

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR YOUTH, FAMILIES & CULTURE FEES AND CHARGES 2016/17 FOR THE COUNTRY PARKS SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for revisions to fees and charges within the Country Parks Service for the financial year 2016/17.

Information and Advice

2. Fees and charges at country parks are reviewed annually. Charges are influenced by service income targets, and the level to which customers are “price sensitive” in what is increasingly a competitive leisure market, served by other local providers (e.g. National Trust and Forestry Commission).
3. Fees and charges levied by the service comprise:
 - Car park charges and season tickets
 - Hire charges for mobility scooters
 - Charges for park trail leaflets and small scale events such as walks
 - Occasional ‘one off’ charges for filming, wood sales etc.
 - Commercial service – catering and retail.
4. Commercial charges in trading outlets at Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest are not covered in this report. Charges for school sessions at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre provided by the County’s Learning Outside the Classroom team are also excluded from this report.

Car Parking Charges

5. Car parking charges are made at the two country parks which function as leisure attractions: Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest Country Park. In 2015/16 the following arrangements were in force:
 - £3 charge per car
 - £5 during major special events
 - Motorcycles £1 (or if taking up a full space, charged as cars)
 - Coaches and minibuses free
 - Car park season ticket £30 per year
 - Free parking offered at Bestwood Country Park and Cotgrave Country Park

- Site Managers have leeway to drop parking charges on days when it is uneconomical or impractical to collect - for example in adverse weather conditions.
6. For 2015/ 16 the period of charging was extended, so that the charge was levied daily through the main visitor season (Easter to end of October) plus weekends through the "Low Season."
 7. Season tickets are a means of encouraging repeat visits. This generates spend on site commercial outlets. Last year there was a £5 increase in the season ticket cost.
 8. A commercial offer invites customers to "spend £15 in our shops or catering outlets and claim back your car park fee." This is to avoid losing business from those tourists who simply want to use the parks for lunch, coffee or afternoon tea. The offer does not apply when the Special Event parking charge is in force.
 9. There is currently no parking charge for coaches, on the basis that coach tours making short stops for coffee or lunches are a useful source of income for onsite catering outlets.
 10. It is not proposed to change any of the above arrangements for 2016/17.

Special Event Parking Charges

11. Various public events are held within country parks, ranging in size from guided walks to living history festivals. The layout of the parks makes "turnstile" entrance charges to events impractical. Thus an admittance charge is not charged for park events, and income is generated instead via car park fees and commercial sales.
12. Large scale events incur considerable extra costs, for example, first aid cover and Portaloos, and limited onsite parking is stretched to capacity at popular events. A Special Event car parking charge helps to offset costs as well as managing demand for parking spaces. The Special Event car parking charge (£5 per vehicle) was introduced in 2011.
13. The Special Event charge in 2016/17 will apply to:
 - the Historical Bazaar, Rufford Abbey, May 2016 (weekend event)
 - the Earth & Fire Festival, Rufford Abbey, June 2016 (three day event)
 - the Robin Hood Festival, Sherwood Forest, August 2016.(seven day event)

Mobility Scooters

14. Mobility scooter hire currently costs £1.50 per hour at Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest Country Parks. Given the repair and maintenance requirements of these scooters, it is proposed to make an increase in price to £2 per hour. Discussions with front line staff indicate that this is likely to be felt reasonable by current users.

Other Options Considered

15. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. Over 90% of visitors arrive by car, private coach or minibus. The recommendation is to keep the car park charge unchanged at £3 per car.
17. Visitor numbers at all outdoor attractions undergo large variations according to weather, and this cannot always be easily predicted. It is recommended that park managers retain the flexibility currently allowed to drop charges on an ad hoc basis when the staff costs of collection are likely to outweigh cash generated.
18. An increase of 50p per hour in mobility scooter hire will help to offset costs of repair and replacement of facilities that help to make the park accessible to a wide range of users.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

20. The modest change to the existing charging arrangements will support the service to operate within its revenue estimates for 2016/17.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

21. An increase in mobility scooter costs will affect those uses with mobility limitations. It will, however, better enable this popular service to be retained and developed.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That approval be given to:

- 1) Raise the hourly hire fee for mobility scooters from £1.50 to £2 per hour at Rufford and Sherwood
- 2) Leave all other fees and charges unchanged for the 2016/17 financial year.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 23/11/15)

22. The recommendations in the report fall within the Terms of Reference of the Culture Committee.

Financial Comments (SS 21/11/15)

23. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraph 20 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Fees and Charges 2015/16 for Country Parks and Green Estate Service – report to Culture Committee on 13 January 2015 (previously published)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0731