

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

21 NOVEMBER 2018

PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE PARKING CHARGES AT WORCESTER WOODS COUNTRY PARK

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mrs L C Hodgson

Relevant Officer

Director of Children, Families and Communities

Local Members

Mrs P Agar, Mr A C Roberts

Recommendation

- 1. The Director of Children, Families and Communities recommends that the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities:**
 - (a) approves 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) notes the wider campus parking considerations; and**
 - (c) authorises 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.**

Background

2. The Countryside and Greenspace Service has made savings of over £800,000 since 2010 and the aim of the Countryside Greenspace Team becoming self-financing was endorsed by Cabinet a number of years ago.
3. Charging visitors for parking at Worcester Woods Country Park car park has been under consideration for many years. Charges at Waseley Hills Country Park were introduced in the late 1990s and contribute a valuable income stream towards the running of countryside sites.
4. Worcester Woods Country Park is an award-winning facility that is extremely popular with visitors (over 600,000 visits annually). Most sites with a similar range of facilities around the county currently either charge for entry or charge for car parking. It would not be desirable (or possible) to levy an entry charge to use the Country Park and this proposal would mean that the Country Park itself remains free to use to visitors - it is

only parking a vehicle which would incur a charge. The Country Park is well served by bus and is on the local cycleway network.

5. In 2014, as part of wider County Hall campus parking changes, the number of dedicated country park visitor-only car parking spaces at the Country Park was increased, so that fewer (but dedicated) spaces became available for staff parking during term time only. The whole of the Countryside Centre car park is available for country park visitors only, during school holidays. However, to deter unauthorised parking, a Car Park Attendant is employed by the Countryside Service Mon-Thurs 08:30-10:30.

Future Proposals

6. The proposal is to introduce car parking charges at Worcester Woods Country Park across 208 spaces, including 9 disabled spaces (i.e. the whole of Countryside Centre car park), 365 days per year (access to the car park is prevented after 10pm at night until 5am in the morning).

7. In developing the proposal at Worcester Woods Country Park, consideration has been given to the charges at other similar facilities locally. For example:

- Wyre Forest Visitor Centre (£3 for 0-2 hours, £4 for 2-4 hours, £5 all day)
- Malvern Hills Trust car parks (£4.20 minimum charge)
- National Trust car park at Clent Hills (£2.50 minimum charge)
- Queenswood Country Park (£1.50 <1 hour, £3.00 1-2 hours, £4.00 >2 hours)
- Annual passes at Malvern Hills Trust sites are £35, Coombe Abbey Country Park is £43.40, Crickley Hill Country Park is £150
- Birmingham City Council is currently introducing car parking charges at Lickey Hills Country Park, but the detail of the charge is not yet established
- Current charges at Waseley Hills Country Park are as follows:
 - Up to 1 hour – 90p
 - Over 1 hour - £1.90
 - Annual pass £27.

The Waseley Hills charges are increased annually. The proposed charges at Worcester Woods would be initially higher than Waseley Hills, but there is also a need to prevent or discourage unauthorised parkers who are not Country Park users but who might otherwise take a space instead of, for example, paying higher rates at the Hospital.

8. It is proposed that the charges introduced at Worcester Woods Country Park would be in the region of:-

Time	Charge
up to 15 mins	Free
up to 1 hour	£1
1-2 hours	£2
2-4 hours	£3
Over 4 hours	£7
Annual pass	£60 (equates to a charge of around £1.15 per week and enables parking for up to 2 hours twice per day).

These charges are considered reasonable and will reduce the cost to the general council tax payer by providing an income stream to meet the costs of the service, are within the range of similar venues as listed above and reflect typical visitor lengths of stay.

9. The majority of visitors to the Country Park stay between 1 and 4 hours. So that non-users of the Country Park car park (e.g. hospital users, county hall campus staff and visitors) are dissuaded from purchasing an annual pass or paying for a whole day's parking, a time limit of 2 hours twice per day for an annual pass visit and a charge of £7 for a one-off visit of over 4 hours is being proposed. If charges are introduced, the number of previously non-users of the Country Park would be reduced significantly, to the benefit of genuine Country Park visitors.

10. The ability for people to park for free for up to 15 minutes will accommodate country park visitors who wish to use toilet facilities and/or purchase take-away refreshments at the Orchard Café.

11. Adherence to the parking charges will be managed via a 'pay on exit' system. This will reduce the need for enforcement by staff. Pay machines will be placed adjacent to the café, toilets and meeting rooms, which provide the main hub of the Country Park and where people tend to arrive at and leave the site from. Pay machines will offer several payment options including contactless payment.

12. Worcester Woods Country Park has a thriving, award-winning café which brings many visitors to the Country Park. The Council wants to maintain the positive working relationship with the café tenant and these proposals have been discussed with her. To incentivise patronage of the Orchard Café, the ability for visitors to get a refund of a percentage of the car parking charge if they spend over a set amount in the Orchard Café will be investigated.

13. It is also envisaged that users of the meeting rooms at the Country Park will comply with the car park charging regime. Whilst this may have some negative impact on room hire revenue, it is considered that it would be more cost effective than administering a concessions scheme.

