

# Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday 3 March 2022  
Time: 2.00 pm  
Venue: Committee Room 2, Shire Hall

## Membership

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)  
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne  
Councillor Jackie D'Arcy  
Councillor Jenny Fradgley  
Councillor Dave Humphreys  
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher  
Councillor Daren Pemberton  
Councillor Tim Sinclair  
Councillor Andrew Wright

Items on the agenda: -

1. **General**
  - (1) **Apologies**
  - (2) **Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**
2. **Public Speaking**
3. **Country Parks Fees and Charges 2022/23**

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**Monica Fogarty**  
Chief Executive  
Warwickshire County Council  
Shire Hall, Warwick

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- Declare the interest if they have not already registered it
- Not participate in any discussion or vote
- Leave the meeting room until the matter has been dealt with
- Give written notice of any unregistered interest to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting

Non-pecuniary interests relevant to the agenda should be declared at the commencement of the meeting.

The public reports referred to are available on the Warwickshire Web <https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1>

### Public Speaking

Any member of the public who is resident or working in Warwickshire, or who is in receipt of services from the Council, may speak at the meeting for up to three minutes on any matter within the remit of the Committee. This can be in the form of a statement or a question. If you wish to speak please notify Democratic Services in writing at least two working days before the meeting. You should give your name and address and the subject upon which you wish to speak. Full details of the public speaking scheme are set out in the Council's Standing Orders.

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**Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee****3 March 2022****Call-in – Portfolio Holder Decision  
Country Parks Fees and Charges 2022/23****Recommendations**

That Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the call-in request.

**1. Key Issues/Background**

- 1.1. On 18 February 2022, the Portfolio Holder for Environment Climate and Culture considered the proposals as outlined in the Country Parks Fees and Charges 2022/23 report a copy of which is attached as Appendix A.
- 1.2. The Decision is attached as Appendix B.
- 1.3. Following the publication of the decision it was called-in by Councillors Kate Rolfe, Jenny Fradgley, Bill Gifford and Jerry Roodhouse. The reasons for the call-in were given as:
  - 1.3.1. There was no consultation with members who have country parks in their divisions which was undemocratic as members did not get the opportunity to make their concerns, on behalf of their residents, known to the portfolio holder.
  - 1.3.2. There should have been a dialogue and forewarning of any proposals so that divisional members could have had some involvement.
  - 1.3.3. The increase is an unfair steep increase, over the rate of inflation, which will have an adverse impact on people who use our country parks.
- 1.4. A response to the areas of concern set out in the call-in request is attached as Appendix C.
- 1.5. The procedure for call in is set out in Standing Order 13. Having considered the call-in request, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may (i) refer the matter back to the decision maker for reconsideration setting out in writing the nature of its concerns or (ii) decide to take no action.
- 1.6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the matter and decide whether to return the matter to the Portfolio Holder for

reconsideration with an explanation of its concerns or to take no action (with or without comment) in which case the Portfolio Holder's decision will be implemented with immediate effect.

## 2. Environmental Implications

None

## 3. Financial Implications

None

## 4. Appendices

Appendix A – Portfolio Holder Report 18 February 2022

Appendix B - Decision of Portfolio Holder dated 18 February 2022

Appendix C - Response to the areas of concern raised in the Call in Notice.

## 5. Background papers

### 5.1 Call In request

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	Nichola Vine Andrew Pau	<a href="mailto:nicholavine@warwickshire.gov.uk">nicholavine@warwickshire.gov.uk</a> andrewpau@warwickshire.gov.uk
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Strategic Director	Strategic Director for Communities	<a href="mailto:markryder@warwickshire.gov.uk">markryder@warwickshire.gov.uk</a>
Portfolio Holder	Portfolio Holder for Environment Climate and Culture	<a href="mailto:heathertimms@warwickshire.gov.uk">heathertimms@warwickshire.gov.uk</a>

# Portfolio Holder Decision – Country Parks Fees and Charges 2022/23

<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate &amp; Culture</b>
<b>Date of decision</b>	<b>18<sup>th</sup> February 2022</b>
	<b>Signed</b>

## Decision taken

Approval be given for the changes to Country Parks fees and charges from 1 April 2022, as set out in the report and the Appendix.

