



Essex County Council

# Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>10:30</b>	<b>Thursday, 18 January 2018</b>	<b>Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH</b>
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**For information about the meeting please ask for:**

Lisa Siggins, Democratic Services Officer

**Telephone:** 033301 34594

**Email:** [lisa.siggins@essex.gov.uk](mailto:lisa.siggins@essex.gov.uk)

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<b>1</b>	<b>Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest</b>	<b>4 - 4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes</b> To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2017.	<b>5 - 9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Questions from the Public</b> A period of up to 15 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions or make representations on any item on the agenda for this meeting. On arrival, and before the start of the meeting, please register with the Committee Officer.	
<b>4</b>	<b>Mobile Libraries Consultation Outcomes - To Follow Report (PSEG/01/18)</b> from Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer on the outcomes of the public consultation on the mobile library service held in late 2017 - <b>when available, this report will be published online, below the heading 'Meeting Documents'</b> - please scroll to the bottom of the page.	

- 5 Essex Libraries: Static Libraries Public Engagement**  
To receive a verbal report from Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer on the public engagement on static libraries commencing early this year.
- 6 Country Parks Car Park Charging Task and Finish Group: Portfolio Holder response to Recommendations and Actions** **10 - 13**  
To receive a response (**PSEG/02/18**) from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste on the recommendations from the Essex Country Parks Car Park Charging Task and Finish Group Chaired by Councillor Eddie Johnson.
- 7 Place Services and Economic Growth Policy And Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18** **14 - 15**  
To receive report (**PSEG/03/18**) concerning the Committee's work programme. Also to receive suggestions, if any, from Members on items the Committee might wish to consider.
- 8 Future Meeting Dates** **16 - 16**  
To note that the next Committee activity day will be on Thursday, 22 February 2018 and note report (**PSEG/04/18**) regarding future activity dates until April 2019.
- 9 Urgent Business**  
To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

### **Exempt Items**

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, Members are asked to decide whether, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **10 Urgent Exempt Business**

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

## **Essex County Council and Committees Information**

All Council and Committee Meetings are held in public unless the business is exempt in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972. If there is exempted business, it will be clearly marked as an Exempt Item on the agenda and members of the public and any representatives of the media will be asked to leave the meeting room for that item.

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## Agenda item 1

**Committee:** Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Enquiries to:** Robert Fox, Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

#### **Recommendations:**

To note

1. Membership as shown below
2. Apologies and substitutions
3. Declarations of interest to be made by Members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct

#### **Membership**

(Quorum: 5)

Councillor E Johnson	Chairman
Councillor T Ball	
Councillor S Canning	
Councillor M Durham	
Councillor R Gadsby	
Councillor S Hillier	
Councillor P Honeywood	
Councillor D Kendall	
Councillor B Massey	
Councillor C Pond	
Councillor R Pratt	
Councillor A Sheldon	
Councillor W Schmitt	
Councillor J Young	

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**Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 23 November 2017****Present:**

Councillor Eddie Johnson (Chairman)	Councillor Bob Massey
Councillor Tony Ball	Councillor John Moran
Councillor Mark Durham	Councillor Chris Pond
Councillor Stephen Hillier	Councillor Ron Pratt
Councillor Paul Honeywood	Councillor Andrew Sheldon
Councillor David Kendall	Councillor Julie Young

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Stephen Canning, Ricki Gadsby and from Councillor Wendy Schmitt who was substituted by Councillor John Moran.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mark Durham declared an interest as the Cabinet Member Deputy to Councillor Susan Barker and any items that may arise related to her portfolio.

**3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 21st September were agreed as an accurate record (subject to two manuscript amendments).

**4 Questions from the Public**

There were no public questions.

**5 Essex Country Parks Overview**

Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste was in attendance for this item. He was joined by Steve Bunn, Area Manager, Country Parks Team and Laura Boreham, Development Manager, Country Parks Team.

Councillor Walsh explained Country Parks is a non-statutory function of the County Council and the current focus is on further commercialisation. There are health and wellbeing opportunities that come with green spaces.

Councillor Walsh informed the Committee the locations of the Country Parks should be seen in the context of the issues on the emerging Essex coastal path which will provide opportunities as there are areas within the path of outstanding natural beauty. There are also the strategic walks, such as the Essex Way.

