

Introduction of Charges for Car Parking

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

14th January 2011

Purpose of report

- 1 To report on the findings of preliminary investigations into the possibility of introducing car parking charges as requested by the Joint Committee at its meeting of 18th December 2009.

Main report

- 2 Introduction of car parking charges is being considered in the context of funding pressures and the need to secure additional sources of income for the Regional Park.
- 3 There are currently 18 car parks located on the periphery of the Regional Park. These range in size, character and ownership from formalised car parks owned by the local authority, to small informal lay-bys in private ownership.
- 4 In order for car parking charges to be viable at a particular location:
 - the car park needs to be in local authority ownership;
 - the facilities need to be of a reasonably high standard;
 - it needs to be located in a popular location with relatively high visitor numbers; and
 - introduction of charges should not conflict with neighbouring land uses and land management interests.
- 5 From an assessment of existing facilities against these requirements, the following car parks are considered as candidates for further consideration at this stage: Threipmuir; Harlaw; Bonaly; and Flotterstone. The Regional Park Visitor Survey carried out in 2006 provides a reasonably reliable basis for the visitor estimates contained in this report as these were based on actual counts.

Threipmuir
- 6 Threipmuir attracts circa 60,000 visits per annum and is a key access point to the hills. The car park has recently been refurbished to a high standard.

- Harlaw**
- 7 Harlaw car park is one of the key access points to the Regional Park, giving access to Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs, the visitor centre and longer walks in the hills. Harlaw has circa 80,000 visitors per annum. The car park regularly overflows at weekends with people parking informally on the privately owned access road leading to the car park. This can interfere with farm operations from time to time. The car park surface is currently in need of refurbishment.

- Bonaly**
- 8 The car park at Bonaly Country Park attracts circa 75,000 visitors annually. Car parking is separated between parking adjacent to the Country Park entrance and laybys off Torduff Road near the City Bypass. There is a small overflow car park in private ownership which the local authority has permission to allow people to use at peak times.

- Flotterstone**
- 9 Flotterstone Car Park attracts circa 77,000 visitors per annum. It is the most popular access point on the South East side of the hills. There is considerable overflow onto the verges of the entrance road at peak times. Inconsiderate parking at Flotterstone has caused access difficulties for residents and land managers in the past. The cumulative effect of visitors to the park and the Flotterstone Inn adds to congestion at peak times. The Flotterstone Inn has a dedicated car park, clearly delineated for customers only.

- 10 Swanston Car park was considered but discounted at this stage because of the relatively low visitor numbers (circa 10,000 pa) and the difficulty with differentiating between visitors to the Regional Park and Swanston Golf Club.

- 11 Similarly, Hillend Country Park was discounted at this stage because of the interaction with paying customers of Midlothian Ski Centre.

Issues Raised by Charging for car Parking

- Public Acceptability**
- 12 One of the fundamental issues is the public acceptability of charging. Introduction of parking charges may be unpopular with some visitors, particularly those living locally and visiting regularly. However, people have generally come to expect parking charges at many similar outdoor facilities and following an initial period of adjustment, it may become more acceptable. It will be important that the purpose and intended use of charges is clearly communicated. Charges will need to be presented as an opportunity to support and sustain the facilities people come to enjoy in the Regional Park.

- Compulsory or Discretionary Charges**
- 13 There is currently no legal basis, nor the staff resource to strictly enforce parking charges at these sites. Additionally, a strong approach to enforcement could be counterproductive in terms of the Regional Park's relationship with visitors. One approach would be to encourage a high level of uptake

while operating on an 'honesty box' basis. Clear signage and a consistent message would be needed to promote the value and benefits of payment.

A 'season ticket' could be introduced for regular visitors such as daily dog walkers. For a 'one off' payment of £20-30 people could enjoy parking at all Regional Park car parks. Additional incentives could be built into the season ticket such as free booking for some ranger led activities, or an annual prize draw for outdoor equipment. Periodically, staff could check tickets and place a 'polite' notice on the windscreen of cars not displaying a ticket.

- 14 An approach based on a discretionary charge without enforcement will generate less revenue. However, this sort of 'lighter touch' approach would be more practical if parking is managed 'in house' and may help maintain a positive relationship between the Regional Park Service and visitors.

Risk of Displacement

- 15 There is a very real risk that introduction of charging could encourage people to park outwith the formal car parks creating additional inconvenience for neighbouring land managers. This may cause congestion along narrow roads, block gateways, damage verges and interfere with land management activities. Illegal or inappropriate parking in these circumstances will require management. Additional signage to prevent gates being blocked and structures added to verges will also have to be considered. The extent of this effect is difficult to predict in advance and would need careful monitoring if charges are introduced. Concerns about displacement are likely to be expressed by neighbouring land owners.

