

Cllr Hubbard  
Beaulieu Parish Council

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Dear Councillor Hubbard,

Thank you for your most recent letter, dated 12 April, which has previously been acknowledged.

Thank you for sharing the views of Beaulieu Parish Council and for expressing the Council's desire to work constructively with us on the scheme.

Your letter was considerable in length and raised a number of Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests. Under the Regulations we are required to respond to this within 20 working days. However, given your request for an urgent reply, and in the spirit of co-operation, we have made efforts to prioritise our response. We hope this reflects our willingness to engage and inform key stakeholders in relation to the roll out of the parking scheme.

Our previous response to you provided a significant level of detail and supporting documents across the range of queries you had. I do not propose repeating this information again in any detail but have referred to it on a number of points for reference.

### **Consultation**

As detailed in our previous response, Forestry England is not required to conduct a public consultation regarding this scheme.

We have carried out the legally required consultations with statutory bodies regarding the necessary permissions and consents.

In addition to this, as part of our on-going commitment to engagement and communication with a range of local groups and organisations, we have pro-actively shared our plans and gathered feedback.



This engagement has influenced the scheme in a number of ways as detailed in the information already shared with you. This includes significant changes such as alterations to opening times and creating additional, accessible ways to pay.

We have reviewed this approach in light of the additional points raised in your most recent letter and taken legal advice. As a result, we remain of the view that the engagement with local stakeholders and groups has been carried out reasonably and appropriately.

### **PSED compliance**

Our previous response provided details of the assessments and processes followed in relation to accessibility and equality requirements. This included our overall national approach and local aspects. The latter has been significantly influenced by discussions with local stakeholders.

We have reviewed the additional points you have highlighted in relation to equality and accessibility. We remain of the view that the approach we have used addresses our duty of care in relation to these aspects and we do not plan to pause the scheme on this basis. We have also taken legal advice on this matter.

Our duty of care in relation to accessibility and equality issues is ongoing and it has always been our intention that, as the scheme develops, we will monitor it and evolve elements where appropriate working with stakeholders. The additional information you have provided will be considered as part of this ongoing review.

We are sympathetic to the issues raised in the individual case sent with your letter. However, as you will be aware, due to the protected status of the verges and grazing land within the New Forest parking on these areas is not permitted. This has been the case for many years and is supported by local groups including the New Forest Association who undertake a “verge watch” initiative to highlight and educate drivers on this topic.

This issue, and the high level of mitigation measures required to prevent displacement and verge parking are addressed in considerable detail in the approach to the scheme outlined in the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) document as approved by Natural England.

We do provide a range of accessible facilities at our car parks and remain committed to continuing to develop these, with support from the funding provided by car parking. More detail on accessibility can be found here - [Access information for the New Forest | Forestry England](#)



## **Business case**

The core aim of our charging scheme is to create sustainable funding for our work to care for the New Forest landscape and provide facilities for people to spend time here.

We look after around half of the New Forest National Park. This includes around 85% of the Park's green space accessible to the public, and many internationally important habitats and species.

For several years now, the costs of our work here have been much greater than the income we are able to generate. We have put in place a series of cost saving measures, including not filling vacant staff positions and reducing the amount and frequency of maintenance and repairs we are able to deliver. However, we are still facing a significant deficit in funding our activity in the New Forest, a situation that is not sustainable.

The funds raised by the introduction of parking charges will contribute significantly to bridging this gap. Over time, it will help us to bring our work in the Forest back to the required levels and improve facilities.

There are several variables that may significantly affect net revenue from charging including take up rates for our membership scheme, the scale of reactive verge works required, rates of vandalism, and rising cost levels for materials. In the event the scheme does generate more than expected, we will work with key stakeholders to consider how funds can best be reinvested in the New Forest.

For many years the New Forest has benefitted from the fact that Forestry England does not hypothecate or otherwise ring-fence income to the forest or management unit in which it is generated. This approach has underpinned our work in the New Forest which overall runs at a financial deficit if considered in isolation. That deficit position is so significant that we fully anticipate the funds raised by car parking to be consumed.

In relation to your specific request for release of the business case relating to the scheme, we can confirm that our previous response under the Environmental Information Regulations applies.

## **An informed approach**

In relation to your queries regarding best practice and experiences from other National Parks. Forestry England already charges for parking in many other locations across the country, including at sites within other National Park areas. This experience has informed our approach to parking in the New Forest and builds on best practice developed at these locations.



The specific nature of the New Forest, and particularly the presence of free-roaming animals, has also been a key consideration of the parking scheme. We have been working directly with the Verderers of the New Forest who have responsibility for the overall management of livestock in the area. We have also worked closely with the Commoners Defence Association.

This collaboration has enabled us to ensure that the scheme in a wide range of aspects addressed the needs of livestock and the valuable role they play in managing the landscape.

### **Habitats Regulations Assessments**

In reference to your additional points regarding displacement, I would refer you to the detailed information already provided in the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and associated documents.

Our approach to the parking scheme in relation to the HRA was informed by discussions with our contracted ecology experts Footprint Ecology and Natural England. The resulting HRA and our approach to the roll out of the scheme was formally assented to by Natural England, as were the implementation and mitigation measures included in the scheme. These Assents are attached with this letter.

As the competent authority in relation to the HRA we will actively monitor displacement and related issues in line with this agreed and clearly set out process.

### **Conclusion**

Having reviewed the points made in the Council's recent letter and having taken legal guidance on these matters we remain of the opinion that these issues, including our compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty, have been dealt with appropriately and in-line with our legal and governance requirements. As such, we will proceed with the roll out of the parking scheme, as planned with and consented by the relevant statutory bodies.

In the spirit of co-operation expressed in your letters we will continue to work with local stakeholders and groups as the scheme is rolled out and monitor any emerging issues or areas that require adjustments. This will include attendance at parish council quadrant meetings and the Consultative Panel where we can hear and respond to issues raised.

Our New Forest team would also be happy to meet with you at our offices in Lyndhurst at your convenience to discuss these issues in more detail.

The parking scheme will fundamentally support the wide range of activity we carry out to care for the New Forest, including providing for and managing recreation in the



area. Without this sustainable funding we will not be able to continue this work and deliver upon the shared goals of forest organisations to secure the future of this very special place.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Seddon  
Forestry England Chief Executive