The Essex Country Parks mission statement is *Essex Country Parks aims to promote access to green and open spaces for visitors and residents: to help support their health, provide places to learn, get close to nature and history, and make memories that last a lifetime.*

Councillor Walsh provided a synopsis of each country park to the Committee. In summary:

- Belhus Woods Country Park is ancient woodland with fishing and conservation lakes and is also a working forest. Car parking improvements are under way, and new play equipment and toilets will be available from spring 2018
- Cudmore Grove, located on Mersea Island, is 100 acres of sandy beach with views to the mainland. There are World War II pill-boxes and a 16<sup>th</sup> Century fort on the site; as well as an area with fossils. There has been investment into a new play area. Visitor numbers have increased with 16,000 additional visitors in July-September 2017
- Danbury Country Park is a 13<sup>th</sup> Century parkland estate which has had investment on car parking and signage as well as resurfaced footpaths. There are partnership opportunities for food outlets – Essex Outdoors located close by has such facilities
- Great Notley Country Park is one of the newest country parks and is a joint venture with Braintree District Council who were gifted the area as part of the Great Notley housing development. The park has play installations such as Sky Ropes; and a zip wire is to be installed shortly.. The park is very busy with up to 100,000 visitors a year; and has been awarded a Green Flag for the facilities on offer
- Marsh Farm Country Park has 300 acres of grazing marsh and attracts funding as a site of specific scientific interest. There is a privately owned demonstration farm on the site
- Thorndon Country Park is split into the north and south sites and is a site of ancient woodland. The north site houses The Gruffalo Trail and is in partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust who have their countryside centre there. The south site is a place of tranquillity. There has been investment in the toilet facilities at both sites and there are plans to improve the car parking facilities and access. It is one of the busiest country parks with the numbers boosted by The Gruffalo Trail. Barbecues in the summer have a tendency to take over the current car parking facility on the south site; however MITIE security supervises the area and there is plenty of space at the park for other visitors
- Weald Country Park has 500 acres of woodland, lakes, flower meadows of national importance and a deer park. It also houses The Stick Man Trail. Toilets are being installed in readiness for the end of next year. There is some land that backs onto the park currently on the market and if any plans adversely affect the county park Councillor Walsh confirmed he would look at those plans
- Crossing Temple is on land gifted to the Knights Templar in 1137 and holds events such as craft and food fairs and weddings – there

is also a successful tea room on the site. The park utilises volunteers on the upkeep of the walled garden. There are, currently, no capital investments planned

In response to Committee Member questions Councillor Walsh and officers stated:

- He would be meeting with residents adjacent to Cudmore Grove in the next week regarding car parking and the increase in traffic
- Park Run takes place in three of the country parks; but with regard to adult fitness equipment experience suggests it is under-utilised. However, Councillor Massey countered that following a £30,000 conversion in Chelmsford the equipment is well used
- Advertising the country park at Marsh Farm, beyond the demonstration farm attraction does need to be improved with additional signage
- Public transport links are part of discussions going forward
- Putting the demonstration farm into private ownership was the right thing to do but this can be reassessed; and Councillor Walsh committed to provide a written answer as to whether the County could take it back at any stage; however, at present, it is working very well with significant investment from the private operator
- The concerns of Councillor Massey in relation to investment in the country park of Marsh Farm were noted
- County gets permission for the Gruffalo and Stick Man characters, which are carved by the Ranger, on the two sites and this is closely monitored to avoid any deviation. Councillor Walsh undertook to ascertain there was no cost to ECC for this
- County parks have good relationships, in general, with adjacent residents, landowners and businesses and there are regular discussions
- Capital investment at Cressing Temple is a challenge due to the historical nature of the site
- There is not necessarily a great deal of district council input in country parks with the exception of Great Notley Country Park; and conversations with Thurrock UA in relation to Belhus Country Park. The parks are regarded as Essex County Council assets

Other assets the County Council manages are 27 areas of woodland; six mills; and two disused railway lines.

Capital investment in Country Parks has increased from just short of £127,000 in 2014/15 to over £1.7million in 2017/18. There has been a significant increase in visitor numbers from over 625,000 in 2014/15 to in excess of 860,000 in 2016/17 – add to that in the first seven months of 2017/18 visitor numbers are already at 659,000. The parks are now operating at a surplus (there was a deficit up to 2013/14) and this allows for reinvestment. Councillor Walsh paid tribute to Essex Country Parks' staff.

