

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 14 DECEMBER 2017****REPORT OF: MR MIKE GOODMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT****LEAD OFFICER: JASON RUSSELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: PAY & CONSERVE, CAR PARK CHARGING ON THE COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Surrey County Council owns 6,500 acres of the Surrey countryside, all of which is open to the public. Ranging from the healthland of Ockham and Wisley Commons to the downland and woodland of Norbury Park and a network of 3,400 kilometres of Rights of Way, Surrey's Countryside is an integral part of what makes Surrey a wonderful place to live. Since 2002, the County Council has contracted with Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) to manage 6,500 acres of the Countryside Estate and a further 3,500 acres of land management under access agreements, in order to deliver biodiversity, landscape and access benefits. The County Council's vision is for a financially sustainable Estate which is protected and enhanced for future generations.

Ongoing pressure on local government funding has meant the County Council has had to find savings in this and many other areas and since 2014 has, in the face of severe funding pressures, been working with SWT to identify new ways of generating income in order to ensure the financial sustainability of the countryside estate. In that period, the value of the contract payment to SWT has fallen from £953,000 per annum to £575,000 with a plan to reduce that figure to £0 by 2020/21. As well as environmental grants that support SWT's work, income is derived from property on the estate and trading and other activities such as events, location filming and weddings.

In line with a strategy pursued by many other landowners, the option of charging for car parking has been investigated as a potential source of income to support the county council's vision. This paper sets out a proposed approach to car park charging. The proposal is based on public consultation carried out during Autumn 2017.

BACKGROUND

1. In addition to the Countryside Estate, the County Council's countryside function includes our statutory responsibility to manage the Rights of Way Network, the management of the Basingstoke Canal as well as support for a number of local countryside partnership and the Surrey Hills Area of Natural Beauty. The

County Council also administers the Rural Development Programme for England: LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Developpement de l'Economie Rurale) fund to support the rural economy and seeks funding to deliver improvements in the countryside.

2. The County Council works with SWT who are contracted to look after the estate on our behalf. SWT makes sure that paths can be safely used, dangerous trees and branches are made safe, sensitive habitats and species are protected and litter is removed. They also make sure residents can get to the countryside, which normally means providing somewhere for them to park. The contract is managed and monitored through a set of KPIs to ensure effective performance.
 3. The current management cost of the SWT-managed Countryside Estate is £2.1million per annum of which the County Council contributes £575,000 directly in a contract payment, with a further 27% in income from the property on the Estate and 28% from trading and other activities associated with the Estate. The remainder is funded through environmental grants (16%) from external sources.
 4. Overall, the County Council's funding for its countryside functions has reduced from £2.6m in 2014/15 to £1.6m in 2017/18 with an MTFP savings target to move to an annual budget of £1m by 2020/21. This is as a result of the ongoing reductions in local government funding and the increase in demand pressures on statutory services, in particular social care and school place provision.
 5. In order to ensure the financial sustainability of the countryside can be secured, Surrey County Council has been working closely with SWT since 2014 to develop and deliver a business plan for the estate. The plan is updated annually and includes a range of activities that can generate income to support our overall vision. The plan is scrutinised by the County Council's Environment & Infrastructure Select Committee. This includes activities such as development of a woodfuel business, securing funding from other sources such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and charitable trusts and income generating activities such as events and location filming.
 6. In addition, in common with many other landowners such as the National Trust and Park Authorities, the opportunity to generate income from the introduction of car park charges has been investigated. There are over 30 car parks across the Estate, which range from formalised car parks with the capacity for 190 cars to informal car parks with just a few spaces. The County Council undertook a public consultation to gather views from residents and local organisations about the concept of charging for parking in order to support the management of the estate. The consultation ran from September to November 2017 for a period of six weeks. A total of 1,258 responses were received, the majority from residents with additional responses from 7 organisations.
 7. This paper sets out the results of that consultation and a proposed approach to the introduction of car park charges at the busiest countryside sites, namely:
 - Chobham Common (6 car parks)
 - Whitmoor Common (2 car parks)
 - Norbury Park (3 car parks)
 - Ockham Common (3 car parks)
 - Rodborough Common (1 car park)
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8. On 29 November 2017 a report was taken to the Environment and Infrastructure Select Committee asking them to consider the output from the consultation, comment on the proposed options and provide a view on the preferred option.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

