

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

17TH JANUARY 2023

**CABINET MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
TRANSPORT, HIGHWAYS & WASTE – COUNCILLOR PHIL LARRATT**

Report Title	Parking charge arrangements at parks
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To propose revised and new parking charge arrangements at Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks, and the Racecourse Park, Northampton.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Council provides car parks for several of its parks. These meet user needs and incur costs of provision. At Daventry and Brixworth Country Parks parking charges are levied, but in other parks this has not been considered appropriate or sufficiently worthwhile.
- 2.2 The current methods of paying for parking in Brixworth and Daventry country parks are inconvenient for users, do not offer a choice of periods, and are vulnerable to abuse and non-payment. The machines are also aging and prone to failure.
- 2.3 The Racecourse car park tends to be used by people who then walk to the town centre, meaning it is not fully available for its intended purpose.
- 2.4 The Council faces a challenging financial position, which means it needs to increase income, where this is practical, in order to maintain services.
- 2.5 It is therefore proposed to provide new ANPR-based parking payment systems (using automatic number plate recognition) and new tariffs at the country parks and the Racecourse. Overall, the new arrangements should generate an additional £176k pa in revenue, with an installation cost of £144k.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - 3.1.1 Approves a capital budget of £144k for new parking charge arrangements at Daventry and Brixworth country parks, and the Racecourse.
 - 3.1.2 Authorises the implementation of new and revised parking charges for those areas as set out in Tables 2 and 3 of the report, to be implemented as soon as practical.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 To improve user choice and income generation, and reduce payment avoidance, at Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks.
- 4.2 To ensure the Racecourse car park is used for its intended purpose.
- 4.3 It is considered that the proposals either benefit users, or where there are negative effects these are outweighed by the need to provide funding to continue services.

5. Report Background

Context

- 5.1 The Council provides car parks at several of its parks, including Daventry and Brixworth Country Parks, and the Racecourse park in Northampton. These meet user needs but have a cost to provide and maintain. There are already charges for parking at these country parks; these provide an important income for the parks service. In other parks it has been considered either not practical or not worthwhile to charge, or the benefits of doing so have been considered to outweigh the benefits.
- 5.2 The Council is installing ANPR-based charging in its larger Northampton town centre car parks. This should be in place by early 2023 and offers users a range of benefits, including no need for physical tickets or permits, and easier means of payment. This project offers the same benefits and ease of use that will be experienced as part of this roll-out.
- 5.3 The project also allows the Council to harmonise pricing across its assets, ensuring that there is a consistency of approach with the ability to provide opportunities for season tickets and other concessions as required.

Country parks

- 5.4 The Council inherited very different parking charge structures in its two main country parks, Daventry and Brixworth, as shown in Table 1. Minor changes towards consolidating them have been made by making the Daventry season ticket also permit parking at Brixworth, but they remain fundamentally different in structure.

Time period	£
Daventry, all day	£2.20
Brixworth, up to four hours	£3.50
Brixworth, up to eight hours	£5.50
Brixworth, up to twelve hours	£7.50
Brixworth only season ticket	£38.00
Dual park season ticket	£70.00

- 5.5 Payment is by means of pay and display. This is not convenient for users, as it requires users to visit the pay and display machine, have the right change, obtain a ticket, and return to their car with it before they are able to enjoy what the park offers. The machines in both parks are also aging and prone to failure. This means people have to try and find a working machine, or the Council loses income. The experience is not one which encourages easy and frequent use of the parks and impacts on revenue for the upkeep of the parks themselves.

- 5.6 The use of pay and display also means that enforcement by parking attendants is required; inevitably, there are times when enforcement does not occur, and people may take the risk of not paying. This is unfair to those who do pay.
- 5.7 There have been complaints, particularly from Park Run, at Brixworth that the shortest period, up to four hours, is too long and unfairly penalises those visiting for a short time. The changes suggested should encourage more people to use the park more frequently.
- 5.8 Given these factors it is proposed to implement an ANPR-based charging system at both country parks. This would make payment easier for drivers, largely remove the possibility of avoiding payment, and make it simpler to apply charges for smaller units of time. The implementation of ANPR also enables any future changes to be done easily and in a cost-effective way. It could assist with any specific changes that may be seen as required in making the parks more accessible at certain times.
- 5.9 Specifically on the issue of Park Run, the Council recognises the particular benefits this mass participation event brings. It is therefore proposed to introduce a Park Run season ticket. This would allow Park Run participants to park for no further charge between 8:30 and 10:30 on Saturday mornings when Park Run was operating. The Park Run season ticket would apply to a specific park.
- 5.10 The proposed charges are set out in table 2. Whilst overall higher they would allow people more choice about the time they spent and therefore the charge they incurred.

Time period	£
Up to two hours	£3.00
Up to four hours	£4.00
Up to six hours	£6.00
Up to eight hours	£8.00
All day	£12.00
Single park season ticket	£70.00
Dual park season ticket	£100.00
Park Run season ticket	£5.00

- 5.11 Even at £100pa, the dual park season ticket would represent excellent value at under £2 per week to use both parks as much as the purchaser liked.
- 5.12 The new payment system is estimated to cost £104k to install.
- 5.13 The revised charges are expected to generate an additional £145k pa across the two parks, with a further £5k pa from the revised season ticket prices, but with some reductions due to the Park Run season ticket (see 7.1).