Essex County Parks has a vastly improved website; runs educational visits; and has successful volunteer arrangements and partnerships. The Country

Parks are now becoming destination visits with the key attractions which have been developed.

Councillor Walsh undertook to provide a written response on Hainault Forest Country Parks, which is mostly owned by the LB of Redbridge but maintained under contract to ECC by the Woodland Trust, with regard to the current contracting arrangements.

Councillor Walsh also undertook to provide a written response on the management arrangements of the woodland that is not open to the public. Councillor Walsh accepted a point made by Councillor Pratt in relation to Country Parks needing to become more commercially aware, rather than relying upon car park charges for viability, but reiterated the changing nature of the parks as destination visits. Commercialisation is a direction of travel and some of the parks do host events; however, issues with ancient woodlands and wildlife do need to be taken care of. Councillor Walsh undertook to provide additional information on capital investment planned.

The Chairman stated ECC should be commended for the work undertaken on Country Parks and thanked Councillor Walsh and officers for their presentation.

#### **6 Essex Country Parks: car park charging consultation**

Councillor Simon Walsh, Steve Bunn and Laura Boreham continued to be present for this item.

Councillor Walsh stated there is to be a review of car park charging at the Country Parks as there had been no change in charges for quite some time. There should be consideration of the allocation of time slots and reflection upon usage.

The Chairman suggested a discrete Task and Finish Group that could meet on a single occasion in December which should be provided with more detail so recommendations on the consultation could be given to the Cabinet Member. To that end Councillor Johnson stated he would Chair the Group and would be joined by Councillor's Massey, Pratt, Durham and Young.

#### **7 Localism and Subsidiarity Task and Finish Group**

Councillor Pond updated the Committee on the work of the Localism and Subsidiarity Task and Finish Group which has met on three occasions and is making good progress. The Cabinet Members for Highways and Transportation (twice), and Culture, Communities and Culture have attended meetings of the Task and Finish Group; and a representative of the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) attended the last meeting. The Group will receive a submission from Highways and the EALC which will be a list of projects that could be devolved within the county. There will be a further two meetings of the Group with a report likely to the full Committee with recommendations in January 2018.

**8 Place Services And Economic Growth Policy And Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18**

The Committee work programme was noted.

**9 Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting on Thursday, 14 December at 10.30 a.m.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 2.20 pm.

**Chairman**

		<b>AGENDA ITEM 6</b>
		<b>PSEG/02/18</b>
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Place Services and Economic Growth Policy &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18<sup>th</sup> January 2017</b>	
<b>Country Parks Car Park Charging Task and Finish Group: Portfolio Holder response to Recommendations and Actions</b>		
<b>Enquiries to:</b>	<b>Robert Fox, Scrutiny Officer Robert.Fox@essex.gov.uk</b>	

**1. *With the exception of the anomaly of a £2 increase at Great Notley Country Park the other increases should be put to the public as part of the consultation.***

On reflection of the Task & Finish Group's recommendation and to bring it further in line with other parks and attractions, we will be lowering the over 3 hour charge to £6.50. This lower charge will also be reflected in the additional option to bring the pricing in line with Great Notley at any sites where ANPR is subsequently introduced.

**2. *The use of ANPR should be encouraged across all Country Parks. The Task and Finish Group recognised the initial outlay costs.***

We appreciate the Task & Finish Group's positive view on the use of pay on exit systems, but due to the variance in site access and layout of each country park, it is not possible for ANPR to be implemented at all of the sites. The team has already been exploring installing ANPR at Cudmore Grove and Belhus as they are suitable locations for this type of system and will be looking to investigate this further in 18/19 as part of the wider long-term strategic vision for the parks.

**3. *Country Park car park enforcers should be supplied with video cameras.***  
Thank you for the recommendation and we will be exploring issuing these.

**4. *The concessions policy should be reviewed.***

It should be noted that the concessions policy only relates to season tickets for over 60s and blue badge holders. If tickets are purchased ad hoc they will pay full price. We will be reviewing season ticket prices mid-year as they have not increased since 2011/12 and plan to review the policy at the same time.

