

Committee(s): Epping Forest Consultative – for consultation Epping Forest and Commons - for decision	Dated: 09/02/2022 09/05/2022
Subject: Epping Forest Car Park Charging – Phase 3 (SEF 09/22b)	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
Report author: Jacqueline Eggleston, Epping Forest	

Summary

Epping Forest's car parks serve Forest visitors and may also support a range of community, non-commercial and business facilities which operate to serve Forest visitors or encourage Forest use.

In March 2021, your committee agreed to implement charging for car parking in Epping Forest. Phase 1 was implemented in May 2021 and Phase 2 in November 2021.

This paper outlines the options for implementing the third (final) phase of car park charging drawing on the experience of operating the first 9 months of Phase 1 & 2 car park charging scheme. Phase 3 is scheduled for implementation from May 2022.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note comments made by the Consultative Committee
- Approve the recommended options for future car park arrangements

Main Report

Background

1. In October 2020, your committee provided feedback on a series of proposals for the introduction of car park charging in Epping Forest.
2. The car park charging scheme was implemented to meet four objectives (*summarised*):

- a. *Reduce overuse by residents / commuters to ensure availability for Forest users*
 - b. *Reduce overuse in honeypot locations where capacity is exceeded*
 - c. *Encourage sustainable travel and discourage car use in the Forest*
 - d. *Generate income to be reinvested into Forest management*
3. A public consultation was conducted during January/February 2021 to consider various charging arrangements.
 4. The Epping Forest and Commons Committee approved car park charging to be implemented across the Forest from March 2021. This has been achieved through a three-phase approach;
 - a. Phase 1 commenced on 10 May 2021 with charging introduced across an initial 16 car parks.
 - b. 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 and charging status can be read at Appendix 1.
 - c. Phase 3 is scheduled for May 2022.
 5. External contract partners have been commissioned to undertake the operational administration and to enforce the scheme. The latter was appointed via a tender process and the former as a variation to the established City-wide contract though the City Procurement Team, in line with the City's procurement policy. The contracts are both due for renewal in spring 2022.

Operations

6. There have been several acts of vandalism and theft that have been undertaken in relation to signage and payment machines since the implementation of the scheme. The costs of this criminal activity will be recovered through the City Corporation's self-insurance scheme.
7. The ability to hold buffer stock and the reorder of replacements for damaged machines has been delayed due to a worldwide shortage of component parts.
8. In the case where a machine or signage has been damaged rendering it unusable and replacements cannot be sourced immediately, officers have left the affected car park open for public parking without charge. The working premise is that the charity does not wish to penalise or inconvenience other users as a result of criminal activity. However, in some cases, temporary closure of the car park may be necessary.
9. Replacement signage is now held in stock for swift replacement, should this be required.
10. The British Parking Association (BPA) is an independent body which represents, promotes and influences best practice in the parking sector throughout the UK and Europe. The BPA set up the Approved Operator Scheme (AOS) specifically to represent those involved in managing and enforcing parking on private, unregulated land. The appointed external enforcement partner is an Approved Operator and follows the BPS's Code of Practice. Any breaches of the code are

managed in line with the operator's complaint procedure and the BPA's scheme of sanctions.

Current Position

11. The third, and final, phase is due to be implemented by May 2022.

12. The report you received at your meeting in January 2022 outlined several challenges with the car park charging roll out. Since January, the following challenges (*italics*) have been resolved or removed from the project's problem resolution list;

- a. *Public opinion has been vocal in opposition to having charges applied* – the need to reduce car park overuse, encourage sustainable transport and generate income to re-invest in the Forest are vital objectives for a sustainable future for the Forest. This message has been communicated through the committee reporting process, in the press, through correspondence, social media and in greater detail through 'FAQ' answers provided on our website. There has also been vocal support for the scheme which many members of the public have recognised as a necessity.
- b. *The season ticket price point (£150) is seen as a barrier for many people* – The higher than predicted uptake on the season ticket, in both Phases 1 & 2 would indicate that the season ticket price benchmarking exercise was robust and whilst the charge of £150 was a barrier or perceived as a barrier by some it was also deemed as a good value option for a significant number of people. In addition to convenience of not paying on each visit, frequent visitors need only to visit for minimal time twice per week to realise a saving with a season ticket.
- c. *Visitors paying to park have a greater feeling of entitlement to park for the full daylight hours* – The gating of certain car parks commenced in 2016 to combat the growing cost of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and fly-tipping to the Charity. Consequently, opening and closing of the car parks became a routine task for the Forest Keepers. However, staff absence and other emergencies can mean car parks open or close earlier or later than dawn/dusk which does not meet reasonable visitor expectations. Recent soft market testing indicates that it may now be possible to appoint an external company to undertake this role when earlier assessments indicated otherwise. A tender exercise is underway to potentially outsource this role, which may be an option if it presents best value. This would free up keeper resources which could then be redeployed to address more customer focused activities on the Forest. Consideration is also being given to the conversion of further car park entrances, subject to planning consent, to offer dual gating arrangements allowing car parks to be closed to new visitors after a certain time but allowing egress by remaining visitors after closure.

13. The challenges which remain are;

- a. **Maintenance standards** (*Visitor expectation when charged for parking is that car parks are maintained in a higher quality state of repair*) – the income generated from car parking recovers the cost of implementing

charging in 2021/22 and the current reactive maintenance. Surplus funds re-invested in Forest management could facilitate future car park improvements. Besides the five macadamed visitor hubs at Bury Road, Barn Hoppitt, Connaught Water, High Beach and Jubilee Pond it is envisaged that the majority of Forest car park surfaces will continue to have unbound surfacing in keeping with the Forest surroundings.

- b. **Transitory Support Schemes** (*The termination of temporary special arrangements*) – these special arrangements were made to aid transition with several organisations that provide facilities and/or services for Forest visitors, whose operations benefit from reliance on Forest car parks. A small number of these organisations are citing that their parking charges may impact on their business when applied.
- c. **Commuter restrictions may not be appropriate away from rail stations** (*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.
- d. **Impact of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)** - 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.

14. While the car park charging scheme has thus far achieved its goals, in advance of Phase 3 implementation, officers seek your committee's opinion on;
- a. The future charging status for all remaining 13 car parks, some of which may require bespoke management solutions to address other issues present at that location.
 - b. Long-term special arrangements which may apply for non-commercial organisations, that provide facilities and/or services for Forest visitors, with wayleave, licence or other historic agreements for which car park charges will impact.
 - c. The facilitating of stays of over 6 hours for all-day visits in limited locations, where it does not undermine the initial aims of the scheme.

Proposals

Future charging status of remaining car parks

15. Six of the remaining car parks are within the SAC, or on its boundary, so public parking must be controlled to avoid displacement parking, in line with the recommendations of the Habitats Regulation Assessment. These are Theydon Green, Gilbert's Slade, Bell Common Cricket Ground, Theydon Bois Golf Club, Woodford Golf Club and High Beach Church (pull in).
16. Bell Common Cricket Ground is reached via a gated, service access track. To use this site for public car parking, substantial investment would be required to secure the Forest, including the cricket wicket & pitch, from the threat of vehicular damage. To meet the requirements of the HRA this car park should be maintained as temporary use only and managed through the licensing process.

17. Gilbert's Slade is controlled by a single barrier and is only used for licenced activities. It is rarely used for parking and is too small to be viable for parking charges. To meet the requirements of the HRA this will be kept closed apart from separately licenced uses.
18. Five locations are not bounded by the HRA recommendations as they sit outside the SAC. These same locations do not suffer from overuse by residents/commuters, are not located at 'honey-pot' sites which suffer from overcrowding. These are Epping Long Green, St John's Pond, Pick Hill (Upshire), Crown Hill (Upshire), and Fernhall Lane.
19. These five locations (paragraph 18), meet just one of the four car parking scheme objectives - income generation. However, implementing charges at these smaller, outer-laying car parks will not be viable due to their size and cost of enforcement.
20. These five locations could remain as 'free' visitor parking, particularly as this encourages parking in less visited, less ecologically sensitive areas of the Forest or buffer land.
21. Fishers Green Lane also falls outside the SAC. Access to the wider Forest at the location is poor, with most visitors parking at this location to gain access to Lee Valley Park land. There is sufficient parking supplied by Lee Valley Park Authority at this location and this location is currently closed to prevent fly tipping.
22. Aldersbrook Road is neither in the SAC nor a public use car park. It is accessed via a secure entry system, passing through the operational staff yard, and is used only by those paying to hire pitches on weekend or event match days. Ground staff and caretakers manage this access and use.
23. Considering paragraphs 14-20 above, the following car park management is proposed for Phase 3:

Theydon Green	Public parking – apply charge
Gilbert's Slade	No public parking - barrier access only for licenced use
Bell Common Cricket Ground	No Public Parking – match day use only
Theydon Bois Golf Club	Public parking – apply charge with an arrangement with the tenant for golfers use
Woodford Golf Club	Public parking – apply charge with an arrangement with the tenant for golfers use
High Beach Church (pull in)	No Public Parking - Restricted use signed for disabled & service/ access only
Fishers Green Lane	No Public Parking - closed
Epping Long Green	Public parking – no charge
St John's Pond	Public parking – no charge
Pick Hill (Upshire)	Public parking – no charge
Crown Hill (Upshire)	Public parking – no charge
Fernhall Lane	Public parking – no charge
Aldersbrook Road	No Public Parking – event or match day use with pitch hirer/s.

