

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons - for information Epping Forest Consultative – for information	Dated: 17/01/2022 09/02/2022
Subject: Epping Forest Car Park Charging Review (SEF 08/22)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y/N
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director, Environment	For Information
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Summary

In March 2021, your Committee agreed to implement charging for car parking in Epping Forest. The implementation began with Phase 1 in May 2021 and was followed up by Phase 2 in November 2021.

This report provides a review of the car park charging since it began.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. At your Committees of 16 November 2020, 18 January and 8 March 2021 your Committee agreed to a series of proposals for the introduction of car park charging in Epping Forest.
2. A public consultation was held between the January and March 2021 meetings with a summary report presented at the March meeting.
3. Phase 1 commenced on 10 May 2021 with charging introduced in an initial 16 car parks. Phase 2 saw a further 20 of the remaining Epping Forest car parks have charging introduced as of the 8 November 2021. A list of car park locations can be read at Appendix 1.

Current Position

4. The charges have been in place for 6 months at the time of reporting. The 'Car Park Charging Scheme 6 Month Review' (Appendix 2) outlines the progress made to date.
5. This report offers the opportunity to present to your Committee a summary of the main successes and challenges of the introduction of the scheme.

Successes

6. Objectives of the car park charging are being realised;
 - a. *Reduce overuse by residents and commuters to allow sufficient space in car parks for Forest users* - Car parks such as Bury Road and Centre Road that had significant issues with commuter parking have reduced numbers of cars particularly on weekdays meaning that Forest users are now able to find space to park. The maximum stay period is the main factor in reducing commuter car parking and the average dwell time for car park users is now 50% of visits under one hour in duration, and over 75% are under two hours in duration.
 - b. *Reduce overuse in honeypot locations where capacity is regularly exceeded* - There has been a reduction in cars in the High Beach area which has helped with managing the previous over capacity issues as well as reducing car use through the Forest. The introduction of the temporary traffic order during the pandemic with red lines around the village has significantly reduced the dangerous and damaging verge parking and the gating of Pillow Mounds has almost eradicated the previously nightly anti-social behaviour in the area. Therefore, these three interventions will have had a combined effect on usage in the area and a longer monitoring period will be needed to fully assess the impact.
 - c. *Encourage sustainable travel to the Forest, discouraging car usage in environmentally sensitive areas* – the earlier monitoring showed that there was a limited amount of displacement from charged sites to non-charged sites during the first 6 months of operation. Displacement was most evident in the data between July and August, when car numbers dropped off in the charged sites but continued to either show a small increase or a relatively smaller decrease in the non-charged locations. Both charged and non-charged sites followed the same seasonal variations in usage, indicating that the fall off in numbers during the height of summer was generally not a result of charging but was a factor of external issues such as the reopening of other activities post restrictions. In this case the charged-for, mainly 'honeypot' sites would be more susceptible to these changes in visitor pattern than the smaller non-charged sites which are more routinely used by, for example, dog walkers.
 - d. *Generate substantial income to be reinvested into car park improvements and Forest management* – as of 31 October 2021 a surplus to local risk of £170,739 has been generated which will be used to reinvest in the management of the Forest.
7. The season ticket take up has been 60% higher than initially predicted.

8. External partners were engaged, one to administer payments and another to manage enforcement.
9. Forest Keepers continue to manage the opening and closing of the car parks day-to-day as per their normal operating procedures.

Challenges

10. Public opinion remains largely in opposition to having charges applied. From implementation in May until October 2021, the City of London Corporation Epping Forest received 75 written complaints. On social media 130 of 150 comments were negative and at phase 2 implementation more aggressive protest occurred with meters and signage being vandalised.
11. Visitor expectation when charged for parking is that car parks are maintained in a higher quality state of repair. Surplus income generated from car park charging will be reinvested in the management of the Forest including improvements to car parks, such as surfacing. However, such works can only be undertaken gradually due to resource availability and appropriate seasonal weather conditions. During the interim period some car parks may not meet visitor expectation.
12. Similarly, visitors paying to park have a greater feeling of entitlement to park during daylight hours. Opening and closing of the car parks is undertaken by Forest Keepers as part of their normal operating procedures. Consistent dawn/dusk opening and closing times cannot be guaranteed due to issues such as unforeseen staff absence.
13. The season ticket price point (£150) is seen as a barrier for many people.
14. The maximum stay of 6 hours has been cited as too short for a whole day visit to the Forest. Longer stays could be facilitated at car parks where the principle of the maximum stay is not undermined.
15. Some special arrangements have been made with tenants to allow a transitional period for their business to adjust to car park charging. A review will be required to ensure parity across these organisations and any others affected by phase 3.
16. The emergency traffic regulation orders in the High Beach area impacted on the implementation of the car park charging scheme. For example, the gating order at Pillow Mounds became particularly problematic as the closing times altered in September/October to much earlier than dusk.

Proposals

17. Phase 3, expected from May 2022, will address whether the remaining car parks (14) have charging introduced or alternative arrangements made. Many of these will require bespoke solutions to address wayleave, tenancy and other historic issues.

18. Work is ongoing to navigate the other challenges outlined in paragraphs 11-17 in this report and a further paper for decision will be presented at your May committee outlining suitable options.
19. The conclusion on the 3 consultations (results pending from Essex County Council) of the traffic regulation orders around the High Beach area will also need to be considered within the May report.

Key Data

20. Data gathered from the initial 6 months of charging is contained in the appended review report including financial information, duration of stay, most used car parks, most popular time of day and number of PCNs issued.

Corporate & Strategic Implications –

21. **Strategic implications** - 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. It also supports several of the Epping Forest Management Strategy 2020-2030 priority objectives and outcomes.
22. **Financial implications** - The car park charging scheme has generated enough income to cover the installation costs of both phase 1 and phase 2 along with a surplus. In future years when the installation/ maintenance costs are more minimal this surplus is predicted to be considerably higher.
23. **Resource implications** - The operation and enforcement have been successfully outsourced to contractors for an initial period. Ongoing in-house resource commitments are limited to contract management and customer service.
24. **Legal implications** - 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.
25. **Risk implications** - There is an increased risk of vandalism to the new infrastructure, particularly in more remote car parks (phase 2 & 3) with a resulting cost of repair and replacement.
26. **Equalities implications** – An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of implementing car parking was undertaken by the City Corporation. It is considered that there are no negative impacts on the protected equality groups. Blue badge users receive free parking with more disabled only bays available. 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

27. **Charity implications** - 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.
28. **Climate implications** - The implementation of the car park charging may 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.
29. **Security implications** – The charging scheme allows greater monitoring of the Forest car parks which facilitates greater vigilance of any criminal activity.

Conclusion

30. Charging for car parks was agreed as a necessity in Epping Forest to manage capacity, deter non-Forest users such as commuters, encourages more sustainable visits to the Forest and raise revenue that can be reinvested into protecting the Forest for public recreation and enjoyment, as well as its internationally significant natural heritage.
31. The initial 6 months of the scheme have been largely successful with a good surplus generated.
32. There are some outstanding challenges which require further resolution in advance of the final implementation phase 3.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Car Park list
- Appendix 2 – Car Park Charging Scheme - 6 Month Review

Background Papers

- Feb 2014, URS Car Park Study
- October 2020, EFCC, Epping Forest Car Parking –Introduction of Parking Charges (SEF 28/20)
- November 2020, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Introduction of Parking Charges (28/20b)
- January 2021, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Tariff Options for introduced charges (SEF 04/21)
- March 2021, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Additional tariff options and consultation feedback (SEF 12/21)

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