

HEDGE END, WEST END AND BOTLEY LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

Monday, 30 January 2023

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT: FEES AND CHARGES

Report of the Local Area Manager

Recommendation

It is recommended that this Committee approves:

- (1) the stated fees and charges for Itchen Valley Country Park for 2023; and
 - (2) the stated fees and charges at Hedge End Station car park for 2023.
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Summary

Fees and charges for Council services are reviewed on a regular basis. In accordance with the Council's budget strategy, fees and charges levied by the Council are reviewed with the intention of increasing yield linked to inflation. The yield target this year is 10.1%. This report sets out the proposed amendments to the fees and charges at Itchen Valley Country Park (IVCP) and Hedge End train station car park.

Statutory Powers

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

Strategic Implications

1. Income from fees and charges at IVCP support the ongoing management and maintenance of the site. The country park contributes to the Council's strategic aims of a Green Borough and Healthy Community. The proposed fees and charges are broadly in line with the projected yield stipulated by corporate policy.

Itchen Valley Fees and Charges

2. The Council agrees an annual strategy regarding fees and charges. In 2023/24 the target yield is 10.1%. This Committee has the authority to set the fees and charges at IVCP. The proposed changes take account of the Masterplan for the site (delivery of which will commence shortly), and the impact of the current challenging economic climate.

3. The Country Parks Manager has discussed the proposed changes with the Hedge End, West End and Botley Local Area Manager and the proposals are set out in Appendix One. The key changes to note are as follows:
4. As part of the masterplan project, new barbeque areas will be created. These are still under design and a relatively small increase in charging is therefore proposed for this year, recognising that the increased number of barbeques should increase yield. This will need further review after the project has been delivered.
5. Currently, IVCP does not have school parties visiting. Where this has taken place, it has been facilitated by Youth Options as tenants at IVCP and has not been run by Country Parks staff. However, it is sensible to continue to offer whole class educational visits as an option. The proposed increase in price reflects increased staffing costs. This fee increase as a per head cost would be £6.33 increasing from £5.83 in 2022/23. It is worth noting that the only room currently available for hire for school parties is the Kingfisher Room. However, this room will not be available for 2023/24 due to the works associated with the masterplan. The new building on High Hill Field will be available for school hire and the charges will be further reviewed once the project has been completed.
6. Given the Kingfisher Room will not be available next year, the charges for hiring this facility have been removed. New charges will be created for the new High Hill Field building as it will be constructed to a much higher specification, is larger, and in a better location.
7. In 2022/23, feedback from the non-charitable organisation that hired High Hill Field was that the rate was significantly lower than the nearest competitor, Southampton Common (£7,000). It is therefore proposed that the charge is increased by between 47-53%. This remains well below the level of charging at other sites and includes parking for 200 cars on the field.
8. This Committee agreed to increase car parking rates for 2022/23 following them having been frozen for 18 months. Further increases are proposed for this coming year, taking account of the improved facilities and visitor experience being delivered by the masterplan project. As per last year's strategy of incentivising longer visit times, the percentage increase for the upper bands is smaller than for the lower bands and overall, the average percentage increase is 9.0%. It is necessary to charge by 10p increments as the pay machines do not accept lower denominations of coins. Parking for one hour (aimed primarily at dog walkers) remains below £2.00 and all charges remain below the 2022/23 charges set at Hampshire County Council country parks in low season. The introduction of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system as part of the masterplan project should result in an increase in yield by ensuring all visitors arriving by car pay a fee (where required) that accurately reflects the duration of the visit. In addition, there will be a reduction in enforcement costs, although these will not be removed entirely.

Hedge End Train Station Car Park

9. In 2022/23, this Committee approved the freezing of charges at the Hedge End train station car park due to the lack of recovery post-pandemic and the continued uncertainty. The parking charges therefore reflect those set in July 2020.
10. A year on, usage of the car park has roughly doubled but remains approximately 10-12,000 parking actions below pre-covid levels. While recovery is slow, it is necessary to see an increase in prices this year. These have been discussed with the Council's Parking Manager and an increase of 12.50% to £4.50 is proposed (currently £4.00). As a comparison, the closest equivalent station is Fareham where parking at the station is currently £4.90/ day (parking near to the station is £4.50). Parking at Eastleigh town centre multi-storey car park is £8.50/ day and £9.90 at Eastleigh Station. Parking at Southampton Airport Parkway is £17.00/ day. It should be noted that parking charges at Hedge End train station car park are typically revised every two years, therefore the next anticipated tariff revisions will be 2024/25.

