

Committee(s) Epping Forest Consultative – For consideration Epping Forest and Commons – For decision	Date(s): 21 10 2020 16 11 2020
Subject: Epping Forest Car Parking –Introduction of Parking Charges (SEF 28/20)	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Consideration
Report author: Martin Newnham– Epping Forest	

Summary

The majority of Epping Forest's 4.2 million annual visits arrive by car. The Forest provides 55 car parks offering in the region of 950 spaces free of charge to the public.

Whilst car ownership has grown by 100% over the past 50 years, car parking provision in Epping Forest has not kept pace to ensure the continued statutory protection of the Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest designations. In addition to growing demand from Forest visitors, car parks are also experiencing significant pressure from commuter parking; vehicles displaced by the expansion of residents parking zone restrictions (largely created to deal with commuter parking) and motorists seeking to avoid local on-street and off-road car park charging schemes.

This report recommends the introduction of a car park charging scheme in order to maintain access to car parking for genuine Forest use, to manage competing demands on the space and to generate sufficient income to offset the estimated cost of continued car park provision. Charging would also address wider strategic aspirations in Local Plans to foster modal shift, while incentivising visits to free Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces, known as SANGS, created close to the Forest and funded by new residential developments.

The report proposes the use of available powers to manage parking through phased introduction of charges starting with an initial 14 car parks that currently experience the most parking issues. This will mirror the practice of sister City of London Corporation Open Spaces sites and competing open space attractions.

Using cashless collection technology through card or mobile phone payment, charges are estimated to generate an annual surplus for reinvestment into car parks and the wider Forest.

Recommendation

Consultative Committee Members are asked to:

- Note the report.
- Offer any comment on the Introduction of Parking Charges for consideration at the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

Main Report

Background

1. There are 55 car parks located across Epping Forest ranging in size from 3 to 200 cars, providing a total parking capacity for 946 vehicles. The current provision of car parking facilities has evolved in a 'piecemeal' fashion, largely formalising areas where vehicle parking has traditionally sought access to the Forest over the past 50 years.
2. The car 'parc' (the total number of licenced and SORN – *Statutory Off-Road Notification* - vehicles in the UK) totalled 19 Million in 1971, rising to 38.2 Million by 2018, a rise of 101% across the last 47 years. Necessarily constrained by the need to protect Epping Forest Land and its special character, especially with regard to the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designations, car parking capacity within the Forest has remained largely unchanged in the face of this dramatic growth in car ownership.
3. The Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 pre-date the subsequent invention of the motor car in 1886. Recognising the need to manage the growth of car ownership and car parking pressure at Epping Forest the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1977 granted additional powers to provide car parks and charge for car parking.
4. A report to the Epping Forest and Commons committee of 10 February 2003 (SEF15/03) sought to rationalise car parking provision across the Forest, gradually moving main car parks to the edge of the Forest while selecting small and problematic car parks for closure. While the closures in the report were not implemented, key strategic car parks identified in the report were upgraded as 'visitor hubs' in the 2009-14 Heritage Lottery Fund *Branching Out* Project.
5. Since the 10 February 2003 report to your Committee and the changes to parking provision made by the *Branching Out* Project, the urban areas surrounding the Forest have seen an unprecedented rise in on-street parking restrictions. This includes the establishment of Urban Clearways; the creation of on-street car parking charges; the growth of Residents Parking Zones, largely to maintain parking for residents in areas popular with commuters, and the expansion of charged parking at neighbouring Transport for London station car parks and adjacent hospitals. Consequently, many drivers have sought to utilise the free Forest car parks for a range of non-Forest uses, preventing access for legitimate Forest visitors.

Current Position

6. The maintenance and operation of the car parks in Epping Forest is a substantial cost for the Charitable Trust's revenue budget. These costs include grounds maintenance; cyclical maintenance of surfacing; opening and

closing gates, together with the provision and cleansing of infrastructure such as signs, bins and vehicle controls.