- i. Charging is introduced at the 5 busiest sites, as detailed in paragraph 7 above.
- ii. Income from car park charging is ring-fenced for the benefit of the Surrey Countryside.
- iii. The initial decision on setting tariffs is agreed as set out in paragraph 27 below and thereafter forms part of the annual review process for fees and charges.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

9. In order to ensure a secure future for the Countryside Estate in the stewardship of the County Council and Surrey Wildlife Trust, a steady revenue stream is critical. Surrey Wildlife Trust is working with the County Council to develop a range of opportunities to produce that income and help to protect and enhance the Countryside Estate.
10. The Countryside Estate is greatly valued by the public, however it is coming under increasing pressure from reducing budgets. The best way to protect and enhance the countryside for the future is to make the Estate self-funding. Paying for parking is an accepted cost of going to the countryside, demonstrated by the many sites that charge and are still very busy.
11. Without funding, the countryside will become more inaccessible, overgrown and littered. A small car park on the countryside estate needs regular collection of rubbish and litter collection, cutting back of the trees and bushes round the edges, and making dangerous trees safe. There are additional costs when repairs are needed after vandalism of information signs and benches, when barriers need replacing, or when re-surfacing and other infrastructure work is needed in the car park and along waymarked trails leading from it. Income from car park charges can help address these issues and support our vision to improve the biodiversity, landscape and access to this valuable asset
12. The results of the consultation show us that the public would prefer not to pay to use the car parks but without income the result would be a deterioration in the quality of the estate and in access to the estate, such as the closure of car parks. Of the payment options available, cash would be the most acceptable to the public. However there are high operational costs and the risk of theft and vandalism as a result other authorities and charities are currently reviewing this method of charging. The next most popular payment option was by card (some 95% of adults in the UK now have bank cards).
13. Many countryside car parks in Surrey and other rural areas make charges. Following financial assessment, the analysis of the Pay and Conserve Public

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Consultation and recommendations from the Environment and Infrastructure Select Committee, it is felt that the most appropriate way of generating the necessary income is to introduce charging at the 5 busiest sites with card-only Pay and Display machines plus the option to pay by mobile phone or to purchase an annual parking permit.

DETAILS:

Pay and Conserve Consultation

14. The Pay and Conserve consultation ran for a six-week period between September and November 2017. During that time, a mixture of digital, social and printed media was used, as well as printed media displays in car parks, district and borough council offices and libraries, in order to raise awareness and encourage participation.
15. The aim of the consultation was to give all residents an opportunity to comment on the possibility of car park charging, with a particular focus on residents in those areas most closely affected. The survey aimed to understand more about how people currently use sites, what they felt about paying to park, including how a scheme might be operated, and what the impacts of parking charges might be, for example on displacement parking. The full details of the consultation are set out in Annex 1 to this report.
16. During the period, a total of 1,258 individuals and organisations submitted their comments, the majority via a survey available online and in hard copy. Most of the responses were made by individuals in addition to 2 angling clubs, 1 local society and 4 Parish Councils.
17. The majority of people responding to the consultation, just under 85%, drive to sites, with 26% travelling for less than 10 minutes and 52% travelling between 10 and 30 minutes, with almost half staying between one and two hours. Most people visit to go walking, often with one other adult. A smaller number visit with children.
18. Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents do not support the introduction of car park charges, with half saying they would seek free parking elsewhere or avoid coming. When asked to express a preference, 74.6% of respondents did not want to pay for parking, with 15.6% supporting charging in all car parks as their first preference and 10.3% charging in some as their first preference. There was a very strong view that less well used car parks should not be closed to reduce overall management costs.
19. In terms of parking operation, cash payment was the most popular, with 59% of respondents, followed by card payment with 46% prepared to pay via this method. Only 33% of respondents were supportive of payment by phone.
20. The survey gave people the opportunity to add any other comments. Some of the issues identified included the risk of deterring people from visiting the countryside, impacting negatively on health and wellbeing and the ability of less well-off people to access the countryside. There were concerns about paying to access common land, and that residents were already paying through council tax. Comments in support of car park charging included that it was the fairest means to fund the management of sites and that funds raised should be ring-fenced for countryside management. The table below provides further details on these themes and the County Council's response.