## Reasons for decisions

The County Council's constitution requires approval of fees and charges by the relevant portfolio holder prior to their application.

Income derived from rents, tenancies, catering concessions, shop sales, caravan site profits share, special events and grants etc, account for approximately 25% of the country parks' total income in a normal year; these elements are adjusted through rent reviews and lease arrangements and are not included in this review.

## Background information

The County Council has power under section 43 of the Countryside Act 1968 to make reasonable charges for any facilities or services provided by them in country parks provided under that Act.

The County Council's normal practice is to use inflation as a basis of increasing fees and charges each year. The service is undergoing a service review and restructure and it may be that in the future a more fundamental review of our fees and charges is required to maximise commercial opportunities.

The impact of the pandemic over the last two years has highlighted the value of the amenities provided to our communities by the Country Parks service in supporting health, safety and wellbeing. Last financial year the decision was taken not to increase fees and charges, except for some modest increases to day fishing prices, in order to support our communities through the challenging time of the pandemic.

As a result of these factors and in line with previous reviews, this report sets out some modest increases in some of the fees and charges for parking and other activities in

Country Parks from 2021/22 levels. However, a small proportion of charges are proposed to have larger increases, for which the rationale is given in each instance.

The Appendix sets out the new fees and charges which take effect from 1 April 2022.

### **Proposed changes**

#### **Coarse permit concession at Kingsbury Water Park**

There is currently a concessionary rate for pensioners for the Coarse permit fishing. It is recommended this is brought into line with the concessionary price of the car parking (which is offered at a 20% discount). This brings the price up of the concessionary permit from **£60 to £70**.

#### **Car Parking price rises**

Car parking charges at the main sites of Kingsbury Water Park and Ryton Pools Country Park are not proposed to be increased this year. Kingsbury still has the highest parking charge rate than all other parks, reflecting the size and range of amenities on offer. The flat rate of £4.50 (£3 in winter) will be reviewed again next financial year. Differential price bands were introduced in 2019/20 at Ryton Pools Country Park, so it was not deemed necessary to increase the charges for this coming financial year.

The charges for the smaller sites have not risen in a number of years, therefore it is recommended that these should be increased this year by **50p** across the sites with flat day rates.

Burton Dassett, Hartshill Hayes and Pooley Country Parks from **£2.50 to £3.00**.

#### **STRATFORD GREENWAY**

The increases in charges recommended for Stratford Greenway are relatively high in percentage terms. However, car parking prices have not been increased in five years at Stratford Greenway, since charges were introduced in 2017. In addition to this, by comparison with Stratford Town Centre, our proposed parking charges are still very reasonable, and we know that some visitors choose to use our car park for longer stays to visit the town centre.

#### **Car Parking:**

Up to 1 hour	from 50p to £1.00
Up to 2 hours	from £1.00 to £1.50
Up to 3 hours	from £1.50 to £2.00
Up to 4 hours	from £2.00 to £3.00
Over 4 hours (all day)	from £3.00 to £4.00

#### **PARKING PERMITS**

As daily parking charges are increased, this in turn increases the price of the car parking permits, as follows:

## **ALL PARKS**

**All Parks Permit:** from £109.00 to £120.00 (permits parking at Kingsbury, Pooley, Hartshill, Ryton & Burton Dassett)

**Disabled permit (for all parks):** from £87.00 to £96.00

**North Parks Permit:** from £81.00 to £90.00 (permits parking at Kingsbury, Hartshill & Pooley)

**Disabled permit (for all north parks)** from £65.00 to £72.00

**South Parks Permit:** from £56.00 to £60.00 (permits parking at Ryton & Burton Dassett)

**Disabled permit (for all south parks)** from £45.00 to £48.00

**Stratford Greenway** from £36.00 to £48.00 Permit (12 months from day of purchase)

**Disabled permit** from £29.00 to £38.00

**Pooley, Hartshill Hayes & Burton Dassett** (permits parking at one of the above sites)

**Permit (12 months from date of purchase)** from £30.00 to £36.00

**Disabled permit** from £24.00 to £29.00

### **Other price increases/changes**

**Events** – guided walks and events including school holiday activities from **£4.00 to £4.50**

**Birthday Parties** – increase from **£120 to £150** to standardise prices across all sites. This is a relatively large percentage increase. However, the last increase in 2020/21 from £90 to £120 did not have a detrimental impact on the numbers of bookings for birthday parties. In addition, having benchmarked our prices with similar competitors, we have potentially been undercharging for these parties, therefore we do not believe this increase will result in fewer bookings and the proposed price will more adequately cover our costs for providing this service.