Security

- 16 All car parks are in reasonably remote locations without a night time staff presence. Vandalism or attempted theft from ticket machines is a possibility. However most of the proprietary ticket machines are robust and reasonably vandal resistant. Levels of vandalism throughout the Regional Park are generally low.
- 17 Staff will be required to collect cash from ticket machines on a regular basis. It is likely that this would be most efficiently carried out by the duty ranger. The duty ranger generally operates alone with telephone backup. Cash collection would increase the risk of such lone working and would require careful risk assessment. It may be that additional staff resource would need to be re-directed from other duties to allow cash collection to be carried out in pairs.

Expected standards

- 18 Visitors arriving at a car park that is in a poor state of repair may be less inclined to pay for parking. It may support payment levels if funds raised were used directly to improve the amenity and facilities within the vicinity. It is unlikely that the car parks can be significantly upgraded prior to the introduction of charges. Other than Threipmuir which has recently been upgraded, the car parks being considered are all currently in need of some refurbishment and there is a risk that initially, people may feel that the quality of parking facilities is not consistent with payment.

'In House' or Outsourced Parking Management

- 19 An option may be to outsource the entire parking charging operation across the Regional Park. This would relieve the Regional Park Service of parking management operations. In order to be viable outsourcing is likely to require a mandatory approach to charges. This is highly likely to cause parking displacement but is also likely to maximise compliance and potential income. A detailed assessment of the viability of outsourcing has not been carried out at this stage.

Financial Implications

Capital and Revenue Costs

- 20 The cost of supply and installation of one ticket machine to the required specification is approximately £4,000. A sign would also be required to explain the parking charges. The overall capital cost per machine is likely to be in the region of £5,000. Machines would need routine maintenance and servicing at £470 pa per machine and regular purchase of consumables at an estimated £1,600 for all sites. Introducing parking at the four car parks would therefore require an initial capital investment of £20,000 and require ongoing revenue funding of £3,500 per annum.

Estimated Income

- 21 The anticipated compliance with a discretionary parking charge is difficult to predict. Uptake of discretionary charges will inevitably be lower compared to compulsory schemes backed up with enforcement. The estimated income has therefore been based on a conservative estimate a 15% uptake. It can be anticipated however that with effective communication and promotion, the uptake will be higher.
- 22 From an analysis of the data in the 2006 visitor survey it is estimated that 65% of visits to the Regional Park generate a car journey (taking into account the percentage of people travelling by car and the single / multiple car occupancy rates). From this figure the number of cars using the car parks annually can be estimated.
- 23 Table 1 below illustrates the estimated number of cars and the anticipated annual income generated based on an assumed 15% uptake of a £1 parking charge (actual charges could be higher or lower based on length of stay).

Car Park	Cars p.a. (Est.)	Estimated Annual Income / £
Threipmuir	39,000	5,850
Harlaw	52,000	7,800
Bonaly	48,750	7,312
Flotterstone	50,050	7,507
		28 469

Table 1: Estimated Income from parking Charges at 4 key sites.

- 23 After operating costs, the estimated annual net income from a £1 charge at the four car parks listed is £24,969.
- 24 It is anticipated that the capital cost of installation would be recovered within one year of operation.
- 25 The figures above are based on a number of assumptions identified in this report and should be treated as indicative at this stage. The actual number of car visits and the percentage uptake of payment may vary in practice.
- 26 The figures above are based on an 'in-house' scheme directly managed by the Regional Park Service. The viability and financial implications of an outsourced parking service have not been assessed at this stage.

Environmental Impact

- 27 All charges would be used to improve the environmental quality and visitor facilities in the Regional Park. Introduction of parking charges is likely to encourage some visitors to travel to the park by non-motorised means making a contribution towards a reduction in CO₂ emissions from transport.

Recommendations

- 28 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- a) notes the findings of the preliminary investigations;
 - b) seeks a view from the Consultative Forum;
 - c) requests that a wider consultation exercise be carried out;
 - d) requests that the viability of an outsourced parking service is further investigated: and
 - d) considers a further report once a consultation exercise has been completed and the viability of outsourcing assessed.


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Appendices Appendix 1: Draft SNH Statement: Places Managed for People and Nature
 Appendix 2: Regional Park Consultation Response

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Wards affected All

Single Outcome Agreement

Relevant to the following National Outcomes:

- 1 We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.
- 2 We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
- 6 We live longer, healthier lives.
- 10 We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.
- 11 We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
- 12 We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations
- 13 We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity.
- 14 We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and Production.
- 15 Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Background Papers

1. Pentland Hills Regional Park Visitor Survey 2006.