

Forestry England New Forest Car Park Charging Proposals

Background Document to Accompany the HRA



1. Background

1.1 Forestry England manages 47% of the New Forest National Park, known as the Crown lands. This area covers a mosaic of different types of landscapes and habitats including wetlands, heaths, ancient woodlands and grasslands. The area is rich in wildlife and plantlife with many of the UK's rarest species found here.

1.2 We carry out a wide range of tasks to ensure the ecological importance of the area is protected and enhanced. Our projects include seasonal tasks and maintenance, major habitat restoration programmes, tree planting, woodland management, wildlife monitoring and much more.

1.3 We also provide information and facilities to ensure everyone spending time here can access the benefits of being in nature. We look after a network of 130 car parks across the New Forest, and maintain hundreds of miles of trails, paths and cycle routes, and support education and engagement via a team of visitor-focused rangers.

1.4 The vast majority of our work is self-funded, with only around 15% of our core work funded by the government. All of the funds we raise go directly back into caring for the Forests we look after and providing facilities. In the New Forest, we operate with a significant deficit and the costs of the tasks we carry out are steadily increasing along with the general rise in the price of many materials and services.

1.5 This document sets out the proposals for car park charging to inform the Habitats Regulation Process. The proposals for car park charging will be brought forward in early 2025.

2 The details

2.1 Car park charging will take place across all Forestry England owned car parks in the New Forest, this accounts for a network of around 130 formal car parks. There are also informal car parks and laybys where people already park that Forestry England may seek to formalise or remove as a part of the introduction. The introduction of charging is planned to take place simultaneously across the car parks.

2.2 Enforcement will take place with the support of a car park management company who will be responsible for the back office including the issuing of Parking Charge Notices, complying with British Parking Association (BPA) regulations. Terms and conditions for car park charging will be displayed on signage within the car parks. The signage will be displayed throughout the car parks including an entry sign, tariff sign and terms and condition sign, there may be repeater signage in larger car parks. The signage will be mounted onto posts that are dug into the ground - where possible, this will be on the existing gravelled surface of the car park. However, there are strict BPA requirements relating to the location of car park signage. This means that entry signs may need to be

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placed outside of the existing gravelled surface of a car park. Where possible, the signage will be attached to existing infrastructure, such as posts and gates. Where it is necessary to place signage into grass, the signage will be wooden post inserted directly into the ground with no concrete.'

2.3 Other proposed infrastructure, such as payment terminals/ticket machines, will depend upon the size, location and footfall of any car park. It is proposed that 24 of our busiest car parks will have payment terminals/ticket machines installed in the first instance. These will be sited on the gravelled surface and anchored into the ground using concrete. Initially, a further 2 car parks will have Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), allowing automatic enforcement. Payment terminal/ ticket machines allow for contactless payment to be taken. Additionally, visitors can pay by phone, either by calling RingGo or through the RingGo App. Visitors can also use their chosen browser to pay online through the RingGo website, which will be accessible via the Forestry England website. Payment at all locations can be made on arrival or up to midnight on the same day of the visit.

2.4 Forestry England offers a membership scheme that enables members to park for free at most Forestry England owned sites throughout the UK, including the New Forest. Currently this costs £94 per annum. Visitors will be able to purchase membership through the Forestry England website. Membership will provide free parking for one year in all Forestry England car parks in the New Forest.

2.5 Commoners exercising their rights to turn out animals will not be charged to park their vehicles.

2.6 A team of staff will be employed to check vehicle registrations for payment and parking charge notices will be sent to those who fail to pay. Overnight parking is also prohibited and those that do so will be subject to a Parking Charge Notice. Parking Charge Notices consist of a charge of £50 subject to a 50% reduction if payment is completed within 14 days. This cost is subject to change at any time. Some car parks will have barrierless ANPR enforcement cameras installed, which may be solar powered or hardwired depending on the location.

2.7 Signage will be placed in bellmouths and gateways which include terms and conditions that prohibit parking. Visitors that choose to park in these areas may receive a Parking Charge Notice, as these areas will be patrolled by the Parking Team. Forestry England has also identified some sensitive and problem areas where physical interventions such as dragons teeth or ditch and bank will be installed prior to the implementation of charging. Once charging is in place, Forestry England will monitor the levels of verge parking and take appropriate action such as education, applying a leaflet, imposing physical measures or in some instances seeking to implement a charge or a prohibition of

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parking. Forestry England will also continue to work with stakeholders to seek to secure a long-term enforcement mechanism for verge parking, such as a Traffic Regulation Order.

2.8 The parking tariff is planned to be introduced at an hourly rate and depending on the technology, we aim to make tickets transferable between car parks. The tariff will also include an all day visit rate.

2.9 Car parks may be closed from time to time as is the current position, for example regular closures of sites during ground nesting bird season and during the winter period when the ground conditions make access challenging. The car parks will also be closed regularly for maintenance purposes.

