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PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release – 31 March 2026

Beaulieu Parish Council calls for pause and independent review of New Forest car park charging plans

Beaulieu Parish Council has today written to the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities, the Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, raising urgent concerns about Forestry England’s proposal to introduce car park charges across the New Forest from next month.

The Council’s concerns centre on whether the proposal has been developed in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which mandates that public bodies properly consider the needs of individuals with protected characteristics early on, supported by appropriate evidence and consultation.

The Parish Council has found no published Equality Impact Assessment or equivalent analysis demonstrating how these duties have been fulfilled. It has also raised concerns about the absence of concessionary arrangements for disabled people and others. In addition, the Council is concerned that a national “one-size-fits-all” approach may have been applied without proper regard for the New Forest’s unique characteristics, raising questions about whether it complies with Forestry England’s legal obligations.

Besides concerns about equality, the Council has pointed out broader risks linked to the scale and design of the proposals, including:

- Environmental risk from displacement parking across the open forest
- Public safety concerns, especially in areas with unfenced roads and freely roaming animals
- Possible damage to the character and tranquillity of the forest landscape
- The installation of physical measures such as roadside ‘dragon’s teeth’ and ditches, which may also pose risks to animals and visitors and disturb the natural beauty of the forest.

The Council has also recognised that other similar landscapes with freely roaming livestock—such as Dartmoor National Park and Exmoor National Park—do not impose widespread blanket charges across their car parks. When charges are applied, they are limited in scope and supported by concessionary arrangements, reflecting the need to balance access, safety, and

environmental concerns.

Considering the scale of the issues identified, the Parish Council has requested:

- Any decisions made so far by Forestry England should be set aside, on the grounds that they may not be compliant with statutory obligations, including the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- The current programme should be paused.
- A comprehensive, independent review should be conducted, covering the programme's equality, environmental, legal, and public safety considerations.

Chairman's statement

"Forestry England undertakes important and often challenging work in managing and protecting the New Forest, and we fully appreciate and support that role.

However, regarding Forestry England's car park proposals, we have significant concerns. We see no clear evidence that key equality considerations have been properly assessed or incorporated, raising serious questions about whether the required legal duties have been met.

The New Forest is a uniquely sensitive landscape, shaped by its freely roaming animals and its accessibility to a diverse range of people, including some of the most vulnerable in our communities. Any changes of this magnitude must be developed with great care, supported by strong evidence, and involve comprehensive consultation.

We are therefore asking Ministers to pause the programme and ensure that a thorough and independent review is conducted before any further steps are taken."

ENDS

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