion prescriptions were dispensed in communities across the UK at a cost of £9.17bn
- There would be reduced participation due to cost according to the Parkrun survey which said that
  - 70% of runners would participate less often
  - 25% would no longer participate (it was anticipated that 150 runners would be from those on low incomes)
- The parking time constraints would destroy the parkrun community spirit
- Contrary to the Councils opinion, Parkrun found that very few people completed activities within 1 hour
- If charges were introduced, runners would arrive later and leave earlier to avoid charges. There would be less stopping for a chat which would potentially lead to traffic issues
- As runners liked to talk about running as much as doing it, runners stayed after parkrun to talk, which as studies state has a positive effect on mental wellbeing
- There was likely to be an adverse impact on the number of volunteers coming forward because this activity generally took longer than participating in the run itself
- Time constraints on parking would lead to clock watching with 85% of runners stating they would reduce their time at the parkrun and 53% stating they would no longer use the Café.

#### Questions/clarification

- Parking fluctuated according to whether it was term time or school holidays. The Manager of the Café thought that there was more of an issue during term time, as the number of parking spaces available was reduced by 50 and allocated to the County Council staff during this time whereas the 50 spaces were available to park users in school holidays
- A parking attendant was on site until 10.30am during weekdays of term time, to oversee the use of the spaces allocated to County Council staff
- The Countryside Services Officers had discussed the possibility of a discount in relation to parking charges for Café users, but the Café Manager thought that this would be a tricky system to operate
- The no charge 15-minute drop-off time wouldn't be a sufficient amount of time to pick up/drop off and

collect refreshments from the Café. Food was made to order and at peak times, there would also possibly be a queue

- Although 2 hours free parking may be an option, it could still have an adverse effect on the business of the Café if users were in a rush to avoid parking charges
- The Café Manager acknowledged that parking charges had always 'been on the cards' but said that she had a good relationship with the Countryside Service Officers and had been asked for her views
- The representatives of Be Military Fit, 20<sup>th</sup> Worcester Scouts and Parkrun said that they had not been part of any discussions about the proposals with Countryside Service Officers
- The Café Manager confirmed that the lease for the Café had recently been renewed, from October 2018 for 7 years but at the time of renewal had been unable to discuss with Place Partnership Limited the impending introduction of parking charges and the effect of them on the Orchard Café. The rent was incremental and would increase in 5 years' time
- The Café Manager was concerned about the potential impact on café income and then on the number of staff she would be able to afford to employ should parking charges be introduced
- Parkrun confirmed that they used the County Council's car park as an overflow facility on Saturday's
- The representatives of Parkrun were asked whether they had any suggestions for raising revenue as an alternative to introducing parking charges. The representative confirmed that Parkrun had a very simple ethos and a light touch approach to marketing options so hadn't considered ideas for generating revenue
- The Chairman suggested that introducing parking charges was a false economy when weighed up against the public health benefits of the people using the park facility.

#### **Cabinet Member/Officers**

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities and Officers introduced themselves. The CMR thanked the public speakers for their participation
- The CMR explained that part of her portfolio of

responsibilities included volunteering, which she was very grateful and supportive of

- Worcester Woods was an award winning green flag facility, which was very popular with visitors and received 600,000 visits annually. Most similar sites around the country charged for entry or for parking
- Any parking charges introduced would be re-invested in the Countryside Service
- The decision was made following the Cabinet Member Decision Report which was published a week before the decision which was taken on 21 November 2018. The CMR explained that she had received the delegated powers to make this decision from the Leader of the Council as detailed in the Council's Constitution and the decision was then Called-in hence the reason for the meeting
- The CMR explained that she had responded to the points made in the Call-in and reiterated that the decision she had made was detailed in the Agenda Report and:
  - (a) approved the introduction of parking charges at Worcester Woods Country Park across 208 spaces, including 9 disabled spaces (i.e. the whole of the Countryside Centre car park);
  - (b) noted the wider campus parking considerations; and
  - (c) authorised the Director of Children, Families and Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities to finalise the details of charging at Worcester Woods Country Park including the level of charges and to take all appropriate steps to implement the agreed proposal and to review the charges annually
- The first point made in the Call-in challenged whether there was sufficient consultation or consideration of the impact of the decision upon members of the Worcester Park Run, 20th Worcester Scouts, British Military Fitness, Orchard Café or the public who used the Centre. The CMR Report clearly set out in paragraph 16 that there would be no formal consultation regarding the proposals to introduce charges. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that advance formal public consultation was not legally required in relation to the proposals set out in the Report given that there was no statutory or common law requirement to do so. Instead it was

