

## **Cabinet**

**13 February 2024**

### **Parking Charges at Country Parks**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

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#### **Summary**

This report proposes the implementation of a charging regime for visitor parking at Medway's country parks. This would apply to Riverside Country Park, Capstone Country Park and, subject to planning permission, any new country park coming forward at Deangate Ridge. These new fees would generate income, which the Council could allocate to environmental improvements.

The following principles are proposed:

- The introduction of a flat parking fee of £2.50 and an annual season ticket priced at £60.00 (valid in all Medway country parks). Coaches would be charged a flat fee of £9.00. The parking fees and the season ticket price would be subject to annual review.
- Payment for parking to be made via Pay & Display machines (card and cash) and RingGo.
- Exemptions from parking charges applicable to Blue Badge holders, motorcycles, Council staff based at Deangate Ridge and users of Deangate Ridge indoor bowls club.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the inclusion of these parking charges as set out in paragraph 6.2 of the report, and associated income and expenditure as detailed in paragraphs 4.10 to 4.14, in the draft Council budget report for 2024/25 which will be considered by full Council on 29 February 2024.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is requested to recommend full Council to approve the following capital additions, to be funded from borrowing over five years, at a cost of circa £45,000 per annum:

- £11,500 in 2023/24, as detailed in paragraph 4.12 of the report.
- £159,500 in 2024/25, as detailed in paragraph 4.13 of the report.

## 2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. The new charge would bring Medway Council in line with the approach taken by Kent County Council to charge for parking in country parks whilst also providing a valuable new income stream to help address budget challenges.

## 3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Whilst the charging for parking at country parks is a new policy and budget position for Medway Council, it is levied by Kent County Council. The new charge is proposed as a way of supporting investment in the Council's highly valued parks and greenspaces. It would also provide a new income stream to the Council to help address the current financial challenges. Supporting investment in country parks and green spaces will also act to address climate change. A Disability Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 1.

## 4. Background

- 4.1. A benchmarking exercise has been undertaken to confirm parking charges, approaches and payment systems utilised in town centre car parks operated by Medway Council and within country parks managed by Kent County Council. Data from this exercise has been used to determine suitable parking charges and payment systems for Medway's Country Parks.
- 4.2. There are nine country parks located within Kent that are managed by Kent County Council. All car parks are open from 09:00 and close at the earliest of dusk or 21:00. They are open every day of the year except Christmas Day. Parking is charged in each, with annual season tickets available as well as the ability to pay on-the-day.
- 4.3. A flat rate parking charge is charged in all car parks; the charge differs on weekdays compared to weekends and bank holidays. Tariffs do not vary depending on duration of stay. In each, payment can be made by cash, card or by using phone-based technology.
- 4.4. A daily charge of £9.00 is applied to coaches and minibuses within each car park. Motorcycle users are not required to pay to park. Kent County Council offers season tickets for regular visitors, which allow holders to park without an on-the-day charge in all nine country parks.
- 4.5. Season tickets cost £62.00 and are valid for one year from the date of purchase and can include up to two car registration numbers, with both vehicles registered to the same address. The season ticket can only be used by one vehicle at a time; it does not allow a second vehicle to be parked concurrently at separate locations at the same location.

- 4.6. Blue Badge holders are required to pay to park, unless displaying a valid season ticket. A season ticket is available at a discounted cost of £15 per year and is valid in all nine country parks. An overview of parking at each country park, including charges, is set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Parking Charges at Kent's Country Parks**

<b>Country Park</b>	<b>Weekday</b>	<b>Weekend and Bank Holiday</b>	<b>Coach Minibus</b>
Brockhill	£2.50	£3.50	£9.00
Manor Park	£2.00	£3.00	£9.00
Teston Bridge	£2.00	£3.00	£9.00
Grove Ferry Picnic Site	£2.00	£3.00	£9.00
Pedwell Bay	£2.00	£3.00	£9.00
Trosley	£2.50	£3.50	£9.00
Lullingstone	£2.50	£3.50	£9.00
Shorne Woods	£3.00	£4.00	£9.00
White Horse Wood	£1.50	£2.00	£9.00