Financial Implications

11. The fees and charges must be implemented in order to achieve the corporate target of 10.1% yield.
12. The current budget for parking income at IVCP in the 2022/23 financial year is £193,400. As of end of Q2 income sits at £131,041. Income levels have been in line with the profile and demonstrate an average spend of £2.95. When compared with 2021/22, which occurred at the peak of Covid lockdowns and therefore alternative recreation options were limited, there is a reduction in overall parking income from a Q2 income of £154,407 with average parking spend of £2.96. This demonstrates that although parking has settled at a lower level, park users continue to stay longer at IVCP than before lockdown, reflecting the aims set out in the business plan. It should also be noted that Q2 visitor numbers for IVCP are currently 10,000 visitors higher than pre-lockdown levels.
13. The proposed increases have been carefully considered to take account of the financial challenges being faced by residents across the Borough (discussed further below) and the need to generate additional income. The introduction of ANPR as part of the masterplan project is expected to result in an increase in yield and once the project is completed, the improved facilities should further encourage increased dwell time. As the financial pressure on families continue to bite, it is possible there will be an increase in middle-income families visiting the park as an alternative to more expensive 'premium' family days out.

Risk Assessment

14. If the Committee does not comply with the corporate fees and charges policy and the income target is not achieved, then it will be liable for any shortfall at IVCP. A shortfall at Hedge End Station car park would be met corporately, as

the recommended fee increase has been proposed by the service rather than this Committee (provided the Committee accepts the recommendation). If income targets for IVCP are not achieved, there is the potential for an impact on service delivery at the site.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. The Council has identified social deprivation as an additional Protected Characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act is therefore relevant to the decisions in this report. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out and attached as an appendix to the report. Due regard has been had to equality issues in relation to parking as free car parking has been retained for those with disabilities at both IVCP and Hedge End Station.
16. With regard to socio-economic deprivation and concerns about Cost of Living, the main income streams for IVCP are parking and catering, neither of which can be means tested. However, the charges for these are deliberately set to be affordable to a wider audience. As mentioned above, the car parking charges at IVCP are lower than the parking charges for the nearest competitor parks, examples from the current financial year are set out in the table below:

	1hr	2hr	3hr	4hr	full day
Hampshire Country Park Off Peak	£ 2.00	£ 3.50	n/a	£ 4.50	£ 6.00
Avon Heath Country Park (Dorset)	n/a	£ 3.00	n/a	£ 6.00	£ 8.00
Hampshire Country Park Peak	£ 2.50	£ 5.00	n/a	£ 7.00	£ 9.00
Moors Valley Off Peak weekend	£ 3.00	£ 5.90	£ 8.50	£ 10.50	£ 11.50
Moors Valley Peak weekend	£ 4.50	£ 8.80	£ 11.80	£ 13.00	£ 15.00

17. The Park has continued to offer targeted, grant-funded sessions this year, which have provided free access, transport and activities for low-income families. In addition, two event days offering free activities to all families visiting the site have been held. Free guided walks have also been provided specifically for isolated elderly residents. In light of the current cost of living crisis, these initiatives are even more valuable, and it is intended to increase, and where possible expand, these offerings.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

18. The provision of car parking and affordable parking charges within the site continues to encourage visitors to drive to the country park, which has an environmental impact. Balanced with this, affordable parking charges enable visitors, and particularly families, to continue to enjoy the facilities at Itchen Valley Country Park, which aims to educate its visitors about the environment and sustainability. While the site is currently not easily accessible by public transport, cycle parking is provided to encourage sustainable travel. In future years, there may be the opportunity to link the Country Park to a wider cycle route network through the delivery of a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) associated with the One Horton Heath development.
19. The provision of reasonably priced parking charges at Hedge End Station provides incentives for residents to travel by train to destinations such as London, rather than using their cars for the longer journeys. While it does promote the use of the car for short journeys, this is overall more sustainable.

Conclusion

20. The Committee is requested to approve the fees and charges at Itchen Valley Country Park and Hedge End Station car park as set out above and at Appendix One.

KITTY BUDDEN
LOCAL AREA MANAGER

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Appendices Attached: 2

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None.

