

## **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.