**Recommended Payment System**

- 4.7. It is considered that Pay & Display and phone-based payment provides the most suitable arrangement for parking at Riverside, Capstone Farm and Deangate Ridge. Desktop-based study, site audits undertaken by SYSTRA and discussions with the Council on current town centre operations have been used to determine the number of Pay & Display machines required per car park.
- 4.8. It is important that users are aware of the need to pay to park, to maximise payments made and reduce instances of successful PCN challenges. As such, a similar assessment has been undertaken to determine the number of information boards and supporting signs required per car park, as well as possible locations for signage.
- 4.9. It is suggested that the Council uses solar-based Pay & Display machines, in line with other car parks it operates, as opposed to machines that are mains-powered. Recognising some constraints of solar-based machines, the following is recommended:
- In busiest car parks, a second Pay & Display machine is installed should the first temporarily stop working due to a lack of power; and

- A second / spare battery is purchased for each machine for use particularly in winter months.

### Cost Projections

- 4.10. There are costs associated with the implementation, management and operation of a parking charging regime. A detailed assessment of these costs has been undertaken, split between pre-implementation, implementation and ongoing management and maintenance. Costs are presented for a five-year period.
- 4.11. The Council undertakes extensive enforcement operations across its parking stock, and the country parks would be incorporated into this should parking charges be introduced. This would require the recruitment of additional staff, equipment purchase and back office management.
- 4.12. Approval to proceed would be sought by full Council at its meeting on 29 February 2024 and if approved works would commence in March 2024, therefore some costs would be expected in the 2023/24 financial year. These are associated with the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) (£3,500) and commissioning a contractor to undertake required works such as lining / marking in car parks (£8,000).
- 4.13. In the 2024/25 (Year 1) financial year, all other implementation costs would occur, including machine / signage purchase and installation, advance warning signage and marketing and communications package. These costs total £105,230. For robustness, as Flowbird maintenance fees etc are annual figures, the financial profile does not account for any reduction in these.
- 4.14. In the first year of operation, transaction costs have been reduced to two thirds of a full year, given charging would be in place from August 2024, i.e. eight months. From 2025/26 onwards, full year transaction costs are applied. Enforcement costs are incorporated from Year 1 onwards.
- 4.15. Taken together the income and cost projections have identified the predicted profit/loss set out in Table 2 below. The average annual net income across 4 full years of full operation is £223,133.

**Table 2: Projected Annual Profit**

Year	Income	Cost	Profit
Year 1: 2024/25	£186,730	£99,155	£87,575
Year 2: 2025/26	£280,096	£-100,238	£179,858
Year 3: 2026/27	£280,096	£101,350	£178,746
Year 4: 2027/28	£280,096	£102,518	£177,578
Year 5: 2028/29	£280,096	£103,745	£176,351
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,307,114</b>	<b>£507,006</b>	<b>£800,108</b>

\*figures have been rounded

## 5. Options

- 5.1. The following options have been considered in the development of this new charge:

Option One: No new charge to be levied.

Option Two: A new parking charge to be levied.

## 6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. This new fee is proposed to help the Council address the pressures in its medium-term financial outlook. These pressures were set out in recent Cabinet papers and indicate financial pressures both in year and in future years. Various options have been assessed in terms of this new fee and the following summary advice is offered: -

6.1.1. *Option One*, does not provide the Council with a new income stream to protect greenspaces and the Council's broader services at a time of increasing financial pressure. This option is not recommended.

6.1.2. *Option Two*, begins to address some of the budget challenges experienced by the Council whilst levying a charge which is comparable to Kent County Council. This option is recommended.

