

Working to Protect the New Forest



PRESENTMENT TO MARCH 2025 VERDERERS' COURT

Official Verderer, Verderers and the members of public attending court today, I am Sarah Nield, Chair of the New Forest Association (NFA). I am giving this presentment on behalf of the association following the Deputy Surveyor's briefing to the Consultative Panel on proposed car parking charges.

The car parks have played an important part in conserving the Forest by preventing the unrestricted and widespread car access that blighted the Forest prior to their introduction in the sixties. Since then, millions of visitors have benefited from free car parking. We recognise that times have changed. Many Forest organisations, including Forestry England (FE), are under financial pressure. Their government funding is inadequate to fulfil all their statutory responsibilities to the Forest. Meanwhile, visitor numbers have grown encouraged perhaps by free parking that is out of step with many other national parks and recreational areas. Thus, we understand the reasons why the Forestry England (FE) has brought forward these proposals. Full details are awaited but we wish to outline some essential issues if parking charges are to have the beneficial effect intended rather than be outweighed by damaging consequences.

First and foremost, everything must be done to avoid the inevitable risk of displacement parking whether on the Forest verges, the Forest villages, inclosure entrances or indeed anywhere where cars may stray. To this end any charges must extend to all Forest car parking areas, both formal and informal, within the perambulation not just those managed by FE. Just as the fencing of the Forest required the incorporation of the outer commons, there must be a Forest wide approach. We thus welcome reports that FE is talking to the National Trust and call for all affected landowners to be brought within any scheme.

Robust measures must also be in place before the start of any scheme to stop verge and other displacement parking. The fundamental purpose of Forest car parks will otherwise be undermined. FE is mindful of this danger, but full details are awaited. There is a challenging balance to be struck with preventative measures that are sufficiently robust and comprehensive to meet their purpose whilst at the same time minimising damage to fragile but nature rich Forest verges and other areas. For example, serious concerns have been raised about the ditches recently dug by the Matley to Lyndhurst road.

To reduce the temptation of displacement parking any charges need to be workable, reasonable and make provision for discounted charges for Forest residents, low

income and vulnerable groups whilst also exempting commoners and those who play a part in maintaining and conserving the Forest. FE has such concessions in mind. These need to be below the parking and membership charges at the other forests FE manages. An enforcement team is also proposed, and they should be adequately resourced to be effective and backed up by a Traffic Regulation Order to tackle verge parking.

There must be transparent accounting of any proceeds which should be ringfenced for the benefit of the Forest. Care also needs to be taken that these charges do not reduce or adversely affect funding from government or other sources. Proceeds should be in addition not instead of such funding. The financial purpose of parking charges for the Forest will otherwise be undermined.

Lastly, we would like to know how the introduction of these charges fits with the much-mooted spatial plan which looks to rationalise the number and location of the car parks as part of the Recreational Management Strategy. Time and again we see piecemeal initiatives that fail to consider the Forest as a whole. There also really seem little point in installing expensive and intrusive charging machines etc if a car park is moved or closed.

In short this is a scheme that must be carefully planned, introduced and managed going forward if it is to achieve its object and avoid the key pitfall of displacement parking.

Sarah Nield, Chair New Forest Association.