

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

Portfolio Holder	Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture
Date of decision	18th February 2022
	Signed

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.

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Assistant Director	Assistant Director, Communities
Lead Director	Strategic Director for Communities
Lead Member	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage & Culture

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