proposed that there would be a period of public and stakeholder engagement to explain the proposals and to seek feedback on the proposed charging structure

- The CMR explained that the proposals included in the CMR Report included indicative charges and it was likely that the final agreed charging structure would look different and wouldn't include a 15-minute drop-off time, as it was just a suggestion
- It was confirmed that on the day that the CMR Report was published, Officers contacted the main users to inform them of the proposals and discuss initial feedback
- If the CMR decision was upheld, wider public engagement would be carried out, but this was suspended whilst the Call-in process was ongoing
- It was confirmed that the Café tenant had already been made aware of the proposal to introduce charges. The implementation was not planned until summer 2019 which allowed for a period of at least five months for engagement to take place
- The second point made in the call-in, questioned the income to be generated. The CMR explained that the income quoted was factual and the costs to install parking pay machines and enforcement had been accurately calculated. The capital cost for parking pay machines and barriers etc was estimated to be £40,000
- The CMR advised that consideration had also been given to whether the Local Authority could charge for parking, but the Countryside Centre car park was different to a Local Authority (District Council) car park
- In developing the proposals consideration was given to:
  - Information gained from visitor comment cards regarding the average length of stay
  - Feedback via Country Park Facebook page and Trip Advisor
  - Verbal feedback from visitors, meeting room users, the Café tenant and staff
  - Consideration of the number of spaces in the car park and the number of weekend, bank holiday and school holiday days compared to the number of regular working week days
  - Turnover rate of spaces within the car park
  - Experience of generating income from parking from Waseley Hills Country Park, since the late 1990s as well as comparisons to other similar sites nationally
  - Seasonality

- Potential number of annual passes that may be purchased
- There was a concern about misuse of the car park by hospital users which was the reasoning behind the suggestion for the higher use pass
- The third point questioned whether the impact upon cycling, physical activity and recreation had been considered along with the impact upon people with low income and those dependent on state benefits. A full Public Health and Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out and was published in Appendix 4 of the CMR Report. This considered the potential negative impacts on protected groups and public health
- The Public Health Impact Assessment highlighted that the proposal may affect those on a lower income and may make a visit to the Country Park less attractive, which would reduce the potential positive effect on physical and mental health therefore:
  - confirmed that comparison of charging structures at similar local attractions had been part of the consideration
  - The indicative charging structure took into account the most popular duration of visit (so that the most common length of visit didn't incur the maximum charge)
  - An annual pass system was incorporated into the structure
  - The ability for visitors to get a refund of a percentage of the car parking charge if they spent over a set amount in the Orchard Café would be investigated
  - The charge was for parking a vehicle at the Country Park, not for visiting the Country Park
- The fourth and final point of the Call-in questioned the impact on the local residential areas of displacement parking. It was not considered that there would be a significant displacement of Country Park visitors to nearby residential areas. The Country Park was approximately 10-15 minutes' walk from Warndon Villages and 10 minutes' walk from Spetchley Road.
- There were examples of neighbouring Councils introducing parking charges eg Birmingham City Council were introducing charges across all parks
- The Assistant Director explained:
  - that although the decision wasn't in the implementation phase, it was always the intention to carry out a period of engagement around finalising the charging structure. The

- views heard at the meeting and received already would feed into that process
- There was a balance between generating income and minimising impact
  - The Equalities Impact Assessment did identify that there could be some adverse implications from introducing parking charges and there was more work to do to understand this
  - Partners were valued, and it was in the County Council's interest to ensure that local businesses continued to thrive, and work would continue with partners to ensure this
  - Volunteers were very important and early indications showed that a solution could be found
  - There wouldn't be a no return policy in terms of pick-up and drop-off timings
  - The Annual Pass would protect the usage of the park but suggestions about the implementation of it were still welcome.

