

# Portfolio Holder Decision – Country Parks Fees and Charges 2023/24

<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate &amp; Culture</b>
<b>Date of decision</b>	<b>17 February 2023</b>
	<b>Signed</b>

## Decision taken

Approval be given for the changes to Country Parks fees and charges from 1 April 2023, as set out in 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 Country Parks service has generally increased fees and charges on an ad hoc basis, with increases to some charges one year, then different charges the next and so on. This has meant that more substantial increases have taken place each time a fee has been increased, sometimes to account for a number of years' worth of inflationary increases. Section 43 of the Countryside Act 1968 allows reasonable charges to be made, and we are comfortable that the amended fees and charges remain reasonable in the marketplace.

A more fundamental review of how and when we increase our fees and charges is required and is likely to result in smaller, index-linked increases on an annual basis, to negate the need for larger increases less regularly. However, for this review the proposal is to increase all fees and charges that were not subject to increases last financial year.

It is also worth noting that, prior to the introduction of cashless parking machines in 2020, parking charges were paid in cash, making it difficult to increase in line with inflation, which would result in visitors having to pay odd amounts in change, which is unrealistic and cumbersome.

It is recognised that, especially during the recent pandemic, the amenities provided to our communities by the Country Parks service are of the highest value and it is important to ensure these remain accessible to all. This will support peoples' health, safety, and wellbeing and also the local visitor economy.

As a result of these factors, it is important that access to our parks remains affordable and value for money, and on a par with similar amenities locally, to remain competitive. However, it is also vital that we increase fees and charges sufficiently to reflect rising costs generally and sustain income to help pay for service delivery. This report sets out around a 10% increase to most fees and charges for parking and other activities in Country Parks for all the fees that were not increased in 2022/23.

The Appendix sets out the new fees and charges which take effect from 1 April 2023.

## **Proposed changes**

### **Fishing Permits at Kingsbury Water Park**

Prices have not increased since 2019/20, with course fishing last increased in 2015. We are therefore proposing a 10% increase on all fishing fees, apart from concessionary course permits, which increased in 2022/23. As investment and improvements are being made in the Fishery over the next five years, we anticipate making fee increases more frequently.

### **Car Parking price rises**

In 2022/23 the charges for the smaller sites were increased by **50p** across the sites with flat day rates, as these had not increased for a number of years. Therefore Burton Dassett, Hartshill Hayes and Pooley Country Parks will not be subject to increases for 2023/24, with the exception of an increase to coach parking fees at these sites from £20 to £22. Stratford Greenway also saw price increases in 2022/23, for the first time since they were introduced in 2017, so will be exempt in this round.

### **Kingsbury Water Park & Ryton Pools**

Car parking fees at Kingsbury have not increased since 2016 and at Ryton since 2019. Therefore, it is proposed to increase all parking charges at Kingsbury and Ryton on all tariffs by 10%.

### **Annual Parking Permits – All Parks/ South Parks & North Parks**

All multi-park annual permit prices were increased in 2022/23, so will not be subject to increases in 2023/24.

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

- Horse-riding Annual Permits – Adult - £30 to £33, Junior - £15 to £16.50 and Family - £55 to £60
- Adult Group sessions (i.e. talk/ presentation to interest group) – this has been £35 for some time. However, as it is similar in nature to a talk/ slideshow, which has

been priced at £55, we have decided to amalgamate these into one category, so the fee for 'Talks/ Walks/ Slideshows', which are accompanied sessions with Countryside or Specialist Rangers, will be £60.50.

- Education Centre Room Hire (for non-school groups): Morning or Afternoon session from £70 to £80. All day from £100 to £120. These figures are comparable to local village hall hire.
- Corporate Away Days - £15 per person (this is a new fee, but has already been successfully introduced this year)
- Event fees are by arrangement, as they vary significantly depending on the type of activity, so no flat fee is put against this

## Financial implications

The price increases detailed above should provide for additional income of approximately £58,000 based on current visitor numbers/sales. This is a total increase of approximately 10%, based on average income over the last 5 to 6 years for car parking and permit income at Kingsbury and Ryton, as well as on the fishing income achieved.

In reviewing our fees and charges for 2023-24 we have not applied the same percentage increase to all charges, but instead have considered each charge on its own merits. This is in line with the approach to fees and charges across WCC services where there is a range of planned price increases for 2023-24, as well as some price freezes, depending on the circumstances of each service.

Where there has been a 10% level increase in our fees and charges the rationale is outlined above and includes where prices have not increased for several years. Some charges have been increased to better reflect the cost of providing the service and to ensure prices remain 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, and we continually benchmark our prices against our competitors, to ensure we are not under or over charging.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy budget reduction increases the income target for Country Parks by £45k for 2023/24, so the proposed increase will contribute to reaching this target, but not fully achieve it, due to increased cost pressures facing the service.

See Appendix for detailed information on Fees & Charges for 2023/24

## Environmental implications

Whilst the Country Parks service is heavily dependent on income from car parking charges, we are confident that, given the relatively modest and infrequency of fee increases, our regular users will continue to pay to visit their local country park or greenway. Most 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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<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>	<i>No</i>
<b>Confidential or exempt?</b>	<i>No</i>
<b>Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?</b>	<i>No</i>

<b>List of background papers</b>
Appendix 1

<b>Members and officers consulted and informed</b>
<p>Portfolio Holder – Councillor Heather Timms</p> <p>Corporate Board – Mark Ryder</p> <p>Legal – Sarah Duxbury</p> <p>Finance – Andrew Felton</p> <p>Equality – n/a</p> <p>Commercialism – John Stansfield</p> <p>Democratic Services – Isabelle Moorhouse</p> <p>Councillors – Local Member(s): Jenns, Mills, Bell, Redford, M Humphreys, Rolfe</p>