

		AGENDA ITEM 10
		PSEG/06/15
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	26 March 2015	
COUNTRY PARKS CAR PARKING CHARGES (Minute 7/ December 2014)		
Enquiries to:	Christine Sharland, Scrutiny Officer 01245 430450 Christine.sharland@essex.gov.uk	

At its meeting in December 2014 (Minute 7) Councillor Hirst, Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment, invited the Committee's views upon proposals for changes to country park car parking charges that he is consulting upon.

Following the meeting confirmation was sent the Cabinet Member that there was a consensus that the Committee supported the changes to the car park charges as set out in the consultation, and recognised that there is a need to reduce the gap between expenditure and revenue.

Attached at the Appendix of this report is a letter from Councillor Hirst advising the Committee on the outcome of the consultation.

Action Required by the Committee:

To note the Cabinet Member's update on the outcome of the consultation on proposed changes to country park car parking charges



To: Councillor Simon Walsh,
Chairman of the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee

25 February 2015

Dear Councillor Walsh

**Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee
Outcome of Consultation on Country Parks Car Parking Charges**

I am writing to formally confirm the outcome of the public consultation on the proposed new charges in the Country Parks which took place from early December until the 14th January (excluding Hadleigh¹ and Great Notley). The aim of the consultation was to inform visitors of the proposed new charging model and to gain their views on the charging bands.

The proposed charges for Great Notley were endorsed by the Joint Venture Partnership Board (JVPB) on 23rd January. The public consultation started on the 2nd February and is due to close on 16th March. All responses will be considered as part of the decision making process and will be reviewed by the JVPB on 29th April. The charges, if approved, will be implemented in early Summer 2015 to coincide with the opening of the new pay on exit system being installed at the park.

Consultation Feedback

Of the thirteen comments received, seven commented that the proposed charges were too high. For the majority, this appeared to be linked to the length of time they expected to be using the park on their visits being over 3 hours which represents only 20% of visitors. However, car parking is being reviewed with the aim of offering better value charges that will improve convenience and flexibility for all visitors. The longer stay visitors will be impacted by the introduction of variable charging, but it will make the system fairer to all with visitors paying for the time they have spent in the park, rather than a flat rate fee regardless of the length of stay. The proposed charging bands are in response to previous visitor feedback and based on information gained from benchmarking against similar sites. A suggestion to reduce the first hours charge to below 50 pence was also received but this would not be feasible as it would impact on the charging rates recommended for the other bands. There will continue to be a 15 minute grace period for all vehicles using the pay and display car parks.

80% of country park visitors stay in the parks for up to 3 hours. The proposed maximum charge at the majority of parks for this length of stay is £4.00 and, with the average occupancy per car being 2.7 people, this would equate to less than £1.50 per person. 40%

¹ Hadleigh Farm and Country Park Olympic Mountain Bike Venue is under construction until March 2015 when it will be fully operational. Charging for car parking will be considered as a sporting venue.

of our visitors stay in the parks for up to 2 hours and the proposed maximum charge of £3.00 results in a cost of just over £1.00 per person. These benchmark favourably against alternative family excursions.

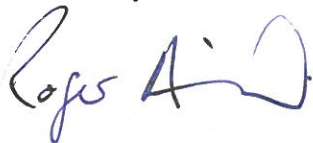
There were observations made regarding the differentiation in pricing between Thorndon and the other parks. The variation is to reflect the provision and service offered at each of the parks. Attractions such as the Gruffalo trail at Thorndon are very popular with families and, with the visitor centre offering refreshments throughout the day, means they provide a greater offer than the other parks. The higher charges at this site provide great value for money considering no entrance fee is charged to use the facilities.

There were also comments that having to purchase your ticket at the start of your visit (which applies to all parks except Great Notley where a pay on exit solution is to be implemented), would spoil the customers' enjoyment of the park due to having to ensure they did not exceed the amount of time purchased. Customers currently have to pay at the start of their visit and we do not believe that this needs to change; we also believe that visitors will soon embrace the new system which is the same as they experience it at places such as Maldon Promenade Park and also in town centres (e.g. when visiting the cinema or shopping). However, the level of income from the different charging bands will be closely monitored and changes made to the system if necessary to ensure it works efficiently and is meeting our customers' expectations.

There was also the suggestion that the season tickets should be promoted. This will continue and all new car parking signage will aim to increase the awareness of the season tickets.

After taking into consideration the feedback received as a result of the consultation, it was recommended by PLT on 19th January that the charges should be adopted. A Key Decision was prepared and confirmed on 20th February. The charges are due to be implemented throughout the parks week commencing 2nd March 2015.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Roger Hirst,

Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment