

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 16 July 2019

Decision No: 19/00054

Subject: KCC Country Parks – Decision to approve fees and charges for Pay and Display and Season Ticket charging, and the principles for establishing future fees and charges

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: For Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Canterbury South, Cheriton Sandgate & Hythe East, Gravesend East, Gravesham Rural, Maidstone Rural West, Malling Central, Ramsgate, and Sevenoaks North & Darent Valley

Summary: This paper details Pay and Display and Annual Parking Season Ticket fees and charges for Kent Country Parks (KCP) following an annual review. This paper also sets out a number of key principles applied when establishing fees and charges for discretionary parking services provided to visitors and customers using the Kent Country Parks.

Recommendation(s): The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the decision to increase fees and charges for Pay and Display and Annual Parking Season Ticket fees and to delegate authority to the Head of Country Parks to annually review and publish revised fees and charges subject to the application of a number of key principles as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

1.1 KCC owns nine country parks, seven of which hold a Green Flag award, four of which were Silver, Silver Gilt or Gold award winners in the 2018/19 Keep Britain Tidy Awards, and one of which (Brockhill Country Park, in Saltwood, Hythe) won the South East England Country Park of the Year in 2018/19. Shorne Woods Country Park in Gravesham has previously won that prestigious award on three occasions, reflecting the quality of these community assets right across the portfolio. The average customer rating according to the most recent visitor survey is 9.25/10.

- 1.2 KCC is entitled to charge for Pay and Display at the Kent Country Parks under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 2003 (Power to Charge for Discretionary Services) and Section 43 of the Countryside Act 1968.
- 1.3 Kent Country Parks determine each site's daily car parking charges by the range and quality of services and facilities provided at the particular site to ensure a fair and consistent approach across the portfolio. The service allocates the nine country parks to one of three bands which are determined in line with the amenities on site.
- 1.4 Band 1 Country Parks, of which there are four in the portfolio, are sites with the widest range of customer facilities which can include visitor centres, permanent catering and w/c facilities, large or multiple children's play areas and a variety of marked or accessible trails. They also host a seasonal events programme, educational programmes, venue hire, children's birthday parties and team building as additional paid for activities. Band 2 Country Parks, of which there are four in the portfolio, are sites with seasonal catering facilities, w/c facilities, medium sized children's play areas and a variety of marked or accessible trails. Band 3 Country Parks, of which there is one in the portfolio, are sites with no catering, w/c facilities or children's play areas but that have a variety of marked or accessible trails.
- 1.5 Pay and Display charges are applied on a daily basis. Customers are able to spend as long as they like (within the operating hours of the park) using the Country Park and all of its facilities for a fixed daily fee. Visitor numbers are significantly higher on weekend days compared to weekdays and therefore charges at weekends are higher to reflect the increased demand, as well as to encourage visitors to visit off peak on weekdays when the pay and display fee is lower.
- 1.6 Enforcement of non-payment of Pay and Display charges uses Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology. This system is designed to capture the number plates of vehicles as they enter and leave the car park and to correlate this information against valid pay and display tickets, or valid entries on the exemptions list. This means that all drivers, including those with a valid blue badge, are required to pay and display to avoid penalty charges for non-payment being applied.
- 1.7 As an alternative to the daily Pay and Display charges, regular visitors to the Kent Country Parks are encouraged to purchase an annual parking permit (season ticket) that, once the initial season ticket is purchased, provides them with unlimited free parking at all nine parks in the portfolio for a period of 365 days. A similar subsidised annual parking permit is available for blue badge holders.
- 1.8 Both daily Pay and Display charges and annual parking permit fees have not changed since 2017/18 despite increasing financial pressures on the service. This report details the current and proposed changes as outlined in Appendix 1 with the intention for increases to be imposed on 1st September 2019.