Key themes	SCC response
Concern that the income from charging will be used for other SCC services	Subject to Cabinet approval the income will be ring fenced for the countryside and noticeboards will be put in the car parks with information to explain to visitors where the money is being spent.
There is a concern that volunteers will be charged	It is proposed to make arrangements for volunteers to park for free when they are volunteering
SCC should lobby Central Government to improve the central public investment in the countryside.	The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport will continue to engage with the Secretary of State and other relevant ministers. The Secretary of State has been briefed on the issue of car park charging and other issues that threaten the future of the countryside.
The introduction of charging is seen as an form of additional taxation on the public that use the sites	The budgets for countryside management are being squeezed as the pressure on the overall County Council budget increases. This is unlikely to change in the next few years and therefore we need to find a way of making the budgets for countryside more resilient to these pressures. The best way of doing this is to generate an income from the countryside estate that can be ring fenced for the countryside budget. However it is not proposed to introduce car parking charges at all car parks on the countryside estate.
There is a negative impact of charging for those on a low income	We are aware this could be an issue, however this proposal would not introduce charging at all car parks. Surrey offers a wealth of greenspaces that can be accessed without charges. Charging could encourage positive environmental changes such as car sharing.
That the introduction of car park charging will have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of users of the sites	The County Council and Surrey Wildlife Trust are aware of this point and have sought and received advice from other organisations that already charge for parking. There is a potential issue for people who cannot or will not pay, however this does not appear to translate into a lower number of people using the car park.
SWT members should not have to pay for car parking	Further investigation will be made to see if there could be more benefit for Surrey Wildlife Trust members.

The Proposed Approach

21. SCC and SWT have been working closely together over a period of years to explore how to secure the financial sustainability of the Countryside Estate, both to maintain but also to enable ongoing improvements to the biodiversity,

landscape and access for the benefit of our residents and the natural environment.

22. A number of options are being developed to support this ambition, with car parking charges playing a key role in securing a sustainable income stream whilst ensuring that those that benefit more from the countryside make a contribution towards its maintenance and improvement. This is in line with many other landowners, including the National Trust, other local authorities and National Park Authorities.
23. The work to date has focused on the 5 most visited sites within the Countryside Estate that are owned by SCC and managed by SWT under a lease agreement. The five sites are:
- Chobham Common (6 car parks)
 - Whitmoor Common (2 car parks)
 - Norbury Park (3 car parks)
 - Ockham Common (3 car parks)
 - Rodborough Common (1 car park)
24. Collectively, there are 15 car parks that serve the five sites and monitoring figures suggest that there are 446,000 cars visiting the sites annually. The largest of these car parks accommodates some 20,000 vehicles per month with the smallest accommodating less than 1,000 in a month.
25. Based on usage data and assumed parking charges, a number of options have been explored which seek to balance value for money with public acceptability. More information on this is set out in the Business Case below.
26. In developing the options, comparable sites were considered. The table below sets out details of a number of local sites that charge for parking and the current tariffs in place.

Length of stay	Box Hill (National Trust)	Frensham Little Pond (National Trust)	Alice Holt Forest (Forestry Commission)	The Lookout (Bracknell Forest Council)	Queen Elizabeth CP (Hants CC)
Up to 1 hr	£1.50	£1.50	£1.80	£2	£1.80
Up to 2 hrs	£1.50	£1.50	£3	£2	£1.80
Up to 3 hrs	£4	£4	£4.50	£2	£3.50
Up to 4 hrs	£4	£4	£6	£2	£3.50
Up to 5 hrs	£4	£4	£8	£4	£3.50
>5 hours	£6	£6	£8	£4	£3.50

27. For the Surrey Countryside Estate, the proposed tariff is set out below, with an annual permit available at a cost of £60 which would be valid at all car parks at the 5 sites.