#### Questions/Clarification

- Although the CMR had been advised that legally, a consultation wasn't necessary, she was asked whether in hindsight it would have been better from a moral perspective to have carried out a consultation prior to making the decision. The CMR confirmed that she believed that the process was right and that she was always planning to carry out engagement post decision
- The Chairman pointed out that the Call-in had happened because many people had been unhappy about the CMR decision. The decision was likely to affect the usage of the Country Park and given that the fee structure was only indicative, the validity of putting it in the Report in the first place was questionable. It was suggested that the process had not built sufficient confidence to gather support for the decision, but a Consultation before writing the CMR Report could have been beneficial in gaining support for the decision, especially as there was adequate time within the process to do so. It would have been better to get things right first time
- The CMR was asked why she had decided to make the decision now, when it had 'been on the cards for many years?' The CMR advised that it had been decided to make the decision now because of the Council's financial situation and

that in hindsight she wouldn't have done things differently. There had always been plans to engage with user and partners over the coming months

- The Assistant Director also confirmed that it was acknowledged that implementation would take some months and so was the opportunity for engagement with partners and the public. The CMR was acting on the advice given by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that an advance formal public consultation was not legally required in relation to the proposals set out in the report given that there was no statutory or common law requirement to do so
- The Chairman remained concerned that given the strength of interest in the decision why the CMR was minded to make such a difficult unpopular decision, which would impact on a large number of people when there wasn't good quality information to support the decision. A Consultation may have shown that the decision was likely to be so complex and difficult to implement that cost outweighed the benefit and it wasn't worth doing. It may have also highlighted the unintended consequences of the decision
- A Councillor suggested that far too frequently consultations took place after a decision was made rather than before a decision was made, which lead to uninformed decisions and a lack of public confidence
- It was suggested information relating to the meetings held at the Countryside Centre during the day was missing from the Report. The Assistant Director advised that this information could be made available to the Board
- The CMR confirmed that she was confident with the detail in the Report, whilst appreciating that the Council was in difficult times and had difficult decision to make. There were pressures in other areas of the Council and this decision would help to protect the Countryside Service. The charges were an illustration not the final decision, which was delegated to officers in consultation with the CMR. Officers would be speaking to partners and other users as part of the engagement process and all views would be taken into consideration
- The Assistant Director confirmed that the charging structure had been based on usage information and modelling, but further information would be made available through the engagement process
- The Chairman reiterated that he believed that

there was insufficient information in the Report for CMR to base her decision on. Collecting information post decision was not good practice or what good governance should be about.

Decisions should not be made on assumptions but clear data

- A Councillor suggested that he was reassured that the decision was not set in stone and that the CMR would consider the views she had heard at the meeting and would fine tune the proposals
- It was suggested that the CMR Report was a working document and had some good information, but more detail was required
- It was questioned whether the lease for the Orchard Café had any flexibility built into it, to reflect fluctuations in service demand for the Café as a result of introducing parking charges. The Countryside Greenspace, Gypsy Service and Road Safety Education Manager confirmed that Place Partnership Ltd had led on the renegotiation of the lease agreement for the Orchard Café. However, predicting the effect of the proposals on rental income was difficult. It was suggested that it wasn't in the interests of the Countryside Service or the County Council if the viability of the Café was affected
- The Countryside Service met every 6 weeks with the Manager of the Orchard Café for a Tenant Liaison Meeting and had discussed the proposed charging structure with the Manager of the Orchard Café. If the decision was implemented it, would run alongside the wider campus project looking at the parking arrangements of County Hall campus
- Rental income from the Orchard Café and other income streams fed directly into the Countryside Services Budget
- It was confirmed that the proposals had been discussed with Worcestershire Acute Hospital Trust as part of the stakeholder discussions and would continue as the process progressed
- A Councillor advised that although he didn't have problem with the principle of introducing parking charges, he was disappointed with the lack of data and clarity supporting the proposals and consideration of the effect on the local businesses. In response to the question, the Countryside Greenspace, Gypsy Service and Road Safety Education Manager advised that it was difficult to estimate the amount of income that would be generated as a result of the proposals,

but the potential income had been estimated from several sources including visitor comment cards, feedback from the Facebook page, the Café tenant and staff. There was also the experience from Waseley Hills Country Park