**Schools: all increased by 50p;**

This increase has been benchmarked against competitors, and is comparable with the wider market offer.

All-inclusive package (min.15 children)

2-hour session, £4.50 per child (from £4)

4-hour session, £7.50 per child (from £7)

**Brownies, Scouts, etc.** (min 10 children)

1-1½ hours with Ranger, £4.50 per child (from £4)

**Mobility Scooter Hire**

Annual Permit from £30 to £35 (no limits on amount of use, only availability)

Daily session from £3.00 to £4.00 (only available if not booked out)

Tramper hire £5.00 to £5.50

To assist with costs of increased wear and tear, and annual maintenance costs.

### Financial implications

The price increases detailed above should provide for additional income of approximately **£80,950**. This figure has been calculated using visitor/ user numbers and sales figures from 2019/20 (pre pandemic) to give an estimate of likely additional income. This is a total increase of about 17% but only on the fees and charges proposed to be increased in this report. As a proportion of a total fees and charges income this percentage is about 10%. The rationale for this level of increase in our fees and charges is outlined above and for example includes where prices have not increased for a number of years, where charges have been increased to better reflect the cost of providing the service and increases to bring prices better in line with the marketplace. In all cases the increased charges are pitched to continue to make our country parks accessible and good value for money.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy budget reduction increases the income target for Country Parks by £30k for 2022/23, so the proposed increase will enable us to reach this target, make the country parks more financially sustainable, and is in line with taking a more commercial approach to service delivery.

See Appendix for detailed information on Fees & Charges for 2022/23

### Environmental implications

Whilst the Country Parks service is heavily dependent on income from car parking charges, we are confident that, with these relatively modest fee increases, our regular users will continue to pay to visit their local country park or greenway. The majority of our visitors do not need to travel for long distances in their vehicles to be able to get to their nearest/ favourite country park. Therefore, we do not believe that these fee increases will have an impact on length of vehicle journey for most of our users, which in turn will not have a detrimental effect on air pollution.

<b>Report Author</b>	Rachel Baconnet Lead Commissioner – Green Spaces Tel: 01926 412818
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Assistant Director, Communities
<b>Lead Director</b>	Strategic Director for Communities
<b>Lead Member</b>	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage & Culture

<b>Urgent matter?</b>	No
<b>Confidential or exempt?</b>	No
<b>Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?</b>	No



**List of background papers**

N/A

**Members and officers consulted and informed**

*Portfolio Holder – Councillor Heather Timms*

Corporate Board – Mark Ryder

*Legal – Ian Marriott*

*Finance – Caroline Jones*

*Equality – n/a*

*Commercialism – John Stansfield*

*Democratic Services – Isabelle Moorhouse*

*Councillors – Clarke, Chilvers, D’Arcy & Fradgley*

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<b>CALL-IN REQUEST</b>	<b>Please state your name</b>	<b>Which Committee do you Chair?</b>
<b>Request by Chair of relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	Councillor	
<b>Request by other Councillors</b>		
	1.Councillor Kate Rolfe	
	2.Councillor Jenny Fradgley	
	3. Councillor Jerry Roodhouse	
	4. Councillor Bill Gifford	
<b>Decision maker</b> <i>(please state Cabinet or member or name and title of officer)</i>		<b>Date of Decision</b>
<b>Councillor Heather Timms</b>		18 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
<b>Relevant Decision</b> <i>(please identify the particular decision that is being called in)</i>		
The decision to increase carparking charges in our country parks		
<b>Reasons for Call-in</b> <i>(please give nature of concerns)</i>		
<p>There was no consultation with members who have country parks in their divisions. (At the bottom of the report it states members – N/A). This is undemocratic as members did not get the opportunity to make their concerns, on behalf of their residents, known to the portfolio holder. There should have been a dialogue and forewarning of any proposals so that divisional members could have had some involvement. As a group we might have come up with a fairer proposal of increasing charges over a period of time. This is an unfair steep increase, over the rate of inflation, which will have an adverse impact on people who use our country parks.</p>		
<b>Office Use Only – To be completed by Democratic Services in consultation with the AD Governance and Policy</b>		
<b>Date Request Received</b>	<b>Is the request valid?</b> <i>(If not please give reason for invalidity)</i>	