- 6.2. The implementation of Option Two would result in the following new fees:

- The introduction of a flat parking fee of £2.50 and an annual season ticket priced at £60.00 (valid in all Medway country parks). Coaches would be charged a flat fee of £9.00. The parking fees and the season ticket price would be subject to annual review.
- Payment for parking to be made via Pay & Display machines (card and cash) and RingGo.
- Exemptions from parking charges applicable to Blue Badge holders, motorcycles, Council staff based at Deangate Ridge and users of Deangate Ridge indoor bowls club.

## 7. Risk management

- 7.1. The key risks to the implementation of the new parking charge have been identified and are set out below:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Displacement of parking	The introduction of charges may result in parking being displaced elsewhere.	This risk is likely to be low, although mitigation measures may need to be considered for Lower Rainham Road, Chatham Snowsports Centre and future residential	CIII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		developments to the north of Capstone Farm.	
Assessment of income projection	The proposed charges are new and whilst built using reasonable assumptions and on the use of car parks at Riverside and Capstone there is no previous charges data to rely on.	Income and parking activity will be closely monitored to identify changes in behaviour. Assumptions will be varied as part of the councils monitoring processes to address this where necessary.	BII
Delay to implementation due to adverse public reaction	The proposal for new parking charges is likely to generate interest from the public and across various media channels. A significant number of objections may be received to the new charge.	An active communications strategy will be developed to explain the rationale for the new charge.	CIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

## 8. Consultation

- 8.1. Prior consultation on this proposed new fee has not been undertaken, given the financial constraints being experienced by the Council and the fact that comparable charges are in place in neighbouring Councils. However, the TRO process includes a statutory consultation and the responses to that will be carefully considered alongside the impacts identified in the DIA. It is important users are made aware in advance, should parking charges be introduced. An indicative marketing and communications budget of £6,000 has been accounted for to cover activity for all sites. In addition, costs for erecting advance warning signage in car parks are accounted for.

## 9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. The key climate change implication is the ability of the Council to use surplus parking income for environmental improvements, including the reduction of environmental pollution, the provision and improvement of outdoor recreational facilities, or improving or maintaining the appearance or amenity of roads, land adjoining roads and publicly available land or water. The charges are not expected to direct additional traffic to parks.

## 10. Financial implications

- 10.1. Taking the policy and practice approach set out above and placing it in the Medway context has resulted in the formation of loss and income projections. This section sets out the estimated income projection associated with the introduction of parking charges at Riverside, Capstone Farm and Deangate Ridge. It includes projected income generated through on-the-day payments and the purchase of season tickets. Income associated with enforcement activity is not incorporated into projections.
- 10.2. It is important to note that the information presented within this section provides estimates only. User behaviour may vary significantly and demand for parking and associated income may differ considerably from that presented.

### **Income Projections**

- 10.3. A number of operational and user behaviour assumptions have been utilised to inform the income projections. These have been discussed and agreed with Highways colleagues. Benchmarking work, as detailed below, has been used to identify suitable pricing structures. The key assumptions are as follows:-
- A flat rate of £2.50 for parking is proposed and £60.00 for an annual season ticket (valid in all three country parks).
  - No assumed change in parking / season ticket charges during the five-year assessed period.
  - Blue badge holders are exempt from payment (displaying valid badge), motorcycles also exempt.
  - No maximum duration of stay incorporated within the assessment.
  - Parking charges implemented during signed car park opening hours only.
  - Payment available via Pay & Display or RingGo in all car parks; no P&D machine in Riverside Overflow.
  - Of those paying to park, 60% would use a season ticket and 40% paying on-the-day (i.e. P&D / RingGo).