**5. *The consultation document should include detail of all the available attractions at each Country Park.***

The consultation posters will be tailored to include information on the attractions available at each site.

*The notes of the Task and Finish Group are attached as an appendix to this report.*

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNTRY PARKS CAR PARK CHARGING TASK AND FINISH GROUP ESTABLISHED BY THE PLACE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE. HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 3, COUNTY HALL ON WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2017**

County Councillors':

Mark Durham	*	Bob Massey
* Eddie Johnson (Chairman)	*	Ron Pratt
Julie Young		

\*present

The following officers were present throughout the meeting:

Laura Boreham	Country Parks Development Manager
Dominic Collins	Director, Economic Growth and Localities
Jenny Stubbings	Project Management Officer
Robert Fox	Senior Democratic Services Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 a.m.

In introduction Councillor Johnson welcomed all to the meeting and reminded the Group of the presentation at the last full committee meeting of the Country Park estates and assets. At that meeting the increase in car park charges, from April 2018, was first mooted and this Task and Finish Group was established.

In presentation, Dominic Collins informed the Group Country Parks have been set strong and meaningful targets for income generation with the MTRS setting a target of an in excess of £600,000 surplus by 2020/21; and one of the key income drivers is car parking fees. A great deal of marketing activity as well as investment in attractions has led to an increase in visitor numbers. Essex County Council has a Fees and Charges Policy which states that increases should be in-line with the RPI and charging for parking at county parks has not been increased since March 2015. Revenue costs would support the capital expenditure that has been, and will be made. There is to be further capital investment in country parks during 2017/18 of £1.7million.

A paper (attached) outlining the preferred and additional options for car park charging was circulated to the Group. The proposed charges were benchmarked against other Green Flag Country Parks and other Essex-based family attractions. The attached paper outlines the proposed new charges with the likely pros and cons highlighted. The additional option is based on the pay on exit, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) arrangement in place at Great Notley Country Park. Similar arrangements will soon be available at both Belhus and Cudmore Grove Country Parks. This would support a growth in income over traditional pay and display. Cressing Temple does not charge for car parking with the income generated by the tea rooms and the events held there; additionally Marsh Farm does not charge for car parking as there is only public access to the riverside footways.

Councillor Massey stated there could be opportunities at Marsh Farm to exploit to get value for money at the park to enable car park charging to be introduced. He reported on feedback from local residents which indicates an appetite for the introduction of an adventure playground at the Country Park.

Questions:

Why is there a disparity in car park charging between different parks; and what is the rationale behind this?

*Response: This is based partly on history and the additional attractions/activities based in the park. The parks have many regular customers and this is recognised as part of the business model. It is difficult to get a blanket charge across the county as benchmarking is done locally, regionally and nationally; and there is a need to drive customers to the parks that have had capital investment to increase revenue. However, benchmarking does not necessarily compare like-with-like, as some national parks are named Country Parks but would not be what Essex would consider a Country Park. Essex County Council attempts to encourage visitors to stay at the parks for a significant part of the day when visiting. Therefore, benchmarking with family day out venues are used as a better benchmark, in many cases.*

Why is there a £2 increase in the car parking cost for three hours at Great Notley Country Park?

*Great Notley Country Park has ANPR and there is a commercial element to this. Apart from that the attractions at the park mean visitors could stay all day which gives a different element to many of the parks. It would be preferable if visitors stayed longer than three hours, therefore, the maximum payment for three hours-plus is likely to encourage longer stays, rather than be a deterrent.*

Are there plans for additional marketing so as not to deter visitors due to increased car parking charges?

*Increased marketing campaigns are being conducted to ensure the customer-base is not solely Essex residents as there is a significant market in North London and Suffolk for Essex Country Parks.*

The public might ask why when there is a £200,000 surplus is there a need to increase the cost of car parking?

*There are difficult conversations to be had with the public regarding this; but there has been significant capital investment and revenue income is needed to pay for these.*

Are parking season tickets available?

*There are six-monthly and annual tickets and these will continue*

Has pay-by-phone been considered?

*It has been considered, however, some of the Country Parks are not available for this as they are outside of mobile signals.*

What is the rationale for the parking concessions offered as there is no hard-and-fast rule as to who is most in need of a concessionary pass?