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## **Appendix C to Report on Call in of Portfolio Holder Decision regarding Country Parks Fees and Charges 2022/23**

The County Council has power under section 43 of the Countryside Act 1968 to make reasonable charges for any facilities or services provided by them in country parks provided under that Act. The County Council has done so for a number of years.

Each year those fees and charges are reviewed, and a report taken to the relevant Portfolio Holder recommending any changes that are considered appropriate.

The County Council's normal practice is to use inflation as a basis of increasing fees and charges each year. However, this year the approach has been more considered taking account of the fact that last financial year the decision was taken not to increase fees and charges, except for some modest increases to day fishing prices, in order to support our communities through the challenging time of the pandemic. However, the costs of providing services and maintaining the parks have continued to rise and it was necessary to take that into consideration when setting fees for 2022/23.

The Appendix to the Report to the Portfolio Holder detailed the fees and charges proposed to take effect from 1 April 2022, and the body of the report provided the rationale for the various proposals suggested.

### **Consultation with members**

The Protocol for Member Officer Relations provides at para 4.2.3 that

officers shall consult the relevant portfolio holders on draft reports to be presented to meetings of the cabinet or for decision by the leader or portfolio holder and circulate a copy of the draft report to the following:

- Relevant spokespersons for information; and
- Local members where the decision would have a specific impact on certain electoral divisions – 'for comment'

The Protocol further provides at para 4.2.2 that

Reports are prepared by officers and contain professional views and advice for all members. Whilst members may be invited to comment on reports, attempts should not be made by members to change the advice given in reports.

The report was circulated in draft to relevant spokespersons in the usual way. The report that was published and went to the Portfolio Holder for consideration had been updated from the draft initially circulated via modern.gov and included Councillors Clarke, Chilvers, D'Arcy and Fradgley as Members "consulted or informed".

The decision being sought from the Portfolio Holder covered a number of different fees and charges across different country parks and, given the nature of country parks and the services provided, the changes were considered to affect county residents as a

whole rather than having a “specific impact” on a particular electoral division. This has been the practice for this report in previous years.

Officers had considered the position with regard to fees and charges at Country Parks carefully before any recommendations were made to raise charges. The fees and charges covered in the report to the Portfolio Holder make up about 75% of the income generated by the parks. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy increased the income target for country parks by £30,000 for 2022/23, and the proposed increases are intended to enable the Council to reach this target and make the country parks more financially sustainable. The proposals are in line with the Council’s approach to being more rigorous in terms of cost recovery. Many of the higher percentage increases occur as a result of prices not having been raised for a number of years.

The call-in notice specifically references car parking price rises and these are explained below (full detail is set out in the original report):

1. Car parking charges at Kingsbury Water Park are not proposed to be increased this year as the charges at Kingsbury remain higher than at other parks, reflecting the size and range of amenities on offer.
2. No changes were recommended at Ryton Pools Country Park, given that differential price bands were introduced in 2019/20.
3. The charges for the smaller sites have not risen in a number of years, and it was therefore recommended that these should be increased this year by **50p** across the sites with flat day rates.
4. It is acknowledged that the increase in charges recommended for Stratford Greenway were relatively high when looked at in percentage terms. However, the prices had not been increased for around five years. The rates remain lower in comparison to those set in Stratford Town Centre.
5. As daily parking charges are increased, this in turn increases the price of the car parking permits. The report to the Portfolio Holder sets out the changes that arise as a result.