

**Proposed Decision to be taken by
the Portfolio Holder for Environment
on or after 23 January 2015**

**Consultation on the Introduction of Car Parking Charges at
the Stratford-upon-Avon to Long Marston Greenway**

Recommendation

That the Portfolio Holder for Environment approves the proposal for consultation

1. Context

- 1.1 The One Organisational Plan (OOP) requires savings of £300k from Rural Services. Rural Services comprises the Forestry Section and the Country Parks team. However, as the Forestry Section already operate as a business unit, it is inevitable that the larger part of the required savings will come from Country Parks.
- 1.2 Warwickshire's Country Parks comprise 5 parks and 3 greenways (dismantled railway lines used for walking, cycling and horse riding). As envisaged by the enabling legislation (Countryside Act 1968) the country parks are free to enter. However, the service already operates commercially, raising approximately 80% of running costs, including staffing costs, as income (£810k in 2013/14). The most significant income stream is from car parking (day charges and permit sales) and the power to make reasonable charges for parking is set out in Section 43 of the Countryside Act. Other sources of income include rents, concessions and licences, retail, angling, events, and education.
- 1.3 The step changes towards a fully commercial service have been ongoing for the last 20 years. The service has rationalised its holdings, divesting land that does not fit the portfolio, and has externally commissioned much of the service activity to private and third sector organisations (cafes, sailing, jet ski, cycle hire, children's farm, camping and caravan site, and a range of other services from ice cream concessions to donkey rides, miniature railways, pedalos and bouncy castles). Given this existing level of commercialisation, further gains are likely to be hard won.

2. Progress to date

- 2.1 Although the OOP savings are profiled for years 3 and 4, the services are planning for them now. Progress includes;
 - Restructuring the management of Forestry and Country Parks following the retirement of key staff

- Refreshing the Country Parks Business Plan (currently in its final year)
 - Protecting current income through effective marketing and working with partners to enhance the visitor offer
 - Reviewing rents and concessions to achieve best consideration, but also supporting tenants to ensure their businesses remain viable through turbulent economic times
 - Benchmarking all commercial activity, fees and charges with peer services
 - Maximising the effectiveness of volunteers, work placements, apprenticeships, and other unpaid labour
- 2.2 These activities are bearing fruit, but it is equally clear that the service still has a very significant challenge to achieve the OOP savings. It is therefore essential that every opportunity for efficiencies and income generation continue to be examined.
- 2.3 The Stratford to Long Marston Greenway is an anomaly in that it is currently the only site with car parks where no charges are levied. The Greenway has 2 car parks. The larger one at Seven Meadows Road, at the Stratford-upon-Avon end of the Greenway, has 24 lined spaces and a larger overflow area. On clement weekend and holiday days the available spaces, lined and overflow, are all used. A second small car park exists at the mid point towards Long Marston, at Milcote, opposite the second railway carriage cafe.

3. Proposal for Consultation

- 3.1 Consultation regarding the introduction of parking fees is likely to yield a negative response as service users would undoubtedly prefer parking at the greenway to remain free. However, experience elsewhere tells us that customers are more accepting of parking charges when they understand that all income generated is reinvested back in the service, and that the service itself is discretionary. The sale of good value permits is also welcomed by regular users such as dog walkers, and permits are offered at a discount for blue badge holders.
- 3.2 The proposed parking tariffs are deliberately set below the on-street and off-street values in Stratford. The proposed tariff is; 50 pence up to 1 hour, £1.00 up to 2 Hours, £1.50 up to 3 hours, £2.00 up to 4 hours and £3.00 all day, but with no overnight parking permitted. For regular greenway users, as with other facilities, good value annual and 6 month permits will be offered at £36.00 and £24.00 respectively.
- 3.3 The main stakeholders and the nature of the consultation proposed are:

Greenway users (walkers, runners, cyclists and horse riders) – face to face questionnaire to obtain quantitative and qualitative information

Local Members, Stratford District Council, Town and Parish Council's – informed of consultation methodology and invited to submit views

Local residents informed by letter drop and/or informal notices

Concessions (railway carriage cafes and cycle hire) – face to face meetings and invitation to make written representations

Greenway Volunteers (who operate a rota to secure the Seven Meadows car park) – as concessions above

- 3.4 It is proposed to use the results of the consultation to inform such matters as implementation (if we are to proceed), a communication plan, and future management of the car park(s). It is difficult to predict the magnitude of the income generated through the introduction of charges for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are no direct comparables as the other greenways do not have car parks. Secondly, there is likely to be some displacement, i.e. users arriving by car choosing to park elsewhere, or to arrive by other means, or to visit less often. Thirdly, experience elsewhere tells us that the displacement effect reduces over time. However, some basic modelling suggests that £20,000 to £25,000 per annum would be achieved. The advantage of progressing the proposal now is that progress towards the savings target will be informed by actual figures rather than assumptions.
- 3.5 The consultation will run for a period of 6 weeks and consultation results will be summarised in a future report. An equalities impact assessment is also being undertaken.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Rural Services must deliver a challenging savings requirement. The levying of charges for discretionary services such as the provision of car parking is one means of achieving savings and reducing the need for service reductions and /or closure of facilities that are dear to the lives of many. The consultation results will inform the next steps.

Background Papers

None

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	Stuart Ikeringill	stuartikeringill@warwickshire.gov.uk
Head of Service	Phil Evans	philevans@warwickshire.gov.uk
Strategic Director	Monica Fogarty	monicafogarty@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder	Jeff Clarke	jeffclarke@warwickshire.gov.uk