Long term special arrangements

24. During Phase 1 & 2, temporary special arrangements were made with those organisations, providing facilities and/or services for Forest visitors, who rely on Forest car parks for their operations to assist with the transition to charged public parking.
25. These special arrangements will be terminated at the end of May 2022.
26. Tenants will be invited to include the impact of car parking on their operations when tenancy agreements are renewed. All these tenancies are due for renewal no later than July 2022.
27. Five of the locations affect non-commercial sports clubs. These require bespoke solutions to address historic use and long-standing access arrangements. These are Powell's Forest (Buckhurst Hill Cricket Ground), Bell Common Cricket Ground, Warren Pond Car Park, Woodford Golf Course & Theydon Bois Golf Course.
28. The use of Powell's Forest and Bell Common Cricket Ground can be addressed by licencing the car park for use by the cricket clubs on match days. There are other not-for-profit sports organisations that agree similar licence arrangements for event car parking periodically.
29. Warren Pond Car Park, Woodford Golf Course & Theydon Bois Golf Course are used on a more consistent basis by members of their organisations, so an 'event day' licence arrangement is not suitable.
30. For these organisations, one of two solutions is available long-term depending on the existing arrangement for car park use & maintenance, either:
 - a. a reduced-price season ticket pass, for their full members, which is restricted to the use of the associated car park/s only, or
 - b. a kiosk within the organisation where members can input their registration number and this 'free to members' benefit reflected within the organisation's lease arrangement.
31. The existing arrangement of reusable parking passes currently in place with catering tenants is not sustainable in the long-term due to the administration resource burden required to manage it. These were offered on a temporary basis for 12 months only.

Facilitating of stays of over 6 hours for all-day visits

32. We know that most visitors use the Forest regularly for visits of less than 2 hours. However, several user groups have expressed the desire to visit for longer than the current 6 hour maximum permitted by the car park charging scheme.
33. Allowing 'free' public parking in 5 car parks outlined in paragraph 18 goes some way to address this but further car parks could have the 6-hour maximum removed where the principle is not undermined.

34. Four car parks, located in the north or middle areas of the Forest have been identified as suitable options. These are Powell's Forest, Mount Pleasant, Wake Valley and Lodge Road. These car parks are generally underused and do not suffer displacement or 'non-Forest use' parking.
35. The fee to park for over 6 hours in these locations would be the same as the current maximum charge for up to 6 hours.

Options

36. The following options are presented for your committee's consideration:

Future charging status of remaining car parks

Option 1

37. Apply car parking charges to all remaining 13 car parks in phase 3 of the car park charging scheme. **This option is not recommended.**

Option 2

38. Apply car park charging in the car parks as outlined in paragraph 21 proposal. This proposal manages use of the car parks located in the SAC in line with the HRA and meets the objectives of the car parking charging scheme.
This option is recommended.

Long term special arrangements

Option1

39. Permit the negotiation of long-term special arrangements for the non-commercial organisations and their members based on historic agreements and use. This facilitates a sustainable option for ongoing use of the car parking facilities.
This option is recommended.

Option 2

40. Terminate all special arrangements as of May 2022 for non-commercial organisations. This will present operational issues for these organisations.
This option is not recommended.

Facilitating stays of over 6 hours for all-day visits

Option1

41. Remove the maximum 6 hours stay from the car parks suggested where the principle of the maximum duration (commuter use and turnover) is not undermined.
This option is recommended.

Option 2

42. Continue to enforce a maximum stay in all public car parks where charges apply.
This option is not recommended.

Key Data

43. Parking statistics

a. Average Parking Volume Per Month (to March, not including pay-at-meter)

- i. Phase one sites –10,886 parking sessions per month.
 - ii. Phase two sites – 2,280 parking sessions per month.
- b. Average PCNs Per Month (May '21 -March '22)
 - i. 260.8 tickets (upheld)
 - ii. This represent 1.9% of users, where the total number of users is taken to be the number of parking sessions booked.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

44. Epping Forest Consultative Committee: The Consultative Committee considered this report and welcomed the inclusion of car parks where the 6 hour stay could be exceeded. Concern was raised about access to High Beach, operation of meters and access for low income families – all of these have been addressed in previous reports to your committee. There was a desire to see some of the issues addressed in a new Forest Transport Strategy.
45. 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.
46. 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.
47. 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.
48. 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.
49. 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.
50. 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.

51. 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.
52. Climate implications - The implementation of the car park charging may play a role in promoting a 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.
53. Security implications – The charging scheme allows greater monitoring of the Forest car parks which facilitates greater vigilance against any criminal activity.

Conclusion

54. Charging for car parks was agreed as a necessity in Epping Forest to manage capacity, deter non-Forest users such as commuters, encourage 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.

Appendices - None

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)
- May 2021, Habitats Regulations Assessment relating to the implementation of car park charging at Epping Forest
- January 2022, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Park Charging Review (SEF 08/22)

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