- Charging is proposed to be introduced at the start of August 2024. This equates to eight months of the 2024/25 financial year; income figure for this year has therefore been reduced to two-thirds of a full year.
- 10.4. Vehicle count data collected by the Council at Riverside and Capstone Farm was used to estimate parking demand, the number of Pay & Display transactions and associated payment income. There is no historical record of paying for parking to rely on. The data covers six months from April to September 2023. To cover a full year, an 1.6\* uplift has been used (i.e. October to March received 60% traffic volume compared to April to September).
- 10.5. Parking data was not available for Deangate Ridge. Therefore, a bespoke methodology was used to estimate demand at Deangate Ridge:
- Average turnover of space per day calculated at Capstone Farm / Riverside using vehicle count data.
  - This applied to total standard capacity at Deangate Ridge (i.e. excludes disabled bays) and uplifted to estimate annual usage.
  - Noting lease requirements at Deangate Ridge Indoor Bowls Centre and Council staff parking needs, assumed 50% of users need to pay and 50% not required to (Council staff / bowls club visitors).
  - Same assumptions on season ticket / Pay & Display split etc then applied.
  - Chatham Snowsports Centre is not included within the assessment (privately owned).
- 10.6. The introduction of parking fees at country parks would require expenditure on equipment, signs and road markings, a Traffic Regulation Order, and communications. A charging regime would generate on-going revenue costs associated with back-office support, enforcement, transactions charges, cash collection and maintenance.
- 10.7. The introduction of parking fees at country parks is expected to generate a budget surplus once operational costs have been accounted for. The use of this surplus is subject to legislation, as set out below.
- 10.8. Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 directs that Councils may use any surplus generated from car park charges to cover all or any part of the cost of the provision and maintenance of off-street parking. The Council is also permitted to use any surplus for funding highway or road improvement projects and for the purpose of environmental improvements. It is proposed that the net annual income is directed to improvement and management of Medway's parks and greenspaces.
- 10.9. An estimated five-year financial profile that incorporates the projected income and costs associated with the introduction of parking charges has been



developed, informed by an implementation plan. This incorporates all car parks at Riverside, Capstone Farm and Deangate Ridge. The average annual net income across the first 5 years of operation is £160,000.

- 10.10. The income projections assume that visitor numbers and associated demand for parking remains static across the five-year period; in reality, changes and fluctuations may occur over time. This is particularly noted for Deangate Ridge, should additional facilities be provided in the future.
- 10.11. Furthermore, large-scale residential development is allocated in the vicinity of Capstone Farm and is expected to come forward in future years; however, this is not expected to be completed within the next five years and so is not accounted for in the financial profile or income projections.
- 10.12. The review has considered the impact of the charge on neighbouring areas. A risk exists that introducing parking charges may result in parking displacement to nearby alternative car parks or on-street parking locations. SYSTRA has undertaken a desktop-based review of nearby alternative parking opportunities and considered the potential for displacement. This includes walk routes and distances between destinations and alternative parking locations. There are no immediate interventions proposed but the impacts of the new fees will be kept under careful review as set out below. A review of bus services has also been undertaken and the Council will work with the bus providers to improve access to the parks where possible.
- 10.13. The fees would be subject to annual review. This is not accounted for in the current estimated budget. Legislation requires the Council to keep an account of income and expenditure in respect of parking places and therefore this budget information will be published every year.

## 11. Legal implications

- 11.1. A Traffic Regulation Order for the car parks would need to be in place prior to implementation of a charging regime, in accordance with Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
- 11.2. Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 directs that Councils may use any surplus generated from car park charges to cover all or any part of the cost of the provision and maintenance of off-street parking. The Council is also permitted to use any surplus for funding highway or road improvement projects and for the purpose of environmental improvements. In detail this can include:
  - a) the reduction of environmental pollution (as defined in the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999);
  - b) improving or maintaining the appearance or amenity of—
    - i) a road or land in the vicinity of a road, or;
    - ii) open land or water to which the general public has access; and

- c) the provision of outdoor recreational facilities available to the general public without charge.

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### Appendices

Appendix 1: Diversity Impact Assessment

Appendix 2: Maps of Riverside and Capstone Country Parks and the proposed Country Park at Deangate

### Background papers

None