

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	26 th January 2016
Subject: Proposed increase to Car Park Charges – Burnham Beeches	Public
Report of: The Superintendent of The Commons	For Decision

Summary

Car Park Charges at weekends and Bank Holidays were introduced at Burnham Beeches in August 2011. The charge has remained at £2 per day since that date.

As part of its Service Based Review commitment the Division is required to achieve an additional £20,000 income per annum from the car park at Burnham Beeches, commencing April 2016.

Benchmarking has been carried out and various options considered by the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group (BBCG). The delivery timetable is three months and to that end the two most feasible options and associated views of the BBCG are shown in the main body of this report.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve Option 1 i.e. to raise the weekend and Bank Holiday car park charge from £2.00 to £3.00 per day commencing April 1st 2016.
- Note that further research will be carried out to facilitate future increases in parking charges should they become necessary.

Main Report

Background

1. Car Park charges were introduced at Burnham Beeches in August 2011 following local benchmarking and consultation exercises. The charges were introduced at weekends and bank holidays at a rate of £2.00 per day. The charges have remained at that rate since their introduction.

- The car park machines were originally purchased in 2007 and whilst they are reliable and robust they are limited to payment by coin. They have a life expectancy of a further two to three years.

Current Position

- As part of its Service Based Review commitment the Division is required to seek an additional £20,000 income per annum from the car parks at Burnham Beeches commencing April 2016.
- Various charging models were drawn up by the Head Ranger and their implications considered by the Superintendent and the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group.
- Two options remain. Both meet or exceed the £20,000 increased income target and can be delivered using the existing car park machines.

Local Benchmarking

- A benchmarking exercise across other local open spaces was conducted.

Table 1.

Site	Owner	Charge	Period
Burnham Beeches	City of London	£2.00 per day	Weekends and BH's
Dorney Lake	Eton College	£2.50/day	7 days a week
Black Park	Buckinghamshire County Council	£3.50 per day £2.50 per day	Weekends and BH's & weekdays in August Weekdays
Farnham Common Car Park	South Bucks District Council	£0.40 to £4.50 On a sliding hourly scale	7days a week
Wendover Woods	Forestry Commission	£3.20 ½ day £5.90 All day	7 days a week
Runnymede	National Trust	£3.00 1-2 hours £4.50 2-3 hours £6.00 All day	7 days per week
Cliveden	National Trust	£10.50 adult £5.00 child	7 days per week

- Table 1 indicates the wide variation in pricing across local open space car parks. Parking charges at Burnham Beeches sit at the lower end of the range and are closest to those that provide the most similar services.
- An increase from £2.00 to £3.00 brings Burnham Beeches into line with its nearest open spaces i.e. Black Park and Dorney Lake.
- Burnham Beeches is the only large open space that does not currently charge for use of its car parks each day of the week.

10. Parking charges at Burnham Beeches must compete with the car park at Farnham Common which is 250m from the site.

OPTIONS

Option 1 - Increase weekend and bank holiday charges from £2.00 to £3.00/day.

11. This is the simplest and most achievable option in the given timescale.

Table 2 – figures are based on the 3 year car park income average.

All figures are net of VAT & include an anticipated 10% reduction in annual car numbers	
Charging at weekends & bank holidays	
£2/day (current state)	£ 58,000 - £60,000
£3/day (expected state)	£ 85,000 - £90,000
Expected loss of weekday donation income	- £5,000
Overall increase in income	£22,000 – £25,000

12. Table 2 indicates that an additional £22,000 - £25,000 will be generated by raising the car park charge from £2 to £3 per day on weekends and bank holidays.

Issues arising

13. Mid week voluntary donation income of £15,000/annum is commonly generated by the car park machines. It is estimated that this could fall to around £10,000 per annum when mandatory charges are increased.
14. A drop in car numbers of 10% is anticipated at weekends and Bank Holidays although this may be a temporary reduction.
15. Existing enforcement and administration processes can accommodate this option without incurring additional costs.