1.9 The Kent Country Parks Service has applied a number of principles in establishing both the daily Pay and Display charge and the annual parking permit charge:

- a) It is incumbent on the Service to charge for activities that are discretionary given the pressures on the County Council finances.
- b) Charges will be costed, reasonable and comply with all applicable legislation, regulation and guidance.
- c) Charges will be reviewed annually and, if needed, on the enactment of any amending legislation, regulation or the issuing of guidance.
- d) Charges will reflect the true cost of service provision and will include both direct and indirect costs of service provision as well as Corporate, Directorate, Divisional and Service overheads.
- e) The charges for specific sites have been established in line with the principles above and our best assessment of the visitor facilities and customer experience whilst using the Kent Country Parks and have been applied fairly and consistently across the portfolio.

1.10 In order to limit the need to seek further Executive decisions in respect of charges, delegated authority is sought to enable annual adjustments up to the maximum value of £5 per annual season ticket and also to the maximum value of £2 per daily pay and display charge to be made to the published fees and charges without the need for further Executive decision. Adjustments will be made following the same set of key principles above and in keeping with competitor leisure facilities in the county

2. Financial Implications

2.1 The nine country parks are extremely popular with residents and welcome 1.5 million visitors every year. The vast majority of park users understand that every penny raised through car parking is invested directly back into the parks. Pay and Display car park charging raised £395,555 across all nine country parks in 17/18. This represents 30% of the £1.3m income the service generated in 17/18. Pay and Display car park charging raised £391,861 across all nine country parks in 18/19. This represents 26% of the £1.5m income the service generated in 18/19. It is therefore a vital income stream for a discretionary service. All income raised through Pay and Display is invested directly back into KCC Country Parks.

2.2 The number of annual parking season tickets has increased year on year. There were 1212 standard season ticket holders in 17/18, rising to 1532 standard season ticket holders in 18/19. There were 682 blue badge season ticket holders in 17/18 rising to 1437 blue badge season ticket holders in 18/19.

2.3 Country Parks service reviews the annual parking season tickets price and the daily pay and display charges each year. The current daily parking charges were set in 2017-18 and based on the principles above there are no plans to increase these fees in 19/20. The standard ticket has increased in small amounts most years but remained at £50 in 18/19, with no increase from 17/18.

The Blue Badge season ticket has remained at £3 since its introduction in 2015.

- 2.4 All monies from the sale of season tickets is reinvested back into KCC Country Parks. This has included improvements to parking facilities such as disabled bays, signage, pay by mobile as well as improvements to park facilities such as access-for-all paths, provision of trampers (all terrain mobility vehicles) for less mobile visitors and more benches to enable blue badge holders and other less mobile visitors to have greater confidence to venture further into our sites. In 18/19 an additional tramper mobility scooter was purchased for the fleet at a cost to the service of £8,500, 1000km of additional accessible pathways were created and 3,500km of accessible pathways were repaired and maintained to ensure that access for customers remains in a quality state. The standard (non-blue badge) season ticket covers the costs of processing the purchase and contributes to the maintenance of the parks just as a member of the public using Pay & Display to pay for parking does. The £3.00 blue badge season ticket does not cover the whole cost of processing the purchase, (which is £7.57) and does not make any contribution to the maintenance of the parks.
- 2.5 In November 2017 a new online payment system was introduced. In conjunction with this the valid period of a season ticket was changed to 12 months from the date of purchase rather than the financial year 1st April to 31st March. This removed a tiered charge (paying a pro rata amount depending at what point in year season ticket was purchased) for the standard ticket, and is better value for the customer.
- 2.6 A review of the season ticket prices and daily pay and display fees has been carried out. We have seen a significant increase in the number of blue badge season tickets since their introduction, which is positive as it indicates more disabled customers and their family or friends are accessing and enjoying our parks. However, the associated costs of servicing more blue badge purchases have also increased, as this client group are less likely to use self-service online payment, preferring to contact Contact Point for telephone payments and support.
- 2.7 The annual price of both season tickets are proposed to rise from the 1 September 2019 by £2. The standard ticket will therefore increase to £52 (costing the customer £1.00 per week to use all nine parks as frequently as they wish) and the blue badge season ticket will increase to £5.00 (10.4 pence per week). This £5.00 figure has been set as the sum to make the processing costs of all blue badge season ticket applications neutral (i.e. putting together those that do apply online with those that use contact centre) but will not provide any surplus funds to support the ongoing maintenance of the parks' infrastructure.
- 2.8 Based on 18/19 sales of season tickets the proposed uplift will generate an additional income for the service of £5,938. It is anticipated this will contribute

to the annual increase in running costs to the service and not to provide an additional surplus income.