Up to 1 hour - £1.30
 Up to 2 hours – £2.60
 Up to 3 hours – £3.90
 Over 3 hours - £5.00

Business Case

28. In order to develop the business case, five options were modelled, as follows:

Option 1: Do nothing – no charges are introduced at any of the sites.

Option 2: Voluntary Donation – a voluntary donation scheme is introduced at the sites.

Option 3: Cash payment – charging is introduced with the option to pay by cash, card or phone. Annual permit also available.

Option 4: Phone payment – charging is introduced with the option to pay by phone only. Annual permit also available.

Option 5: Card payment – charging is introduced with the option to pay by card or phone. Annual permit also available.

29. For each of the options, an assessment of the benefits and disbenefits were considered as set out below. The costs and income associated with each of the options is set out in paragraph 30 below.

Option 1 No change

If no charges were made for car parking there would be no income generated to cover the cost of running the Countryside Estate.

The consequence of this option are:

- a) Car parks would continue to be free to use and available to all to access the sites. There would be no issue with displacement parking.
- b) As funding reduces, money would not be available to maintain car parks and the sites. This could lead to the closure of the car parks or the removal of other access facilities at the most popular sites on the Countryside Estate, resulting in falling visitor satisfaction and additional risks associated with the maintenance of car park surfaces and safe use of car parks and trails.
- c) This could lead to more insurance claims if the condition of the car parks deteriorates.
- d) This approach would mean there would be no funding available to invest in protecting and enhancing the countryside.

Option 2 Introduce a voluntary donation in the busiest car parks.

Income would be collected via mobile phone payment, such as RingGo or similar, (i.e. no honesty boxes or payment machines). Soft enforcement would be in place with messages encouraging visitors to make a donation of a suggested amount.

The consequence of this option are:

- a) Car parks would be open to all, with the option to make a contribution. There would be no issue with displacement parking.
- b) Compliance, based on work by the National Trust, would be likely to be approximately 25%. Potentially this could be lower as this is County Council land, rather than land owned by a popular charity. It should be noted that Dartmoor National Park calculated that they received on average 15p per car via their voluntary donations and are now introducing a mandatory charge.
- c) Income from car park charging would make a minimal contribution to the Estate becoming self-funding and is projected to result in a funding shortfall, resulting in a reduction in levels of maintenance in car parks and at sites.

This could lead to the closure of car parks and other impacts as set out in option 1 above.

- d) This approach would mean that there would be no funding available to invest in protecting and enhancing the countryside.

Option 3 Introduce car parking charges on the five busiest sites using cash and card collection

Income would be collected via a mix of Pay and Display machines, accepting cash, cards and mobile phone payment. The smaller and least used car parks would offer card or phone payment only. An annual parking permit would be available for use at all 5 sites.

The consequences of this option are:

- a) Funding would be generated to support the ongoing maintenance and management of the countryside estate and enable the County Council to continue to improve the biodiversity, landscape and amenity value of the estate for future generations.
- b) The introduction of car park charges may deter some people from visiting the sites and displacement parking would need to be monitored and could be a problem in residential areas around the car parks.
- c) The costs of cash collection are significant and there are risks associated with having cash on sites, particularly in isolated rural areas, particularly in relation to theft and vandalism which could result in periods of time where meters are not operational and therefore income is lost.

Option 4 Introduce car parking charges across the five busiest sites using meterless payment methods only.

Income will be collected via mobile phone payment and an annual parking permit scheme only (i.e. no Pay & Display machine).

The consequences of this option are:

- a) Funding would be generated to support the ongoing maintenance and management of the countryside estate and enable the County Council to continue to improve the biodiversity, landscape and amenity value of the estate for future generations.
- b) The introduction of car park charges may deter some people from visiting the sites and displacement parking would need to be monitored and could be a problem in residential areas around the car parks.
- c) Capital investment costs would be minimised as no meters would be required, with the focus being on clear signage.
- d) Annual costs would be minimised because this option removes the need for cash collection at sites and a banking service. All transactions are based on mobile based payment and an annual parking pass scheme using an online facility.
- e) No cash meters will reduce theft and vandalism, a common issue for isolated rural car parks.

