

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE**

### **FEES AND CHARGES 2014/15 FOR THE COUNTRY PARKS AND GREEN ESTATE SERVICE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval for the proposed fees and charges for the Country Parks and Green Estate Service for the financial year 2014/15.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. Fees and charges are reviewed annually and are influenced by the rate of inflation, service income targets, market forces, and the level to which customers are 'price sensitive' in what is becoming a very competitive leisure and tourism market, also served by other providers across the County, such as the National Trust, Forestry Commission and Thoresby Estate.
3. Fees and charges levied by the Country Parks Service comprise car parking, hiring for mobility scooters, filming fees for commercial companies (infrequent) and events on parks.
4. Commercial charges in trading outlets (catering and retail at Rufford and Sherwood) are not covered in this report. School sessions at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre provided by the Environmental Education team and in the Rufford Crafts Centre (Arts Service) are also excluded.
5. It should be noted that the income raised through car parking is about one tenth of that generated through retail and catering, and there is a concern that it may act as a deterrent to some visitors to the country parks. Customer feedback during the year questioned the need to charge and there was also some confusion as to when car park charges were levied.
6. The proposed charges for 2014/15 for the Country Parks Service are set out below:

#### **Car Parking at Rufford Abbey Country Park and Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve**

- the car parking charge to remain at £3 per car per whole day for all cars
- the free concession for coaches and mini-buses will be retained

- the charge for motorcycles will remain the same £1 per bike per whole day
- the charging period will be from 5 April to 21 December for all week ends and bank holidays. In addition there will be a week day charge from 24 July until 3 September (see **Appendix 1**)
- the season ticket of £20 per calendar year will be increased to £25
- mobility scooter hire to be increased to £1 per hour
- a special event charge of £5 per car to be made for premier events, including, but not exclusively, the Robin Hood Festival, the Earth and Fire Festival the World War 1 event and the 1940s week-end.
- to retain the special offer redemption at Rufford and Sherwood where the £3 car park fee is refunded on a purchase of £15 or more (except when the special event fee is in force).

### **Car Parking at Bestwood Country Park and Cotgrave Country Park**

- no car parking charges to be levied as there are no visitor facilities on site.

### **Filming Fees**

- a filming fee at Rufford Abbey if the footage / photography is to be broadcast, printed or used for commercial purposes will be charged at £250 per full day or £175 per half day (3 hours). There is no charge for amateur, educational or 'not for profit' uses
- a filming fee donation at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre (as the Council does not own this site) for short filming sessions (less than an hour on site), with only minimal input from staff, will be £50. For longer sessions, requiring greater input from staff, a fee of £200 will be charged.

### **Firewood**

- to increase the charge from £70 to £75 per trailer, when wood is available at any of our sites.

### **Public Events**

- various smaller public events are held within Country Parks, ranging in size from guided walks to living history days. On occasions, charges may be made for activities within these, eg: for trail leaflets. Such charges are outside the scope of this report.

### **Memorial Items**

- to maintain charges for benches and plaques installed at Rufford Abbey within a range of £250 to £850, dependent upon the nature of the memorial item.

7. It is further proposed that the Group Manager, Country Parks and Green Estate Service, is authorised to adopt a flexible approach towards all charging during the year, particularly to any increase in charging for car parking at special events/occasions, in consultation with the Chairman of the Culture Committee.

### **Other Options Considered**

8. Charges are kept under review throughout the course of the year and reflect a balanced approach between generating income and retaining visitor numbers at our sites.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

9. The recommendation to keep the majority of car park charges unchanged but simplify the charging period is made in the light of customer behaviour and feedback during the course of the year, after examining the operational practicalities and of its potential impact on other income generating activities. The increase of £5 on the current season ticket cost of £20 is believed to still represent excellent value for money for regular visitor including dog walkers.
10. Though the daily charge is comparable with other local providers, it should be recognised that car park charges are less important to overall site income than retail and catering income. Increase in car park charges can have a tendency to depress spending in on-site commercial outlets and so can have an overall negative effect on income.
11. It should also be remembered that visiting outdoor attractions such as country parks is heavily influenced by the weather. On good days, car parking demand at Rufford, for example, is very high. In such cases, the parking charge period is a method of helping to manage undesirable peaks and troughs of demand, by encouraging visitors to come midweek and off peak if they can.
12. Whilst it would be logical to also remove free parking for coaches, there is a concern that with some 300 plus coaches per year calling at Sherwood Forest and Rufford Abbey, trade in catering and retail outlets would be affected, and tourists would go elsewhere. As the free parking is an attractive incentive to coach operators, it is therefore proposed to retain free parking for coaches.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Implications for Service Users**

14. The revised charging regime is in line with local competitor pricing and will not impact negatively upon visitor numbers.

## **Financial Implications**

15. The charging regime set out in this report will support the Service to operate within its revenue estimates for 2014/15.

## **Public Sector Equality Duty Implications**

16. As part of the process of making decisions and changing policy, public authorities are required by law to think about the need to:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics (as defined by equalities legislation) and those who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
17. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are a means by which a public authority can assess the potential impact that proposed decisions / changes to policy could have on the community and those with protected characteristics. They may also identify potential ways to reduce any impact that a decision / policy change could have. If it is not possible to reduce the impact, the EIA can explain why. Decision makers must understand the potential implications of their decisions on people with protected characteristics.
18. An EIA has been carried out on the implications of increasing the charges and to date there is minimal evidence that these will have a disproportionate impact on any particular group of park visitors/users. However, the impact of the charges will be kept under review and if it is evident that these have a longer term disproportionate impact, there is built-in flexibility to the procedures to make any appropriate changes.
19. The EIA is available as a background paper. Decision makers must give due regard to the implications for protected groups when considering this report.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That:

- 1) the charging regime as set out in paragraph 6 of the report is adopted for 2014/15
- 2) the Group Manager, Country Parks and Green Estate Service, in consultation with the Chairman of the Culture Committee, is authorised to retain a flexible approach to charging throughout the year and that the current charges can be varied or the charging period extended as circumstances warrant.
- 3) car parking charges be further reviewed as part of the wider commercial analysis currently being undertaken of trading activity on country parks and that the results of this review be brought back to a future culture committee for analysis and discussion.

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**Constitutional Comments (NAB 19/11/13)**

20. Culture Committee has authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

**Financial Comments (KLA 19/11/13)**

21. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 15 above.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

Equality Impact Assessment

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.

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

C0328

## **Schedule of Charges for Rufford Abbey Country Park and Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve 2014/15**

### **When?**

Car parking charges apply as follows:

- **Saturday 5 April to Sunday 21 December** at weekends and Bank Holidays only
- **Thursday 24 July to Wednesday 3 September** every day

Outside these times, including Boxing Day and New Year's Day, parking is FREE

### **How Much?**

- **Cars £3** (this applies to all cars, including blue badge holders)
- **Motorcycles £1**
- **Coach & minibus parking free.**
- **Season Tickets £25**

**A Special Event Car Parking Charge of £5** will apply for major events, including throughout the year.

### **Discounts**

**£25 season ticket** allows parking at both Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre as many times as you wish. Season tickets cover one specified vehicle only and cannot be used on special event days.

**Special offer** - spend £15 in a single transaction in one of our on-site shops, cafés or restaurants and present your ticket to claim a refund of your parking charge (offer does not apply when special event car parking charge is in force)