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Sent by email to: informationrights@forestrycommission.gov.uk
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24 March 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

Environmental Information Regulations Request and Formal Notice of PSED breach

Introduction of Car Parking Charges in the New Forest

A. Introduction

At the New Forest Parish Quadrant Meeting (South-East) held on 28 January 2026, Forestry England undertook to circulate essential supporting documentation, including risk assessments and the business case for the proposed introduction of car parking charges in the New Forest, to the attending parish councils.

The promised information was not circulated by Forestry England and so on 2 March 2026, Beaulieu Parish Council wrote to Forestry England again requesting this information. To date our correspondence has not been acknowledged and the requested documentation has not been provided.

Given that Forestry England has indicated that the charging scheme is due to commence shortly, the Parish Council has no alternative, and for the reasons set out below, but to formally request that the project be immediately paused.

This letter is also a formal request for information. Where possible, please provide the requested information electronically in PDF format. If any information is withheld, please specify the relevant exception under the Environmental Information Regulations and the public interest reasoning supporting its application.

Under the Environmental Information Regulations responses should be provided within 20 working days. Given the stated intention to introduce charging shortly, it is important that the information is provided as soon as reasonably possible.

B. Equality Impact Assessment

Please provide us with copies of any Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) related to the proposed charging scheme, which should include evidence showing how Forestry England assessed compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and considered the effects on disabled visitors, older people, low-income visitors, and families with children. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 makes this duty a legal requirement.

At the Quadrant meeting on January 28th, we asked the project manager from Forestry England why there were no parking concessions for disabled people or others, such as those with low incomes. He stated that this policy is consistent across all national car parks managed by Forestry England and is outside his control. If true, this could be seen as a Fettering of Discretion, which is not permitted under the law.

We subsequently examined Forestry England's website announcement regarding the proposed car park charges. As detailed in Annex A, it shows that the required EIA has not been published. This suggests that it might not have been fully carried out.

Our legal concerns are laid out in Annex A. It is important to note that if Forestry England proceeds with parking charges without properly addressing the PSED, its decision could be unlawful. If the Forestry England Chief Executive now concludes that the PSED's legal requirements have not been met, the project must, by law, be paused.

C. Risk Assessments

Please provide the following risk assessments, including all identified mitigation measures, particularly all those where risks were assessed as high or 'red'. Where any of the risk assessments below were not undertaken prior to the decision to introduce charging, please confirm this.

If any of the information requested below is not held, please confirm this explicitly and state whether the assessment or document was never prepared or whether it exists but is held by another authority or contractor.

For the avoidance of doubt, this request includes draft versions of documents, internal briefing papers, internal correspondence, and communications with external consultants or advisors that relate to the development or assessment of the charging scheme.

Please provide documentation showing when the risk assessments requested below were completed, including the dates on which those assessments were finalised and the dates on which the decision to introduce car parking charges was formally approved.

Please also provide any documentation showing how those assessments informed the final decision.

1. Project Risk Register

Please provide copies of the project risk register, risk log, or equivalent project management documentation relating to the development and implementation of the charging scheme.

2. The Unique Characteristics of the New Forest

Please provide all analysis undertaken prior to the decision demonstrating how the New Forest, because of free-roaming animals and the high density of small car parks used for local rather than tourist purposes, materially differs from other Forestry England sites where car parking charges operate, and how these differences were considered before any decision was made.

3. Traffic and Vehicle Displacement Assessment

Please provide Forestry England's assessments of:

- Anticipated vehicle displacement from Forestry England car parks onto surrounding roads, verges, forest tracks and villages
- Anticipated impacts on livestock and highway safety

- Impacts on nearby settlements, including village parking capacity and local authority car parks

4. Visitor Management and Public Safety Assessment

Please provide all copies of any monitoring or evaluation plan prepared to assess the visitor management and public safety impacts of the charging scheme following its introduction.

5. Environmental and Ecological Assessments

Please provide:

- Habitats Regulations Assessment screening or appropriate assessment
- Assessments relating to impacts on SAC, SPA or SSSI designations within the New Forest
- Analysis of impacts on protected habitats, wildlife or commoning livestock

6. Animal & Livestock Safety Risk Assessments

Please provide copies of all Animal & Livestock Safety Risk Assessments, including any impact assessments undertaken by Forestry England relating to vehicle collisions or safety incidents involving livestock in Forestry England car parks or immediately adjacent roads in the New Forest during the past five years, and how these have been considered in Forestry England's plan.

7. Parking enforcement safety assessments

Please provide any risk or safety assessments relating to the enforcement of car parking charges within the New Forest, including but not limited to risks to staff and the public from free-roaming livestock, small or informal car parks and roadside locations, together with any mitigation measures or operational protocols.

