

<b>Committee(s)</b> Epping Forest Consultative – For consideration Epping Forest and Commons – For decision	<b>Dated</b> 21 10 2020 16 11 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest Car Parking – Introduction of Parking Charges (28/20b)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>4,11,12</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>£170,000</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>Local Risk</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Open Spaces	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Martin Newnham	

### 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 purposely not matched this growth 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 significant 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(s)**

Members are asked to:

- Note comments made by the Consultative Committee on the proposed scheme of charges.
- Approve the proposal to implement a car park charging scheme in Epping Forest.

### **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.

## Current Position

5. 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.
6. 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. Moreover, 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.
7. Since the 10 February 2003 report to your Committee and the changes to parking provision made by the *Branching Out* Project, in addition to growing demand for car parking space from Forest visitors, car parks are also experiencing significant pressure from non-Forest users including:
  - a. **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;
  - b. **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;
  - c. **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;
  - d. **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;
  - e. **Quietway and Mini-Holland cycling schemes.** While cycleways are providing valuable modal shift improvements the 'land take' has also reduced on-street parking capacity.
8. Given the clear pressure on limited car parking capacity, together with the significant cost of provision, a mechanism is required, to maintain access to car parking for genuine Forest uses, while discouraging parking for other

purposes. Income generation will help to offset the estimated cost of continued car park provision.

## Proposals

9. 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 the long-term 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 Pond

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

### *Leyton Flats:*

- Hollow Ponds
- Boathouse
- Eagle Pond

This will tackle commuter use and the displacement from hospital car parks by hospital visitors and NHS staff and contractors (where charges apply).

### *Chingford Hub:*

- Bury Road,
- The Caddie House, 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 consequent displacement to Barn Hoppitt, Tennis Club and Connaught Water.

### *High Beach:*

- Pillow Mounds
- Generals Ride
- High Beach Visitor Centre

This will tackle the intensity of use in this area and anti-social behaviour. Wellington Hill and Claypit Hill may be included when re-opened.

10. 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 phase.
11. 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.
12. 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 to help reduce the pressure of visits to the Forest and make alternative sites or SANGS attractive propositions for activities, like daily dog-walking.
13. 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 visitor access.
14. 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**

15. 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.
16. 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 in the management of car parks.
17. 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.

18. 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. Testing by PMS Consultants suggest that there are viable phone signals for most of the proposed phase 1 sites
19. 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.
20. **Concessions** - It is recommended that parking should remain free for Blue Badge concessions and Motorcyclists.
21. **Emissions-based charging** - With the introduction of Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ's) in the southern parts of the Forest in October 2021 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.
22. **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 the length of stay to prevent it becoming a cheap option for commuters.
23. **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**

24. 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
25. 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

## Timeframe

26. A further report will be presented to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee at their meeting of January 2021 to present options for the charging tariff for agreement.
27. Following this, a public consultation exercise will take place for 6 weeks. Detailed comments from key stakeholders and partners such as tenants, neighbouring local authorities and parks, will be proactively sought.

## Options

28. Two options are presented for your Committee's consideration:

28.1 Option 1 - Agree to the proposal that charging is introduced in an initial 14 car parks. Officers will finalise the detail of the process and your Committee will be asked to approve the tariff at the Epping Forest and Commons Committee in January 2021. This will generate substantial income to be reinvested into car park improvements and Forest management. Overuse by residents and commuters will be alleviated reserving car parks for Forest users. Better visitor information will be generated that will help with sustainable visitor management in the longer term. **This option is recommended.**

28.2 Option 2 - Do not agree to introduce parking charges in Epping Forest. This will continue to leave Epping Forest as an anomaly offering free parking next to residential parking zones, underground and train stations and other parks and venues where charging applies. Overuse by non-Forest users will continue to increase repair and maintenance costs to the charity. **This option is not recommended.**

## Strategic Implications

29. 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.

## Financial Implications

30. 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.

31. **Resource:** The estimated forecast budget for the scheme indicates that an in year pay back for the initial outlay is possible, depending on how the initial investment is managed. A benchmarked car parking tariff will be presented to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee at their meeting in January 2021, with options for approval.
32. **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.
33. **Equalities:** 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.
34. **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.
35. **Climate:** The implementation of car park charging can play a role in promoting modal shift to other forms of transport reducing reliance on cars to access the Forest, which in turn should have a positive impact on carbon emissions and air quality.

### **Epping Forest Consultative Committee**

36. The Consultative Committee considered this report at their meeting of 21 October 2020 and the following was noted: (responses included here for clarification)
- Concern that the introduction is contrary to undertakings given in the narrative to the Epping Forest Act 1878 that the City of London Corporation would meet the costs of managing Epping Forest  
**The Act predates the introduction of the motor car, along with many other legislative and population changes that have significantly changed the context in which the Forest first operated 142 years ago.**
  - Concern for the impact on low income families  
**Charging will be incremental. More work will be undertaken to promote active travel options regarding accessing the Forest locally without using a car.**

- Concern that people are wary of using public transport as an alternative to cars during the pandemic / public transport provision is not adequate

This may not still be the case by the time the scheme is implemented. There is access by public transport to lots of the Forest. This is promoted in a range of walks designed to lead to and from public transport hubs. Signposting schemes are also in development along with local signage to increase awareness of local access points to the Forest.

- Importance of synchronising with resident parking schemes – which often allow free parking at weekends – Forest users will use residential areas as an alternative

This has been considered and will influence local charges.

- Could a voluntary charge be levied instead?

This was the system for many years at our sister site Burnham Beeches, however donations were low, and a formal charging system has now been installed.

- Concern that some older people do not use smartphones and will only be able to pay cash

In 2019, at least one adult in 79% of UK households owned or leased a smartphone, with 72% using a 4G connection. The option of a season ticket may be suitable for those individuals wishing to pay by phone.

The isolated nature of many car parks and the cost and risk of collecting cash makes the scheme prohibitive.

- Will cars be towed?

There is currently no intention to tow vehicles as a parking enforcement measure. Parking penalties will be managed through penalty charges.

- Some Members saw the scheme as simply a method to raise revenue and requested more honesty on this approach. There was also a concern that if Epping Forest were to raise income in this matter the City Corporation's contribution may diminish further.

The scheme has multiple aspirations as identified in the report. The pressures of austerity have already seen efficiency savings in relation to the City Corporation's deficit funding and these are likely to continue irrespective of the Forest's income generating activity.

- Need to invest in cycle parking at car parks to show cycling as a viable alternative transport method

Noted. All new/refurbished car parks now include these as standard.

- Will people be willing to pay if the surface is poor – need to tarmac?

Experience elsewhere shows that people will pay – for example Hatfield Forest, however it will be our intention to resurface and make improvements if sufficient income is generated.

- Ensure sufficient disabled spaces are available.

This has been audited and is sufficient on peak days at present but additional bays can be created if needed.

## **Conclusion**

37. 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 and will provide an income stream to more effectively manage the cost of providing car park facilities. Charging will also reflect wider Local Plan objectives by helping to 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

### **Report author**

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