Option 5 Introduce car park charging at the five busiest car parks using non-cash parking machines and pay by phone.

Income will be collected via a mix of card-only Pay and Display machines, a pay by phone option and use of an annual parking permit.

The consequences of this option are:

- a) Funding would be generated to support the ongoing maintenance and management of the countryside estate and enable the County Council to continue to improve the biodiversity, landscape and amenity value of the estate for future generations.

- b) The introduction of car park charges may deter some people from visiting the sites and displacement parking would need to be monitored and could be a problem in residential areas around the car parks.
- c) The operational costs would be lower than with a cash option due to the fact that cash collection is not required.
- d) The fact that meters will not contain cash removes the risk of theft and significantly reduces the risk of vandalism.

30. The business case modelling was based on the proposed tariff as set out in paragraph 27 above. The modelling focused on options 3, 4 and 5 on the basis that option 1 would not generate any income and based on information from elsewhere, income from option 2 is likely to be minimal and unpredictable.

	Option 3: cash, card & phone ¹	Option 4: phone only ¹	Option 5: card & phone ¹
	£000s	£000s	£000s
Capital investment required in year 1 ²	382	229	362
Total revenue ³	6,816	6,830	6,816
Expenditure (including debt repayments)	5,633 ⁴	3,074	3,675
Net revenue³	1,183	3,756	3,141
Average per annum net revenue	79	250	209
Project NPV at 5.5%	546	2,057	1,693
Project IRR	19%	80%	48%
Project payback period	6 years	2 years	3 years

Notes

¹Each option also includes the option to purchase an annual parking permit.

²Capital investment includes all costs associated with security, meters, signage and measures to mitigate displacement.

³Total revenue and net revenue figures are over 15 years.

⁴Expenditure for option 3 includes assumptions around level of vandalism per annum, based on data from other rural sites. It is assumed that 5 machines vandalised each year would cost £31k pa in replacement costs and lost income

Preferred Option Analysis

31. In order to assess the options to develop a preferred option the following criteria were considered:

- **The contribution to the financial sustainability of the countryside** – the extent to which the option could support the vision to protect and enhance the countryside for current and future generations.
- **Public acceptability** – the extent to which the option was likely to be acceptable to the public, based on the feedback from the consultation and experience from elsewhere.

32. Option 1 does not generate any income and, whilst in the medium term there may be other opportunities to generate income from other sources, the ability to generate sufficient income to offset funding reductions is limited. As such, this option would not support the financial sustainability of the countryside estate. Similarly with option 2, whilst some income may be generated, evidence from elsewhere suggests this is likely to be very low and is unlikely to make any meaningful contribution to the financial sustainability of the countryside estate.
33. Options 3, 4 and 5 all provide a positive business case, with net revenue making a positive contribution to the maintenance of the carparks and the wider estate. Option 4 (phone & permit only) provides the best return on investment. A cashless system with no meters on site will require a lower capital investment and incur lower annual running costs. The second most favourable return is provided by option 5, which also includes an option to pay by card, resulting in higher capital and running costs. The capital costs associated with option 3 are similar to those of option 5 but the running costs associated with option 3 are significantly higher due to the costs of cash collection and the risk of being subject to a high level of vandalism, theft and loss of income that results from having cash at the sites. As a result, the level of income generated for investment in maintaining the Surrey countryside is projected to be significantly lower with option 3 than either option 4 or 5.

Public Acceptability

34. The results of the consultation show us that options 1 and 2 would clearly be the most preferable, as both would mean that people would not need to pay for parking. However, this would result in deterioration in the quality of the estate and in access to the estate, such as the closure of car parks, which would result in much lower amenity value and impacts on biodiversity and landscape value. A number of respondents to the consultation recognised the need for funding to pay for the countryside and emphasised the importance of the money raised being ring-fenced for protection and enhancement of the countryside.
35. Of the options that include charges (options 3, 4 and 5) option 3 the cash system, would be the most acceptable to the public as the consultation showed that 59% preferred to pay by cash. The next most popular payment option was by card at 46%. The consultation results showed that the least preferred payment option was the pay by phone only option.

