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PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

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Beaulieu Parish Council calls for pause to Forestry England car park charging proposals

Beaulieu Parish Council has today jointly written to The Rt Hon Mary Creagh MP, the Minister for Nature, and to Mike Seddon, Chief Executive of Forestry England, to set out significant concerns about the proposed introduction of widespread car park charging across the New Forest.

The letter follows a detailed review of documents recently disclosed by Forestry England under the Environmental Information Regulations, including material relating to the legally required Equality Impact Assessments.

The Parish Council's assessment identifies a number of serious concerns, including:

- a lack of clear evidence of structured, meaningful consultation with local communities and affected groups
- potential shortcomings in the discharge of the Public Sector Equality Duty, particularly for disabled people and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
- insufficient understanding of how charging may affect people on very limited incomes, including whether access to the Forest may become unaffordable for those who derive the greatest health and well-being benefits from it
- limited evidence of engagement with disabled users, carers, or organisations representing those most affected
- insufficient assessment of the risk of displacement parking and its potential impact, including on public safety, free-roaming animals, local towns and villages, and the wider tourist economy

- the absence of key supporting information, including the underlying business case

The Parish Council has therefore formally requested that the implementation of the scheme be paused to allow for proper consultation, full transparency, and a more robust assessment of impacts.

Cllr Nick Hubbard, Chair of Beaulieu Parish Council, said:

“We fully recognise and support Forestry England’s role in protecting the New Forest. However, the evidence now available raises serious concerns about whether the needs of some of the most vulnerable people have been properly considered.

In particular, having reviewed Forestry England's planning documents, we are not satisfied that the impact on disabled people and those on very low incomes has been adequately assessed under the Equalities Act 2010. There is a real risk that access to the Forest could become unaffordable for those who often benefit from it the most, particularly for their health and wellbeing.

This is not about opposing change—it is about ensuring that any changes are lawful, fair, and proportionate. At present, we have not seen sufficient evidence to support this.

We are therefore calling for a pause to allow the necessary work to be done properly, including meaningful engagement with those most affected.”

The Parish Council has made all correspondence and supporting materials publicly available on its website (<https://beaulieu-pc.org.uk/new-forest-parking>) to ensure transparency and to support engagement by other local councils, organisations, and stakeholders.

ENDS