



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet
15 January 2025

Report of the Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage & Culture

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected:

All

Report Title

Country Parks – Car Parking proposals.

Purpose of the Report:

To provide an overview to members of the proposals for aligning car parking across the Country Parks and seek permission to formally advertise the required statutory parking order.

Executive Summary:

Following a staff reorganisation there is now an opportunity to provide a more consistent approach to parking measures at Country Parks in Neath Port Talbot while maximising the revenue opportunities and in turn reducing the pressure on the medium-term financial plan.

The country parks in scope for this review are:

- Gnoll Country Park
- Margam Country Park
- Afan Argoed Country Park

Access to all country parks will remain free for all including local communities and visitors from further afield. Charges will be solely relating to vehicle parking and any additional activities and special events.

Background:

The Country Parks are going through a significant amount of change with new tenants at Afan Argoed, a large capital project at Gnoll Country Park and changes at Margam Park to help reduce the operating costs.

Currently both Afan Argoed and Gnoll Country Parks are operated on a pay and display basis. This relies on active enforcement to provide a deterrent to not paying which is provided by Parking services. However, due to staff and other pressures within that service they are unable to consistently provide the deterrent needed and substantial revenue is currently being lost.

Margam Country Park operates on a pay on entry basis, again with little active enforcement if people choose not to pay.

Like all Council departments the Leisure Tourism Heritage & Culture service has considerable budget challenges as part of the savings required to meet the medium-term financial plan targets. A prudent assessment shows that approximately 20% of parking revenue is being lost at each venue and tightening up on this will help to meet the budget pressures going forward.

Cabinet, in August 2023 recommended that a review be undertaken into the opportunities to align the parking options in the country parks.

By aligning the approach, we are able to develop a combined All Parks Pass, encouraging repeat visits and providing excellent value for money for local residents and regular visitors. Payment via direct debit mechanism (for the 'All Parks Pass' only) will help purchasers spread the cost and encourage loyalty. Holders of the season pass will also be given the benefit of various other offers; 10% off catering for example.

The current system of pay on entry at Margam Country Park limits the hours when car parking payments can be taken and by introducing a new system, the park will be accessible by car through the spring and summer evenings. This may provide other commercial options in future however footfall is expected to be light and the park, initially at least, will be unstaffed in the evenings.

The hard standing Orangery car park which is largely unused when there are no functions will be brought into general use. The car parking cost for functions will be incorporated in the hire charge and a local system implemented to ensure fixed penalty notices are not issued to Orangery users.

As part of developing this proposal officers looked at other management options and in particular a barrier entry system. Whilst efficient in controlling paid access/egress of car parks, installing barrier systems at each of the three sites incurs significant installation fees and are prone to breaking and general maintenance issues. If the barrier is not in use due to a breakdown, all car park fees are lost until repair is completed or a costly manual process is implemented.

A detailed marketing campaign will be developed to promote the benefits of the All Parks Pass in particular.

Pay & Display system:

Already in place in across at 2 of 3 parks (Gnoll and Afan Forest) the current pay & display systems are generally proven effective at these venues, although a significant percentage of sales are lost by customers not paying and a lack of enforcement.

The pay and display option would link with the current MiPermit/ IPS system meaning no new software is required and online and cashless payment options can be maximised. The system will also able us to better track the number of the trends digitally for monitoring and marketing purposes

Given the current ratio of cash/card payments at pay and display machines (approx. 80/20), going almost cashless on these machines is realistic and reduces cost and risk of cash collections going forward however it is important to maintain on site payment options for users that are unable or unwilling to use online options.

All pay and display options require a relatively small amount of investment in some pay and display machines for Margam Park, but this is minimised by actively encouraging the cashless, online options.

In the longer term it is possible the enforcement role can be included within the existing ranger/ site officer roles at the parks. However, this would require job evaluation and some restructuring, so the preferred option is to directly recruit a parking enforcement officer to ensure the processes are fully embedded and there is a visible presence to assist visitors while the new systems are established.

Schedule of Charges:

The proposed schedule of charges is attached (Appendix 2). In summary this shows a general uplift of prices of approximately 10%. However, the introduction

of an All Parks Pass will provide excellent for money for repeat visitors and works out at a cost of £7.50 per month.

Afan Forest Park has 3 spaces for electric hook ups designed to host overnight campervans that are currently included in the Off Street Parking Order. It is proposed these are removed to allow the site operator more flexibility.

Financial Impact:

A summary of the financial impact is shown in Appendix 1. Overall, the changes are projected to be revenue positive in the region of £142k

A relatively small capital investment will be required to purchase some new pay & display machines. Financial provision for improved parking at Gnoll Country Park has already been put aside with £50k allocated and this will be used to fund the initial changes.

Using pay and display for all sites will incur a charge of between 8-10% of the income generated. This has been factored into the projections.

Workforce Impacts:

One additional Parking Enforcement Officer post, directly employed by the Country Parks will be required for an initial 12-month period. This will be at a Grade 4.

Legal Impacts:

Any changes to the parking fees and charges need a legal order to be advertised that allows for any objections and observations to be reported back to Cabinet Board before a final decision is implemented.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. A second stage assessment is not required as the policies that underpin the car parking provision remain unchanged.

Valleys Communities Impact:

No implications

Risk Management Impacts:

There will always be a risk with changing tariffs, but this is largely mitigated by the introduction of the All Parks Pass and the introduction of the direct debit payment option.

The biggest risk will be around ensuring appropriate enforcement resource is allocated to provide the deterrent to those wishing to avoid paying.

Consultation:

The off-street parking order will be advertised and consulted on in line with the statutory processes.

Scrutiny Observations:

This report was presented to the Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning scrutiny committee on 5 December 2024.

Members asked questions around the provision of pay and display machines and received assurances these would still be used. Members also queried the potential use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) but this has been discounted due to the costs to set up and the operational limitations. The majority of questions were seeking to understand if a sliding scale of charges could be introduced at Margam Park and Gnoll Country Park. Officers explained that they had looked at this carefully, but the season ticket option gives very good value of money for local people wanting to use the sites for relatively short amounts of time. The committee accepted the report and supported the recommendation.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that members agree to the proposed changes in the management of the country parks car parking and give permission for the off street parking order with the schedule of charges (Appendix 2) to be advertised and consulted on.

Reasons for the Proposed Decision:

The proposed fees and charges bring together the country parks to form a more coherent offer and in turn provide better value for money for the park users. They also address help to address the issues surrounding a lack of enforcement and help to meet the targets in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Implementation of Decision:

This decision is subject to a three-day call in.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Revenue assessment

Appendix 2 – schedule of charges
Appendix 3 - IIA

List of Background Papers:

None

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