PREFERRED OPTION

36. Taking account of the assessments above, option 5 (card & phone payment plus annual permit) offers a system that balances financial return and public acceptability. Whilst in purely financial terms, option 4 would be preferable, the consultation made clear that many people would not be happy with a scheme where payment by phone or annual permit were the only options. As such, option 5 offers the additional option to pay using a card (around 95% of adults in the UK have a debit or credit card), but removes the very significant risks and costs associated with a scheme that includes cash payments.
37. The proposed scheme will have the following features:
- **Enforcement** – enforcement will be carried out as an extension to existing enforcement activity run by the County Council. This

arrangement provides flexibility in order to provide the client with the level and type of enforcement deemed appropriate for the sites.

- **Introduction** – the introduction of the charging will be combined with information for visitors, both to provide early warning of the charges and how the system will work and to provide information for visitors about how the income is being reinvested in Surrey's countryside. Wardens will be present during the early phase to answer questions and provide support. Information boards at the sites will provide more information on how the income from car parking is being reinvested in supporting the Surrey countryside.
- **Mitigation** – measures to mitigate the impacts of displacement parking will be critical. The County Council's parking team are advising on mitigation measures. As far as possible, measures will be appropriate and sympathetic to the local environment. Monitoring of displacement parking will be part of the early implementation plan and funding is built into the project to support rapid implementation of further mitigation once the scheme is implemented should the need arise.
- **Exemptions** – visitors to the car parks will be exempt from paying for parking if they are volunteering at the site or are blue badge holders.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

38. The following risks have been identified as part of development of the project.

Risk Identified	Risk Management Actions
Negative publicity from the users of the car parks as a result of introduction of charging	Clear communication with users of the site about the reasons for the introducing charging, including how income from this is being used to protect the countryside. Seeking Cabinet approval to ensure that all money raised from car park charges is reinvested in protecting and enhancing the countryside.
Negative impact on those on low incomes	Whilst there are a number of rural car parks in Surrey that now charge for parking, there remain many green spaces in Surrey that can still be accessed by car without having to pay for parking, both in rural Surrey and in more urban areas. The cost of implementing a means tested payment system would be prohibitive but we will continue to monitor to identify if there is any evidence of people on low incomes being excluded from accessing green space.
Displacement parking on roadside verges	Advice has been sought with the SCC Parking Team and maps have been produced identifying the areas likely to be affected. Where necessary displacement parking measures will be implemented that are practical and sympathetic to the environment prior to any charges being implemented.

Vandalism, theft and loss of income	By implementing a cashless system the likelihood of this is significantly reduced.
Income levels that are significantly lower than projected, resulting in a reduced level of income to invest in the countryside	The business case has been modelled based on a set of assumptions, recognising that SCC has limited historic data about rural carpark income. For example, the model has assumed levels of decline, certainly initially, in levels of car park use.
Lack of capacity to effectively deliver the project	The County Council and SWT are working closely together to develop the project including assigning project management capacity to ensure that the scheme is effectively delivered.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

39. The table in paragraph 30 above sets out the capital investment required to install the necessary equipment and signs. The table sets out the projected annual average income (after allowing for the revenue implications of capital borrowing) and the project payback period for the three options that have been modelled. Generating this income will allow SWT to help manage the planned reduction in local government funding and move the countryside estate towards a self-financing position and therefore continue to protect that part of the service from further pressure on local government funding. This will also help the service to meet the savings outlined in the Medium Term Financial Plan while continuing to manage the Estate.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

40. The County Council is facing a very serious financial situation, whereby there are still substantial actions to be identified and delivered to achieve a balanced budget in the current year and a sustainable budget plan for future years.