Appendix One

Itchen Valley Country Park: Fees and Charges 2023

Itchen Valley Country Park			
	1 April 2022	1 February 2023	Change %
Barbeque Charges			
Up to 60 people Friday-Sunday	66.00	72.00	9.09
Over 60 people	93.00	100.00	7.53
School Parties			
Whole class education visit	175.00	190.00	8.57
Kingfisher Room			
Room hire per hour (minimum charge 2 hours)	28.00	Delete	n/a
Room hire for parties (up to 5 hours)	60.00	Delete	n/a
Hire of High Hill Field (minimum charge)			
Charitable Organisations			
- Up to 1000 people	372.00	400.00	7.53
- Over 1000 people	680.00	750.00	10.29
Non-charitable Organisations			
- Up to 1000 people	680.00	1,000.00	47.06
- Over 1000 people	1630.00	2,500.00	53.37
Car Parking			
Up to one hour	1.70	1.90	11.76
Up to two hours	2.90	3.20	10.34
Up to three hours	4.00	4.20	5.00
Four hours +	4.50	4.90	8.89
Other Parking Charges			
Coaches	23.00	25.50	10.87
Orange/ Blue badges	Free	Free	n/a
Motorcycles	Free	Free	n/a
Annual permits	51.00	56.00	9.80
6 monthly permits	29.00	32.00	10.34
Quarterly permits	19.00	21.00	10.53

Appendix Two

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Title of EqIA:	Itchen Valley Country Park (IVCP) and Hedge End Train Station car park fees and charges
Brief description of the Proposal:	To increase a range of fees and charges at IVCP and Hedge End train station car park in line with the corporate target of 10.1% yield for 2023/24.
Summary of Impacts and Issues:	<p>An increase in charges has the potential to impact low-income residents the most at a time when the cost of living is a particular issue. However, the cost of providing services for the Council is also affected by the economic situation, and if the corporate yield target (10.1%) is not met, savings will need to be achieved which may impact the ability of IVCP in particular to deliver programmes which benefit these residents.</p> <p>The main income streams for IVCP are parking and catering, neither of which can be means tested. However, the charges are deliberately set to be affordable to the widest audience and the Park has continued to offer targeted, grant-funded sessions for low-income families. It is intended to increase, and where possible expand, these offerings.</p> <p>Hedge End train station is typically used as a commuter station for travel to London or Winchester. Users are therefore more able to absorb a 50p increase in parking costs. Due to the pandemic, more people are working from home on a regular basis which has reduced travel costs overall.</p>
Potential Positive Impacts:	Maintain an affordable offering for a wide audience, with targeted sessions that specifically benefit low-income families, allowing access to a well-maintained country park and the associated benefits to mental health and wellbeing.
What engagement or consultation has been carried out?	No direct engagement or consultation. Fees and charges are reviewed on an annual basis and the recommendations published in advance of the Local Area Committee where interested parties are able to speak to express their views.

Assessment

For all of categories below please consider:

1. **Does this proposal eliminate unlawful discrimination?**
2. **Does this proposal advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it?**
3. **Does this proposal foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it?**

Statutory Considerations: Please highlight what impact could there be on people with protected characteristics.

Impact Assessment	Details of Impact	Possible Solutions/ Mitigating Factors
Age:	None	None
Disability:	None	Free orange/ blue badge parking provision
Gender reassignment:	None	None
Marriage and civil partnership:	None	None
Pregnancy and maternity:	None	None
Race:	None	None
Religion or belief:	None	None
Sex:	None	None
Sexual Orientation:	None	None
Social deprivation - please highlight what impact could there be on people experiencing social deprivation:	Increased charges may render park inaccessible to low-income residents who have access to a car.	Continue to offer targeted, grant-funded sessions for low-income families that provide free access, transport and activities. Increase, and where possible expand, these offerings in 2023/24.
Other significant Impacts:	None	None

Action Plan

Activity	Outcome	Timeframe	Person responsible
Report recommending fees and charges increase to HEWEB	Secure approval for increase	LAC 21/11/2022	Kitty Budden
Implement charge increases	Increased fees and charges	1 February 2023	Simon Gould/ Rob Saunders
Offer Family Fun Days for low-income families	Fun activity days for a range of low-income families from the Borough	July-August 2023	Simon Gould/ Mandy Adams

Lead Officer:	Kitty Budden
Manager:	Louise O'Driscoll
Corporate Director:	Natalie Wigman
Date completed:	08/11/2022