7. A report commissioned from URS consultants in 2014 identified the significant impact of cars and car parks on both visitor enjoyment and the Forest environment including from noise and air pollution, fly tipping, littering and the loss of habitat. Conversely, the Epping Forest Visitor Survey (2009-14) and further surveys in 2017 and 2019 reveal that around two thirds of visitors travel to the Forest by car.
8. In addition to growing demand for car parking space from Forest visitors, car parks are also experiencing significant pressure from non-Forest users including:
 - **London commuters** who are seeking to park their vehicles close to Transport for London Central Line stations at Epping; Theydon Bois; Loughton; Woodford; Snaresbrook and Wanstead together with Chingford; Manor Park and Wanstead Park Overground stations
 - **Residents and visitors displaced by parking restrictions** through Urban Clearway and No parking or Waiting yellow line restrictions introduced to manage traffic flows, and public safety schemes which reduce the amount of road frontage available for vehicle parking during peak hours.
 - **Local residents displaced by the expansion of Residents Parking Zone (RPZ) restrictions.** RPZs have largely been created to deal with pressures from commuter parking. The resulting pressures on the reduced range of car parking opportunities and punitive charges for second and third vehicles associated with individual properties is encouraging 'refuge' parking by residents.
 - **Motorists seeking to avoid local on-street and car park charging schemes.** The introduction of hospital visitor parking charges in 2000, and major price increases in 2010 have displaced considerable parking onto Forest land. Similar charges for most local authority car parks have also encouraged shoppers to park in Forest car parks.
 - **Quietway and Mini-Holland cycling schemes** –while cycleways are providing valuable modal shift improvements the 'land take' has also reduced on-street parking capacity.
9. A mechanism is required therefore, to maintain access to car parking for genuine Forest uses, while discouraging parking for other purposes. Income generation could also help to offset the estimated cost of continued car park provision.

Proposals

10. The report proposes that a rolling programme of car parking charges be implemented in the majority of car parks across Epping Forest. This is

necessary to prevent displacement of parking if only some car parks implement charging. However, due to the cost of installation and monitoring, the introduction of charging will need to be incremental. It is proposed that the following car parks will have charging introduced in this first phase as a priority:

Wanstead Flats:

- Centre Road
- Alexandra Lake
- Jubilee

This will tackle vehicle displacement from resident parking zones and commuter use.

Leyton Flats:

- Hollow Pond
- Boathouse
- Eagle Pond

This will tackle commuter use and displacement from hospital car park (where charges apply).

Chingford Hub:

- Bury Road,
- Chingford Golf Course
- Connaught Water
- Barn Hoppitt (and seasonal overflow)
- Connaught Tennis Club

This will tackle commuter use at Bury Road and Golf Course and prevent cars then moving up to Barn Hoppitt, Tennis Club and Connaught Water.

High Beach:

- Pillow Mounds
- Generals Ride
- High Beach Visitor Centre

This tackles the intensity of use in this area and anti-social behaviour. Wellington Hill and Claypit Hill will be included when re-opened. Displacement generated from charging in this area may create a need for charging at Hill Wood in the future but as this is most extensively used by motorcyclists it is not considered a priority in this first round. The introduction of car parking charges should wherever possible be integrated into wider schemes encouraging modal shift – *the delivery of policy objectives through a move away from particular transport types* - away from motor vehicle use to other forms of more sustainable transportation including pedestrian access, cycling and public transport. Over time income from charges could be used to encourage this change through the creation of local access points around the edge of the Forest near to housing, bus stops and rail stations to provide a more attractive welcome for visitors.

10. One of the wider schemes into which charging needs to fit is the provision of a network of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGS) and the necessity to prevent adverse impacts on Epping Forest SAC. Epping Forest District Council (EFDC), in its consultation draft Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (Section 1, paragraph 1.26), made it clear that it wished to “*work with the Conservators of Epping Forest to explore the potential for introducing car parking charges*” so as help reduce the pressure of visits to the Forest and make alternative sites or SANGS attractive propositions for activities like daily dog-walking.
11. Car parking charging can also assist in communicating the message that Epping Forest is special and needs looking after and such charging is one way in which visitors can contribute to its continued protection and improvements in access.
12. In addition to the Forest’s visitor surveys the introduction of car parking charges will over time provide more detailed and valuable information on the number of visitors and duration of stay for each car park location which can be used to inform operational changes.