- The CMR advised that the misuse of the carpark, also needed to be considered. The charges were a starting point and it was likely that the final decision would look different as the feedback received would be taken into account
- It was noted that Birmingham City Council were looking to introducing charges across all parks
- The CMR expressed her gratitude to everyone who had spoken at the meeting
- The Chairman suggested that a cross party time limited Scrutiny Task Group to look at the detail of the issue would be would be helpful. The Assistant Director confirmed that technically a short delay on implementation of the decision to allow for a Task Group to gather further information would not have an adverse financial impact on the decision
- It was confirmed that the savings from the proposals would be phased. There would be a partial saving of £40k this year and a saving of £60k next year with a £40k capital cost for equipment
- The CMR reiterated her thanks to everyone who had spoken at the meeting and confirmed that she stood by her decision but would ensure that the views heard would be taken into account in developing the final proposals over the next few months.

#### Closing Remarks

#### **Cabinet Member**

The CMR thanked everyone for their presentations, all comments would be considered, and the engagement process would continue. The CMR confirmed the proposals were a starting point and that she was confident with her decision around the principle of introducing parking charges. There was a concern about the misuse of the car park which needed addressing.

#### **Cllr Udall**

Whilst respecting the CMR and the Officers, Cllr Udall thought that this decision shouldn't be made in isolation, Scrutiny should have been asked to help and assist with

this process. The evidence of witnesses was powerful and whilst appreciating that the financial situation of the County Council meant that things couldn't stay the same, introducing parking charges should be a political not officer decision.

Alternative measures to generate income or marketing opportunities should be considered and more creative options looked at. A Scrutiny Task Group would be a compromise that everyone could support, especially as this was an ideal area for Scrutiny to assist with.

### **20th Worcester Scouts (Ben Smith)**

Ben thanked everyone for listening and confirmed that it was clear that there would be engagement, but it felt like signing a contract without knowing what the terms and conditions were.

### **Orchard Café (Nett Ward)**

Nett had found the process very useful as it was helpful to hear everyone's perspective. More time needed to be taken to talk to stakeholders to gather more detail before making a decision.

### **Park Run (Richard Ralphs and Gerry Rudolf)**

Richard confirmed that he understood that the CMR had a tough job given the financial pressures that the County Council faced. He thanked everyone for listening and those who had signed the petition.

The meeting adjourned from 1.10-1.20pm

### Decision

The Board were referred to paragraph 12 and asked to consider the options available to them.

Following the Board's deliberations, it was agreed that, in taking the decision, the CMR had departed from principles as set out in Paragraph 7.2 of Article 7 of the Council's Constitution and that there was insufficient information on which to base the decision. Specific areas of concern included lack of regard to all relevant and material considerations, the realistic evaluation of alternatives, lack of consultation, openness and clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

Furthermore, out of the options available to the Board,

Option C was agreed which was, to propose modifications to the decision or require a reconsideration of the decision (in which case the implementation of the decision was delayed until the Cabinet or CMR had received and considered a report of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board).

The Board was mindful that the additional work should be carried out as quickly as possible and agreed that a cross party Task Group would be set up as soon as possible with the aim of reporting to the 28 February meeting of the OSPB. It was agreed that the Lead Member for this Task Group would be Cllr Bloore.

Furthermore, the Board were concerned that the decision was being taken in isolation of the wider campus issues, which it recommended should be looked at separately at a later date.

The meeting ended at 1.45 pm

Chairman .....