41. This report sets out how the introduction of car parking charges on the countryside estate can help the council to deliver its Medium Term Financial Plan by moving the Countryside Estate further towards a self-funding position. The financial implications of introducing charges are set out in paragraphs 30 – 33 and 39. The preferred option does not produce the highest financial benefit but is considered by the service to present the best balance between financial benefits and public acceptability. Cabinet should also note that the exact level of income will be dependent on visitor numbers, would could vary from the level assumed.

42. The Council's Investment Panel are due to scrutinise the proposal on 12th December 2017, and should it be necessary following the scrutiny the Section 151 Officer will update this advice.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

43. The Council, as landowner, is able to introduce charges for car parking on the chosen sites. The intention is that the arrangements will be managed on behalf of the Council by SWT under its existing lease.
44. The public sector equality duty applies to this decision. This means that, in deciding on the recommendations, members must have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity to people with protected characteristics, foster good relationships between such groups and eliminate any unlawful discrimination, which includes considering any disproportionate impact on any particular protected group. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for the project and is annexed to this report, which members should take into account in making their decision.

Equalities and Diversity

45. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out for the project and is included in annex 2 to this paper. A summary of the impacts and key actions is set out below.

Information and engagement underpinning equalities analysis	Liaison Group Meetings, feedback from the public, stakeholders and interest groups.
Key impacts (positive and/or negative) on people with protected characteristics	Charging for parking may discourage people from using the site and therefore missing out on the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the countryside but by not charging in all locations this provides an alternative for those who do not want to or cannot afford to pay. The elderly may be less likely to own a mobile phone. Investment in better infrastructure such as improved trails and surfaces will benefit people with mobility issues.
Changes you have made to the proposal as a result of the EIA	Preferred option to offer card as well as phone payment, recognising that some equalities groups may be less likely to feel comfortable using a pay by phone option.
Key mitigating actions planned to address any outstanding negative impacts	N/A
Potential negative impacts that cannot be mitigated	The imposition of a charge, necessary for the financial sustainability of the site, may stop some people from visiting the sites where car park charging is implemented but this does not differentially impact any equalities group.

Environmental sustainability implications

46. Nature and landscape conservation and associated access facilities must draw on a budget for revenue costs and periodic capital works. It is considered reasonable for car parking charging to contribute to this budget; the alternative being for these costs to fall on the council tax payer generally or for landscape and habitats to come under threat through lack of management.
47. An independent ecological consultant has been appointed to carry out a Habitat Regulations Assessment Report (Stage 1) to screen for likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (Thames Basin Heaths SPA) that may arise as a result of introducing car park charging. This consultant will also prepare the Appropriate Assessment Report (Stage 2) that may be required by Natural England for this project and develop mitigation measures for the implementation of car park charging.

Public Health implications

48. The County Council and Surrey Wildlife Trust work together to ensure that the Countryside Estate is open and accessible for the public to come and enjoy the countryside for health and wellbeing.
49. Without funding, the countryside will become inaccessible, overgrown and littered. A small car park on the countryside estate needs regular collection of rubbish and cutting back of the trees and bushes round the edges, and making dangerous trees safe. There are additional costs when repairs are needed after vandalism of information signs and benches, when barriers need replacing, or when re-surfacing and other infrastructure work is needed in the car park and along waymarked trails leading from it.
50. There is a risk of the public not visiting these sites as a result of car park charges, but there is little or no evidence from other local authorities and landowners to suggest that this is the case. We will also look at providing better access to sites by cycle and on foot as part of the future improvements that the income will make possible.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

Project Milestones:

Activity	Month / Year
Formal and informal consultation	July - Nov 2017
Project and business case development	Sept – Nov 2017
Securing necessary approvals	Nov – Feb 2018
Procurement and implementation	Feb - July 2018

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

SCC Residents
SCC Members
District and Borough Members
Secretary of State
Liaison Groups
Natural England
SCC Highways Parking Team

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Analysis of the Pay & Conserve Consultation
Annex 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Sources/background papers:

- Pay & Conserve Consultation
 - Environment & Infrastructure Select Committee Report – Pay & Conserve, Car Park Charging on the Countryside Estate. November 17
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