Option 2. Introduce weekday charges of £1.00 per day whilst maintaining weekend and bank holiday rates at £2.00.

Table 3 - based on the 3 year car park income average.

All figures are net of VAT. Includes a 15% reduction in annual car numbers	
£1/day	£57,000
Less current weekday donation income	- £15,000
Overall increase in income	£42,000

16. Table 3 indicates that an additional £42,000 would be generated by introducing a £1.00/day weekday charge in addition to the £2/day weekend charge.

Issues arising

17. Weekday charges would replace the voluntary donation option so £15,000 has been removed from the total generated by Option 2.
18. A drop in car numbers of 15% is anticipated across the week.
19. The introduction of a weekday charge may be locally contentious given the high volume of regular dog walkers using the site Monday to Friday.
20. The introduction of 7 day per week charges using the existing machines would require a fundamental review of the site's car park charge administration procedures. Enforcement patrols would need to be extended to cover the Monday to Friday period and this would necessitate significant alterations to current Ranger duties with consequent impacts on their work programmes and the management of volunteers.
21. Whilst in the longer term it is possible to find ways of accommodating a change to 7 day per week charges it should be delivered with careful thought, consultation and forewarning. Members of the BBCG were appreciative of this issue and the associated risks.
22. The Burnham Beeches Cafe operator expressed his concern that the introduction of week day charges could have a significant impact on his business, particularly as they would fall closely on the heels of the introduction of Dog Control Orders. Again members of the BBCG were sympathetic to this risk.

Proposal

23. Option 1 was favoured by the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group and is supported by the Superintendent as it:
 - a. Meets the SBR target figure and is sufficient to accommodate a small drop in car numbers, variations caused by extended periods of poor weather during visiting season and a decrease in voluntary mid week donations.
 - b. Allows time to review options afforded by improvements in technology whilst reducing the immediate need to invest in new machines.
 - c. Minimises the impact on the Burnham Beeches Café.
 - d. Is deliverable within the required 3 month timescale.
 - e. Is politically expedient i.e. is currently the least contentious option.
 - f. Avoids increases in administration costs and alterations to Ranger duties.

Implications

24. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out with regard to Option 1 and its findings are included as Appendix 1.
25. Option 1 represents a 33% increase in the current car park charge although it would be the first in more than 4 years, and continues to charge only on those days that experience the highest demand. As such it is not considered likely

to have a significant impact on visitor numbers nor otherwise impact upon the site's Charitable Objectives.

26. Further, Option 1 meets the immediate financial challenge and has some built in resilience to accommodate 'poor income years'. Whilst it is unlikely to be a popular decision it is considered to be the least contentious given the recent local context.
27. From the above the Superintendent considers the proposed car park charge to be reasonable.
28. Option 2 is not currently favoured by the BBCG or the Superintendent but remains a future possibility. To that end it is proposed that further work is carried out to investigate week day charging models. This will ensure that resources (administration costs, impact on Ranger patrols), infrastructure (machines, remote telephony etc) and political sensitivities are properly considered and resolved so that charges may be introduced should the need arise.

Legal Implications

29. Section 9 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1977 allows the City Corporation to provide parking places for vehicles at Burnham Beeches and to make reasonable charges.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

30. The project ensures that Burnham Beeches will meet the requirement to increase its car park income by £20,000 per annum.
31. Weekday charges as indicated in Option 2 remain a longer term possibility.

Conclusion

32. Burnham Beeches is required to increase its income from car park charges by £20,000 per annum as part of the Service Based Review programme.
33. Any increase in charges is likely to be contentious and carries reputational risk.
34. Option 1 meets the current income target figure and is deliverable within the current resources and given timeframe. It is considered to represent a reasonable charge and will help fund the charitable objects of the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common charity without impacting on those objects
35. It is recognised that it may be necessary to introduce weekday charges at some point and further research will be carried out to facilitate that process.

Appendices

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Background Papers:

Report to Epping Forest and Commons Committee – 7th March 2011

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