*At present over-60's and the disabled receive a concession.*

Do the car-parking enforcers have cameras attached for filming disputes?

*This could be considered. There is a high turnover of staff in these positions.*

If the proposals received are those the county goes out to consultation with would it be useful to outline why the county is making changes to car park charging by communicating what exactly is on offer at all the country parks?

*This could be added to the consultation.*

Is there charging for country park walk-in's?

*No. There is consideration of people parking their cars close by at residential settings. However, there is regular communication about this with residents.*

### Recommendations and Actions

Following consideration by members of the Task and Finish Group the recommendations below were agreed:

1. With the exception of the anomaly of a £2 increase at Great Notley Country Park the other increases should be put to the public as part of the consultation.
2. The use of ANPR should be encouraged across all Country Parks. The Task and Finish Group recognised the initial outlay costs.
3. Country Park car park enforcers should be supplied with video cameras.
4. The concessions policy should be reviewed.
5. The consultation document should include detail of all the available attractions at each Country Park.

**AGENDA ITEM 7  
PSEG/03/18**

**PLACE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18 (ADOPTED BY SEPT 2017 COMMITTEE MEETING)**

**Approach to topic selection – where can the committee conduct reviews quickly, influence change and make a difference to the residents of Essex.**

<b>Date/Timing</b>	<b>Issue/Topic</b>	<b>Focus/other comments</b>	<b>Approach</b>
December 2017 – January 2018	Country Parks car parking consultation	T&F Group for the Committee met in December 2017 to help frame the consultation due in 2018	(i) Task and Finish Group Dec '17 (ii) Report back to Committee Jan '18 (iii) Follow-up date Jul '18
Ongoing until December 2017/January 2018	Localism and Subsidiarity Task and Finish Group	Scoping undertaken and four meetings until December with a report to the full Committee in January 2018 with recommendations and actions for the relevant Cabinet Member(s)	(iv) Task and Finish Group (v) Follow-up date Sep '18
January 2018	Libraries	Report on the Mobile libraries consultation; and to receive an update on static libraries public engagement	Full committee briefing
February 2018	Localism and Subsidiarity	Report back from the Task and Finish Group	(i) Timing TBC after further discussions with key officers (ii) Could overlap with remit of other committees so there could be an opportunity for joint working.
February 2018	Highways and Transportation	Opportunity to learn about issues within the portfolio	(i) Full committee briefing
February 2018	Air Quality Monitoring and Control	To establish the Task and Finish Group – motion at Full Council December 2017	(ii) Task and Finish Group (iii) Follow-up date subject to above
February 2018	Passenger Transport and Bus Withdrawal Process		Full committee briefing
Spring 2018	Moving Around Essex		Task and Finish Group
TBC	Footways		Task and Finish Group

**AGENDA ITEM 7  
PSEG/03/18**

July 2018	Country Parks car parking consultation	Implementation review report from relevant Cabinet Member	Full Committee
September 2018	Localism and Subsidiarity	Implementation review report from relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Full Committee

		<b>AGENDA ITEM 8</b>
		<b>PSEG/04/18</b>
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Place Services and Economic Growth Policy &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18 January 2018</b>	
<b>FUTURE COMMITTEE DATES</b>		
<b>Enquiries to:</b>	<b>Robert Fox, Senior Democratic Services 033301 34585 robert.fox@essex.gov.uk</b>	

Please note the future meeting activity dates for the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year June 2018 through to April 2019.

Please can Members ensure that they reserve the whole day in their diaries as these activity dates may comprise a variety of committee work across the full day including formal public meetings, briefings, task and finish group meetings, and visits:

- Thursday, 21 June 2018
- Thursday, 19 July 2018
- Thursday, 20 September 2018
- Thursday, 18 October 2018
- Thursday, 22 November 2018
- Thursday, 13 December 2018
- Thursday, 17 January 2019
- Thursday, 21 February 2019
- Thursday, 21 March 2019
- Thursday, 18 April 2019

Please also ensure that you have the remaining activity dates for this municipal year in your diary as follows:

- Thursday, 22 February 2018
- Thursday, 22 March 2018
- Thursday, 19 April 2018
- Thursday, 17 May 2018