2.10 The New Forest Parking Team will deliver enforcement of car park charging as well as verge monitoring outside of the car parks, escalation of measures and general customer service. Initially the team will be made up of 10 Parking Rangers, however this may be reduced once car park charging is established in the landscape.

2.11 The Monitoring Protocol can be found below, and escalation of mitigation measures will take a targeted approach based on likely impact on protected features of the SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar. If cars are parked on any of the 260 parking locations comprising verges, laybys, gateways and roadside spaces (identified in the HRA - Map 5), across more than two dates, then one or more of the following actions will be taken:

- Dedicated ranger time to speak to the people parking there and make sure they are aware of options for passes, how to get tickets, etc. and the impacts of parking on verges
- Leaflets under windscreen wipers
- Ditch and banking
- Dragons teeth
- Civil enforcement
- Implementation of parking charges

3 Monitoring Protocol

3.1 Monitoring will include regular counts of parked vehicles across all parking locations around the New Forest (including ones not managed by Forestry England). Based on the results of the monitoring, Forestry England will regularly review the tariff and implementation of charging across all locations and amend as necessary. Where parked vehicles are recorded outside of pre-determined locations (i.e. on verges rather than car parks, etc.) on European sites not managed by Forestry England, Forestry England will liaise with the landowner directly and through the New Forest Recreation Management

Strategy (RMS) Steering Group and the RMS Advisory Group. Forestry England will share information relating to parked vehicle counts and information relating to effective measures for preventing vehicles from parking outside of pre-determined locations.

3.2 Vehicle counts

3.2.1 These will follow the methods set out in Panter and Saunders (2020b) and will comprise snapshot counts of all parking locations across the New Forest (including those not managed by Forestry England), undertaken through a series of transects.

3.2.2 Five separate surveyors will simultaneously drive a set route covering different parts of the Forest. Surveyors will drive into a car park, count the number of parked vehicles and then move to the next location. Any vehicles not in pre-determined locations (i.e. those on verges rather than car parks, etc.) will be counted and specific locations noted.

3.2.3 Each of the five separate transect routes will take around 2-3 hours to complete. Start times and direction will be varied to ensure good coverage of different times of day and different days of the week.

3.2.4 Prior to parking charges being instigated, four counts will be undertaken to provide baseline count data. These will be targeted to a similar time of year and be within a year of the charging starting. At the point of parking charges starting, complete counts will be undertaken, at least twice a week, ensuring weekend and weekday coverage. The timing and intensity of monitoring ensures good data around the period of change and the scope to rapidly respond to any particular locations or issues arising (i.e. displacement parking at specific locations).

3.2.5 After three weeks of monitoring the data will be reviewed and the frequency of counts adjusted as required. Every subsequent three weeks further adjustments will be made, depending on the results. It is anticipated that displacement will be most marked around the introduction of charging and once use patterns have settled, and are consistent, there will be little need for monitoring, and frequency can be adjusted accordingly.

3.3 Checks of ticket purchasing

3.3.1 The numbers of passes purchased and the volume of ticket sales will be checked and summarised on a monthly basis over the first year. The data will provide further insights into how visitors have responded to the instigation of charging and how/when patterns of use settle to a consistent pattern over time. Checks will also show how the pricing is working and this will inform reviews of the tariffs charged.

3.4 Visitor Surveys

3.4.1 Visitor surveys may be used once car park charging has been established to help determine if there have been changes in visitor attitudes.

4 Communications

4.1 A comprehensive communications plan and resource is in place to support the roll out of car park charging. This incorporates a number of key objectives and stages:

1. Increase awareness of the special features of the New Forest, including verges and the importance of responsible parking. This is an ongoing objective and subject to a number of current communications supported by all key agencies.
2. Improve the public's understanding of the current pressures on car park maintenance and how additional funding will help address this and support the wide range of tasks carried out to care for this special area.
3. Provide clear information on how charging will work, including details of membership and how to prepare for the beginning of charging (i.e. downloading the RingGo app, knowing where the next car park is if one is full, etc.)
4. At the point of roll out, provide the public with clear guidance on timescale for go live, how to pay, etc. Core to this will be guidance on no verge parking and the reasons why parking responsibly is so important to the landscape and its wildlife.
5. Over-time, improve understanding of the benefits of charging via the work it is funding and the positive impacts this delivers.

4.2 The communications plan will be shared and supported across key New Forest organisations to ensure all touch points and channels to reach the visiting public are utilised. This will include targeting all of those spending time in the New Forest, including locals, day visitors and those who visit from further afield via tourism. This includes media, social media, marketing, e-newsletter and publications, and communication materials used to support ranger and staff interactions with the public.

4.3 Several key indicators will be used to measure the effectiveness of the communications campaign:

- Media coverage and social media attitudes - how these change over medium to long term and key issues highlighted by them.
- Complaints - effective resolutions of these and reducing number over time.