14. Mass participation events that currently make use of wider campus parking will be included in the charging regime as participants will be using the Country Park (and therefore the pay on exit system) to exit the campus.

15. An exemption or concessionary rate will be introduced for those using a blue badge displayed correctly, for disabled visitors. 9 dedicated parking bays would continue to be provided.

16. 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. This will explain the reason for the charges, how the regime will work, and focus on the fact that all income raised goes towards off-setting the cost of running the site and provide an opportunity to ask questions. Stakeholders such as café tenants and meeting room users will also be informed and engagement with staff at County Hall and surrounding facilities such as Wildwood Drive offices and St Richards Hospice carried out.

17. Proposed timescales for the implementation of the new charges is Summer 2019 by which time the wider campus staff car parking management options (see paragraphs 18-22) should be determined. Capital expenditure for the proposals in this report is estimated at £40,000 and would involve the purchase of car park machines and alterations to the barrier system at the Country Park car park. This has been accounted for by reducing the savings in the first year of implementation. The annual income predicted to be generated from the proposed charges thereafter is estimated to be around £140,500.

County Hall Campus Parking Strategy

18. It is recognised that Worcester Woods Country Park's close proximity to County Hall and the interrelationships of parking arrangements with County Hall, Wildwood Offices and the Hospital, demonstrates there is a interdependency between decisions affecting the Countryside Centre parking management and the wider management of parking across the whole of County Hall campus including Wildwood.

19. Attempts have been made to try to control unauthorised car parking users across the Campus and reduce the amount of traffic on site by introducing various policies. These include restricting the amount of days staff are allowed to park and parking permits but these have been unsuccessful and with noticeable lower demand on Mondays and Fridays, the issue of space availability is currently exacerbated between Tuesdays and Thursdays.

20. During 2017 a management decision was made to try and improve the management of parking on the campus. The project includes renewal of the barriers to County Hall, and new signage. The intention is that the new system will be used not just to gather data on occupancy and use but to control and monitor access for permitted personnel and genuine visitors only.

21. The new system will:

- Reduce unauthorised use of the car parks
- Control and monitor tenant usage where numbers are restricted
- Provide usage data to fully understand parking demand versus supply and confirm peaks and troughs
- Identify the working patterns of staff and how this impacts on demand.

22. By gathering data there will be the ability to make further strategic decisions for the management of the car parking and the system being installed will provide the flexibility for this.

Risks and Opportunities

23. The proposed removal of the 50 part time spaces for staff within the Country Park could force more parking off site, such as Spetchley Road and the surrounding areas. The expectation is that when the parking system is installed and the use is properly controlled and monitored, it will efficiently control the management of the car parking and reduce unauthorised County Hall parking to offset the loss of spaces at the Country Park. However, only when the system is operating will the true demand versus supply and impact be fully understood.

24. By installing the parking monitoring system across the entire campus the opportunity to charge for parking spaces at County Hall on weekends/evenings is opened up. There are various clubs and periodic events held at both County Hall and the Country Park that currently use the parking at County Hall in addition to the Country Park. Therefore, the possibility to generate additional income would be an option and this could be done by linking in with the charging regime at the Country Park.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

25. The Countryside Greenspace Team has a net budget of £140,000. If the proposal goes ahead, the Countryside Greenspace Team would be fully self-financing (excluding recharges), generating up to £140,000 annually from car parking charges.

26. There are no legal restrictions to introducing charging for parking in countryside sites owned by the Council on a contractual basis. The role of the Car Park Attendant will need to be reviewed.

Equality and Diversity Implications

27. The Council must, during planning, decision-making and implementation, exercise a proportionate level of due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

28. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the recommendations. This identified potential negative impact for: Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity. Therefore, to ensure compliance with our Public Sector Equality Duty, consideration has been given to:

- The location and positioning of pay machines in the car park so that people with disabilities are not adversely affected. These will be placed adjacent to the café, toilets and meeting rooms, which provide the main hub of the Country Park and where people tend to arrive at and leave the site from
- The charging structure so that those who may take longer to carry out activities during a visit to the Country Park (e.g. people with a disability or a young baby) are not disadvantaged by an unreasonable time restriction which forces them into a higher charging band. The lowest charging band is for up to 1 hour. However, visitors are able to park for free for up to 15 minutes
- The number and location of disabled spaces in the car park so that these are located as near as possible to pay machines, café, toilets and meeting rooms
- The use of the meeting rooms by disabled groups and those with babies.
- The full EIA is attached as an Appendix.

Privacy and Public Health Impact Assessments

29. The proposal may affect those on a lower income, may make a visit to the Country Park less attractive and so reduce potential positive effect on physical and mental health. Therefore:

- Consideration has been given to comparison with charging structures at similar local attractions
- The charging structure takes account of most popular duration of visit (so that the most common length of visit does not incur maximum charge)
- An annual pass system has been incorporated into the charging structure
- The ability for visitors to get a refund of a percentage of the car parking charge if they spend over a set amount in the Orchard café will be investigated
- The charge is for parking a vehicle at the Country Park, not for visiting the Country Park.

Supporting Information

- Appendix – Public Health and Equality Impact Assessment

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children Families and Communities) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.