

		AGENDA ITEM 6
		GTP/06/15
Meeting:	GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK JOINT VENTURE PARTNERSHIP BOARD	
Date:	29 April 2015	
<u>Great Notley Country Park Car Parking Consultation</u>		
Enquiries to:	Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks Tim.Dixon@essex.gov.uk , 07717 867628	
Purpose		
<p>This report is to advise the JVPB of the feedback received as part of the public consultation regarding the proposed variable banding charges for car parking from 2nd February to 16th March 2015.</p> <p>As a result of this, the report makes the recommendation that the proposed charges are taken forward at Great Notley Country Park on installation of the new charge parking equipment that will enable visitors to pay on exit on 1 June 2015.</p>		
Background		
<p>Essex County Council Country Parks aims to improve the experience of our 150,000 customers and is driving towards to becoming cost neutral, and charging for car parking is the Country Parks' main source of income. All of the income generated from car parking goes directly towards offsetting the costs of managing the parks.</p> <p>Car parking has been reviewed in Essex Country Parks to provide convenience and flexibility for visitors. Variable charging models, based on the length of stay, have been proposed to benefit short stay visitors and create a fairer system for all users.</p> <p>Essex Country Parks introduced variable charging across all the parks (except Great Notley and Hadleigh Farm and Country Park Olympic Mountain Bike Venue) in early March 2015. This replaced the previous flat rate charge at the parks and removed the reduced flat rate winter charge that applied to Thorndon and Great Notley to reflect the shorter time visitors stay. There has been very little impact on the ground since the new charges have been implemented; with positive feedback relating to the short term charges.</p> <p>The introduction of a banded charging system takes into account and provides for, those visitors who only wish to stay for very short periods of time, offering a half hour charge and hourly rates. Short stay visitors could in effect be paying less than half of the fee they are currently charged.</p>		

Proposed Charges

The proposed charges at Great Notley are as follows:

% of visitors per band	Band	Length of Stay	Charge
1.5%	1	Up to 30 mins	£1.00
1.5%	2	Up to 1 hour	£2.00
37%	3	Up to 2 hours	£3.00
40%	4	Up to 3 hours	£4.00
20%	5	Over 3 hours	£5.00

It was agreed that the proposal was to be taken forward for consultation, as it provided the best value for visitors and compares well to locations we have benchmarked against.

This option would deliver an additional annual income of ca.£11,000 excluding VAT. The figures have been based on 2013/14 visitor numbers, and include assumptions of increases in visitor numbers for the high ropes course at Great Notley Country Park to commence from summer 2015.

Consultation Method & Feedback

The aim of the consultation was to inform visitors of the proposed charging model and gain their views on the proposed charging bands.

Consultation Method

Posters were displayed within Great Notley Country Park inviting visitors to e-mail or write their views on the proposals from early February with the 6 week consultation finishing on 16th March. Users of the football facilities operated at Great Notley were contacted by letter to notify them of the consultation. Great Notley Parish Council was also notified of the consultation through the Head of Country Parks at a meeting to discuss the Park.

In addition, details on the consultation were provided on the Country Parks website <http://www.visitparks.co.uk/>, Twitter, Facebook and on the ECC intranet.

Summary of Consultation Responses

A low response was received to the consultation when considering the 150,000 users of the park, with 7 comments via e-mail/letter and 9 directly relating to the proposed charges on Twitter. The consultation feedback is attached which includes responses to the comments/questions raised. Some additional comments were also made around the use of contactless payment and the proposed new pay on foot solution which have been included.

Appendix A gives details of comments received.

The summary below highlights the main comments received.

The majority of the responses received indicated that they felt the proposed charges are too high. One person commented that the current charges are already too high and drives people to park in alternative locations in the local area which are free of charge.

The proposed charging bands are based on information gained from benchmarking against a range of sites and compare favourably to these. Car parking is being reviewed with the

aim of offering better value charges that will improve convenience and flexibility for 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 introduction of a banded charging system takes into account and provides for, those visitors who can only stay for very short periods of time, offering a half hour charge and hourly rates. Short stay visitors could in effect be paying less than half of the fee they are currently charged.

There were also concerns raised from an organised dog walking group who uses the park once a month and for their annual charity dog show that the charges were too high and if they were to be adopted then it is unlikely that they will continue to use the park. The new charges do offer flexibility to users, linked to their length of stay, and any formal use of the site for an event can be negotiated separately.

There were concerns raised regarding charges for those parents dropping off children to take part in activities such as football. Part of the Pay on Exit solution will include a free 15 minute drop off period which will be available free of charge. After 15 minutes car park tariffs will apply. For those who visit the park regularly, it is not proposed to increase the charges for car parking season tickets for local residents to reduce the impact of change for customers. These will remain at £65 for 12 months and £40 for 6 months, reduced to £45 and £30 respectively for Blue badge Holders and over 60's. ECC has maintained these prices since 2012, and sell around 1,800 per annum.

There were two comments around the facilities at the park including one around resurfacing. 2014/15 has seen investment in upgrading the car park access road, 500m of footpath and installing a new surfaced footpath across the play mound.

Recommendation

After taking into consideration the low level of feedback received as a result of the consultation, It is recommended that the proposed charges are adopted. Following this, a Cabinet Member Action (CMA) will be prepared for agreement by the ECC Cabinet Member. It should be noted that there has been very little negative impact following the price increases already implemented in the other ECC run Country Parks.

The proposed milestones for implementation are as follows:

Activity	Timescale
Partnership Board approves the proposed charges	29 April 2015
Cabinet Member Action prepared and approved to enable new charges	8 May 2015
New car parking equipment and new signage installed to enable visitors to pay on exit	11 May to 29 May 2015
Pay on exit and new charges commence	1 June 2015

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 in terms of the choice in length of stay.