D. Business Case and Decision Documentation

Copies of the business case supporting the introduction of car parking charges, project initiation documents, internal decision papers or board approvals, and any alternative options appraisal undertaken prior to the decision.

E. Consultation and Engagement Records

Copies of documents showing the results of consultation with the New Forest National Park Authority, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, the

Verderers of the New Forest, Parish Councils, and other stakeholders, including details of which feedback was included in Forestry England's plan and which was not.

F. Conclusion

As explained above, if it is confirmed that Forestry England has not followed the PSED, we are informed that, under existing English law, the project must be paused.

Furthermore, Forestry England has taken a conscious decision to advance the scheme in a way that effectively prevents proper scrutiny and input from local communities and their elected representatives. Without the information requested above, the Parish Council cannot be assured that the human, animal, or environmental risks of the scheme have been thoroughly evaluated.

Therefore, the Parish Council urges Forestry England to immediately halt the implementation of the charging scheme in any event until the requested information is provided, enabling a transparent and inclusive consultation, which has not yet taken place.

G. Acknowledgement

Please acknowledge receipt of this request.

Yours faithfully

Nick Hubbard

Cllr. Nick Hubbard
Chair

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Nicky Deering

Nicky Deering
Clerk

Contact details above

cc: Richard Burke, Forestry England
Craig Harrison, Forestry England
Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP
Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne TD MP
Cllr. Keith Mans, Hampshire County Council
Cllr. Dan Poole, New Forest District Council
Victoria Mander, NFNPA Chair
Edward Heron, Official Verderer
The Rt Hon Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

ANNEX A: LEGAL GROUNDS OF CONCERN

1. The Mandatory "Due Regard" Test

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, Forestry England must have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. The High Court established in *Bracking v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2013] that this duty:

- a) Must be exercised with rigour and an open mind;
- b) Must be performed at the formative stage of a policy, not as a retrospective justification, and
- c) Is non-delegable; the decision-maker must personally be aware of the duty and its implications.

2. Fettering of Discretion (The "Consistency" Error)

A public authority acts unlawfully if it adopts a "blanket" national policy that precludes consideration of specific local circumstances. By admitting in the 28 January meeting that the "no-concession" rule for Blue Badge holders was adopted for national consistency, Forestry England has seemingly fettered its discretion. In so doing, Forestry England has failed to account for the unique statutory context of the New Forest National Park and the specific needs of its residents and visitors.

3. Impact on Protected Characteristic: Disability

Forestry England's own data (Annual Equality Monitoring Report) acknowledges that 23.1% of forest visitors have a disability. However:

- a) The proposed 'time-based' charging disproportionately penalises those with mobility impairments who take longer to navigate the Forest, and
- b) Maintaining existing Blue Badge spaces does not mitigate the new financial barrier. The PSED often requires treating disabled people more favourably to achieve an equal outcome.

4. Impact on Protected Characteristic: Age (Digital Exclusion)

The reliance on the "RingGo" app/phone system at 113 of 129 sites creates a "barrier to entry" for elderly visitors. Statistically, older people are less likely to use smartphone payment technology. Failure to provide accessible, non-digital payment solutions at all sites is a breach of the duty to "minimise or remove disadvantages" faced by older persons.

5. Failure to Foster Good Relations

The PSED requires authorities to foster good relations between different groups. Imposing a "one-size-fits-all" national template on a sensitive landscape like the New Forest—without a transparent EIA—damages the relationship between Forestry England and the local communities it serves.

6. Procedural Impropriety

If, as explained below, the EIA analysis was not conducted before the decision to proceed was finalised, then the project is procedurally flawed and potentially *ultra vires*.

A decision of this magnitude requires a comprehensive, published EIA. The proposed car park charging arrangements are set out on Forestry England's webpage: <https://www.forestryengland.uk/upcoming-changes-parking-in-the-new-forest>. This webpage does not include a published EIA. The only information is in the ancillary Q&A, which states that Forestry England has a number of disabled parking spaces in the New Forest to allow Blue Badge holders to park close to their destination. It should be noted that some, if not all, of these spaces existed before the car park charging project commenced. It also states that parking charges will apply to all vehicles, including Blue Badge holders. The conclusion is therefore that the risk of a "disability tax" has not been appropriately considered.

On face value, this suggests that an EIA has not been undertaken, as there are significant discrepancies between what has been disclosed and what is required under a properly completed EIA. For example, in addition to disability not being properly addressed, there is no information about how Forestry England has considered the car park arrangements for people based on their age, pregnancy and maternity, families with children, sex, or socio-economic status.