Racecourse, Northampton

- 5.14 The car park at the Racecourse has 80 spaces; it is currently free to use. It is intended to serve the park. However, it appears that the car park is largely being used by people who then walk into the town centre avoiding the costs of parking in the town, making parking difficult for those wishing to use the park and impacting in the businesses that are located here. This means that the car park is not serving its intended purpose.
- 5.15 It is therefore proposed to introduce charges at set out in Table 3, along with a no return within three hours rule. This should ensure that the car park is available for users of the park. 'Evening/overnight' is defined, as with town centre car parks, as available to purchase between 5pm and midnight and allows parking until 10am next day. If arrangements for the town centre car parks are changed, consideration would be given to also adjusting the evening/overnight arrangements here.
- 5.16 There is also a Park Run at the Racecourse. It is therefore proposed to also offer a Park Run season ticket for the Racecourse car park, on the same basis as for the country parks.

Time period	£
Daytime up to 1 Hour	£1.10
Daytime up to 2 Hours	£2.20
Daytime up to 3 Hours	£3.30
Evening/overnight charge	£2.20
Park Run season ticket	£5.00

- 5.17 As with the country parks, it is practical to install an ANPR-based system at the Racecourse. Given the benefits to users and the Council, this is the proposal.
- 5.18 The new payment system is estimated to cost £40k to install.
- 5.19 This charge is expected to result in increased income of £60k pa. As the proposal is likely to result in the displacement of users to other, more central, car parks the income is unlikely to appear in the Racecourse car park; instead, much of it would appear in other car parks. As such, the impact of Park Run season tickets is likely to be low.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 The choices open to the Council are to apply none, both, or all of the proposals. Each of these has its own advantages and disadvantages. Given user benefits from ANPR-based charging, the Council's financial position, and the proportionate approach to the proposals, it is suggested it would be appropriate to proceed with them all.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

Resources and Financial

- 7.1 The proposed charges, except the Park Run season ticket, are included in the draft budget. They should result in additional income of the order of £210k pa. The introduction of the Park Run season ticket is likely to have some adverse impact on this income, but the extent of this is not possible to assess with confidence. If it is assumed that overall 250 cars are parked for Park Run 35 weeks per year, this would result in a loss of income of £35k, with Park Run season ticket income of £1k. Thus, the net increase in income would be £176k.
- 7.2 The use of ANPR-based charging systems would greatly reduce the potential for breaches of the regulations. This is likely to reduce income from penalty charge notices. However, parking attendant would be used more in the towns centres where travel distances are less and due to the volume of parked cars their time would be more efficient, detecting other contraventions, and thus generating income.
- 7.3 The Council faces a difficult financial situation, where the costs of providing services its residents depend on is unlikely to be matched by existing sources of funding. In that context it is necessary to look at the prices the Council charges for optional services.

Legal

- 7.4 The Council provides and regulates its off-street car parks under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and regulations made under it. Unlike for on-street car parking, the Act does not require the income from off-street car parks is ring-fenced for particular purposes. The Act also empowers the Secretary of State to give 'type approval' for equipment used for parking enforcement, which the Council then uses.
- 7.5 Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council needs to consider the impact of its proposals on protected characteristics. Although parking charges are the same for all parking users, this may have a disproportionate impact on those on lower incomes, and there is a higher proportion of individuals with certain protected characteristics on low incomes. This is mitigated, however, by the provision of town centre disability parking free of charge for blue badge holders, who do not have the same choices as others as to whether to use motorised transport. Everyone is encouraged to use other forms of transport where possible to minimise the impact of traffic on communities and to support the reduction in carbon emissions. One of the ways of doing this is charging for parking, although this is more relevant for Daventry and the Racecourse than Brixworth. In addition, car parking charges support the efficient use of public assets and generate income to support public services.

Risks

- 7.6 The proposals carry a number of inherent risks, notably:
- 7.6.1 The new and increased charges may reduce people's willingness to park to use the parks, thus reducing the expected increase in income. Given the improved ease of use through ANPR-based systems, and the additional flexibility on offer, this effect is expected to be minimal and it is hoped that more people may start to use the parks as a result.
 - 7.6.2 Procurement and implementation of new payment systems may take time, resulting in an inability to deliver full year benefits in 2023-24. This would be mitigated as far as possible through early commencement of procurement.
- 7.7 There may be some public objection to the proposals, attracting negative media coverage. This would need to be managed by clear and open communication, explaining the Council's reasons, including both the practical benefits and the realities of the challenging financial situation facing the Council.

Consultation

- 7.8 No consultation has taken place on these proposals. They do, however, respond to complaints at Brixworth about the limited choice of time periods.

Climate Impact

- 7.9 There is likely to be relatively little overall impact on climate as a result of these proposals. They are not considered likely to materially reduce usage and therefore travel by car.

Community Impact

- 7.10 The impact of the proposed changes on the community varies by area.
- 7.11 The Country Park changes would benefit some users, such as Park Run and other short-stay users, whilst increasing charges for others. They would benefit all users by providing a system which made payment easier and more reliable. They would also benefit honest users by making it very much harder for others to avoid payment.
- 7.12 The new charges at the Racecourse should mean that car park is available for park users.

Communications

- 7.13 Decisions to vary or create new parking charges inevitably involve some reaction. It would be necessary to clearly communicate the Council's reasons, including both the practical benefits and the realities of the challenging financial situation facing the Council.

8. Background Papers

8.1 None.