3. Policy Framework

- 3.1 Kent Country Parks' work programme is determined by the Kent Country Parks Strategy 2017 - 2021
- 3.2 This Strategy helps deliver KCC Strategic Outcome 2 – “Kent communities feel the benefits of economic growth by being in work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life.” The Strategy particularly contributes to Strategic Supporting Outcome “Kent’s physical and natural environment is protected, enhanced and enjoyed by residents and visitors.”
- 3.3 This Strategy has three strategic aims, one of which is “Ensuring the Service is as financially self-sustainable as possible.”
- 3.4 This Strategy was endorsed by the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 31st January 2018.

4. Legal considerations

- 4.1 KCC is entitled to charge for Pay and Display at the Kent Country Parks under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 2003 (Power to Charge for Discretionary Services) and Section 43 of the Countryside Act 1968.
- 4.1 KCC Legal Services have confirmed lawfulness of parking enforcement through English contractual law and this has recently been tested and ratified through the Local Government Ombudsman following a customer complaint.

5. Equality considerations

- 5.1 No equalities implications have been identified; an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) initial screening and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been completed.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The Kent Country Parks service relies on the income generated from daily Pay and Display charges and the sales of annual season tickets in order to continue to maintain the parks and the services they provide to a high-quality standard.
- 6.2 The proposed £2 increase will affect all sales of annual parking season tickets with effect from the 1st September 2019. There are no proposed increases to daily pay and display charges in 2018/19.
- 6.3 The proposed increase to annual parking season tickets is to cover the administrative costs of providing the season ticket facility and will enable blue badge season tickets to be provided as a cost neutral offer rather than one that costs the service to administer.

- 6.4 Delegation of authority to the Head of Service to make annual increases to the maximum additional value of £5 to annual parking season tickets and £2 to daily pay and display charges will reduce the need for further Executive decisions to be made in order to respond to the changing market. All decisions for future increases to charges will be made in line with the principles outlined in this report.

6. Recommendation(s)

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The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the decision to increase fees and charges for Pay and Display and Annual Parking Season Ticket fees and to delegate authority to the Head of Country Parks to annually review and publish revised fees and charges subject to the application of a number of key principles as shown at Appendix A.

7. Background Documents

- 7.1 Appendix 1: Current and proposed daily pay and display charges and annual parking season ticket charges for Kent Country Parks.
- 7.2 Appendix 2: Proposed Record of Decision
- 7.3 Appendix 3: Country Parks charges for daily Pay and Display fees and Annual Parking Season Ticket fees – EQIA
- 7.4 Appendix 4: Data Protection Impact Assessment

8. Contact details

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Appendix 1

PROPOSED PARKING CHARGES 2019-20							
Country Park	Current rate		Proposed rate		Difference	Difference	
	Mon-Fri	W'ends / BHs	Mon-Fri	W'ends / BHs	Mon-Fri	W'ends / BHs	
Shorne Woods Country Park	£ 2.00	£ 3.00	£ 2.00	£ 3.00	£ -	£ -	
Lullingstone Country Park	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ -	£ -	
Trosley Country Park	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ -	£ -	
Brockhill Country Park	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ 1.50	£ 2.50	£ -	£ -	
Teston Bridge Country Park	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ -	£ -	
Grove Ferry Picnic Site	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ -	£ -	
Pegwell Bay Country Park	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ -	£ -	
Manor Park Country Park	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ 1.30	£ 2.00	£ -	£ -	
White Horse Wood Country Park	£ 1.00	£ 1.50	£ 1.00	£ 1.50	£ -	£ -	
Annual Parking Season Tickets	Current annual rate	Proposed annual rate	Difference				
Standard Season Ticket	£ 50.00	£ 52.00	£ 2.00				
Blue Badge Season Ticket	£ 3.00	£ 5.00	£ 2.00				