Range of Charges

PMS Consultants commissioned by the City Corporation analysed parking charges in operation in areas surrounding Epping Forest car parks. It is proposed to adapt charging according to local benchmarks with incremental charging depending on length of stay.

13. The charges will reflect the most common length of time visitors spend in the Forest at one to two hours. The revenue raised at these amounts are projected to be sufficient to cover the cost of operating charging in car parks and produce a surplus for reinvestment.
14. The option of a free period of parking will not be progressed due to the increased complexity of monitoring and additional administration costs. The experience of similar provisions in other areas has shown that free periods were open to high levels of abuse leading to complaints and appeals where enforcement notices have been issued.
15. Two types of payment options will be provided to include: -
 - Pay & Display Machine – Card payment only
 - Pay by Phone – Telephone call or via the service providers web application
16. Due to the isolated location and nature of the car parks, payment by cash is not recommended as conventional machines will be highly susceptible to theft. The exclusively cashless payment approach is now being adopted by many local authorities and car park operators across the UK and reduces the costs associated with cash collection and maintenance of ticket machines.

17. **Concessions** - It is recommended that parking should remain free for Blue Badge concessions and Motorcyclists.
18. **Emissions-based charging** - With the introduction of Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ's) in the southern parts of the Forest and Clean Air Zones (CAZ's) in many towns and cities it is recommended to consider moving to emissions-based charging at a later stage. This will require Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) which will have a higher cost than the initial scheme and so is proposed to be reviewed as a potential option after the second year of operating charges.
19. **Season Tickets** – A significant numbers of visitors make multiple daily visits to Forest car parks. It is proposed to provide a season ticket to recognise regular visiting. The season ticket will have a cap on length of stay to prevent it becoming a cheap option for commuters.
20. **Tenants/ Facility Use** - Specific arrangements will be made to allow facility users time limited free parking. For example, players at Chingford Golf Course will be able to park for the duration of their round.

Service Delivery Options

21. A number of service delivery options are being considered including:
- A. Complete external service provision
 - B. Complete internal service provision
 - C. Internal service/enforcement provision with external contractor processing appeals, DVLA and debt management
22. These are being assessed against the criteria of
- Optimised level of income generation
 - Shortest implementation route
 - Optimum service delivery and level of management control
 - Public perception and support

Implications

23. **Corporate & Strategic** Car park charging supports the Open Spaces Departmental Business Plan objective to provide safe, secure and accessible Open Spaces and services for the benefit of London. Improving car park facilities and accessibility promotes opportunities to value and enjoy the outdoors for recreation, learning and healthy living; and developing a long-term management strategy will help protect the integrity of the environment.
24. **Financial:** Financial details will be presented to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee in a later report, but initial consultants estimates indicated that an in year pay back for the initial outlay is possible.

25. **Legal:** Section 8(2) of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1977 gives the Conservators the power to provide parking spaces on Forest Land in order to improve opportunities for the enjoyment of the Forest by the public. There is also a power to make reasonable charges for the use of parking spaces under section 8(4) of the 1977 Act.
26. **Equalities & diversity:** Blue badge users will receive free parking for a capped number of hours. Epping Forest is well served by public transport and is accessible by foot from many urban centres, charging is not therefore considered as unduly detrimental to those on lower income. An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision has been undertaken by the City Corporation. At this stage, it is considered that there are no negative impacts on the protected equality groups.
27. **Charity:** Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity.

Conclusion

28. Decisive action is needed to ensure Epping Forest's full car parking capacity is available to Forest visitors, rather than third party use displaced by road restrictions and charging regimes. Charging will help to resolve these issues, provide a surplus for reinvestment in Forest facilities and reflect wider Local Plan objectives to help establish SANGS . A cost-based scheme will also provide improved data on visitor usage and help to deliver more sustainable ways of visiting the Forest.

Background Papers

- Epping Forest and Commons committee report 7 July 2014

Martin Newnham

Head Forest Keeper

T: 020 7332 5310

E: martin.newnham@cityoflondon.gov.uk