



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board

6th June 2019

Report of the Head of Property and Regeneration – Simon Brennan

Matter for: Information

Wards Affected: Cymmer

AFAN FOREST PARK – INCREASED CAR PARKING CHARGES.

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update Members on the impact of the increase in car parking charges at Afan Forest Park

Executive Summary

- 2 To report on the impact the increase in car parking charges has had on existing businesses and in achieving a balanced budget for the Council at Afan Forest Park.

Background

- 3 Afan Forest Park(the facility) comprises the former Visitors Centre and Café (main building) ,car park, toilet/shower block and outside paths and grounds etc. as approximately shown edged in Black on the attached plan 1.

4. Prior to 1st April 2016 it was an operational facility run by Streetcare Services with a significant budget deficit. The Councils Saving Budget for 2015/16 cut the budget by £200,000 which resulting in the café being closed and no Council staff on site. Responsibility for the facility also transferred to Property and Regeneration.
5. As a consequence either the facility had to achieve an ongoing balanced budget or close.
6. As a result of a subsequent tender exercise the main building was leased to Cedar Tearoom Limited with the basement room leased to Afan Valley Bike Shed for which market rents are received. The adjoining Museum is leased out to South Wales Miners Museum a local charity for which a small ground rent is received.
7. However the Council retained responsibility for the day to day operation and running costs of the car park, toilet/shower block and outside grounds etc.
8. The income from the car park as approximately shown coloured Grey on at attached Plan 1, is fundamental to achieving a balanced budget at the facility.
9. Parking charges had been fixed at £1.00 for all day use for a number of years and there was no season permit system available.
10. It was also clear that many visitors were not purchasing a ticket due to the lack of on-site enforcement.
11. There was a budget deficit of £28245 and £12524 for financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18 respectively.

Parking Income during these periods were £5775 and £12381 respectively.

- 12 The Council has since installed 2 electric powered Pay and Display machines within the car park one of which accepts card/contactless payments
- 13 To meet the original FFP commitment to achieve a balanced budget to sustain the future of the facility back in February 2018 this Cabinet Board (and subsequently Streetscene and Engineering Cabinet Board) approved:
 - i) an increase in Car Parking Charges to £1.00 for up to one hour, £2.50 for up to 4 hours and £3.50 all day, and the introduction of a season ticket at a cost of £52.
 - ii) for the car park to be included in the Off-Street Parking Order allowing effective enforcement on an ad-hoc basis by the Councils parking enforcement officers.
 - iii) These were to take effect from 1st April 2018 or the earliest possible date thereafter.
- 14 As part of these changes the three businesses in the main building were provided with up to a maximum of three free transferable season parking tickets for its staff.
- 15 Due to procedural matters associate with the legal parking order the increased parking charges were not implemented until mid-June 2018. Also the Councils parking enforcement officers have only recently started enforcement on an ad-hoc basis.
- 16 Despite this income from increased parking charges has contributed to a small budget surplus of £1534 for the financial year 2018/19.

Parking income for this period was £29128 an increase of £16604 on the financial year 2017/18.

Income from a full years increased parking charges and ad hoc enforcement by the Councils Parking Services should mean a larger budget surplus in this and coming years.

- 17 Other possible income generating and costs savings measures are being undertaken to include a review of expenditure at the facility and an audit of energy use for the outside toilet/shower block to reduce costs.
- 18 It is interesting to note that the number of recorded vehicles entering the car park between 1st January and 31st December 2018 was 35,161 whilst the number of parking tickets sold during that period was only 17,202.

This does not taken into consideration vehicular movement by the 45 season permits holders (to include the tenants and Council staff) however it does suggest that a large number of visitors are still not paying the parking charges.

Regular ad hoc enforcement by the Councils Parking Services will hopefully reduce the number of offenders this year resulting in increased income from parking charges.

- 19 The tenants were requested to provide their comments on perceived impact to their businesses of the changes to parking charges and responses are as follows:
 - i) Afan Valley Bike Shed
 - Verbally advised that they supported the revised changes and did not consider there had been any impact on their business.No formal representation was submitted.
 - ii) Cedars Tearoom Ltd
 - Accepted the need for the revised charges but considered there had been a negative impact on their business.

- They requested the Council extend the period of the £1.00 from one hour to one and a half hours. They consider this would attract more short term visitors for walking and to frequent the businesses at the facility.
- A copy of its formal representation is attached.

iii) South Wales Miners Museum

- Accepted the need for the revised charges but considered there had been a negative impact on their charitable business albeit that no evidence to support or formal representation was submitted.
- They have however formally requested additional free transferable season parking tickets for their volunteers in lieu of them undertaking without charge additional grounds maintenance works at the facility.
- Discussions are continuing to identify what works and whether could be undertaken safely by the volunteers and whether this would achieve a budget saving.

20. Recorded footfall within the main centre between 1st January and 31st December 2018 was 52,874 a fall of circa 8% for the same period in 2017 when it was 57,390.

However Cedars Tearoom Ltd inadvertently switched off power to the data recorder for a period of time last year which will have affected the recorded footfall within the main centre.

- 21 This recorded number of vehicles entering the car park which fell by 4% during the same period from 36,624 to 35,161. This clearly shows that a significant number of visitors to the facility for whatever reason do not go to the main centre where the businesses are located.
- 22 There has also been a general decline in numbers visiting

the Afan Valley in recent years and in particularly mountain bikers to Afan Forest Park. Since 2014 the number of recorded uses of the trails has decreased by circa 27,000 uses.

The reasons for the decline has been the subject of deliberation with stakeholders and Natural Resources Wales with the following identified as possible causes:

- A significant change in the way that mountain bikers seek to ride our trails, many now look for 'off piste' experiences. This trend could be affecting trail numbers as riders aren't being counted if they do not ride on formal trails.
- Diversions and closures of trails affected by active forestry operations (Afan is a working forest)
- A lack of strategic development and a future plan covering NRW/ NPTCBC and local businesses (similar to the former Afan Forest Park action plan).
- No specific marketing campaigns for Afan Forest Park since the completion of the European funded Cognation MTB Trails South Wales project in 2014/2015 which delivered approximately £5 million of investment in mountain biking infrastructure in South Wales.

- 23 Clearly there are a number of factors affecting visitor numbers particularly to the main centre other than the change in parking charges.
24. With such a small budget surplus the Council is not in a position at this time to fund the costs of implementation(circa £1250) nor the loss of income from extending the period of the £1.00 parking charges from one hour to one and a half hours.
- 25 However the request is worth considering if and when budget surplus considerably improve.Officers will therefore monitor the situation to see to implement if and when there is a significant improvement in the budget surplus.
- 26 In the meantime officers will continue to meet with the

businesses on a regular basis to discuss site management issues and opportunities to increase visitor numbers and further develop the facility as a popular tourist attraction.

27. The new Tourism Team is working with tourism stakeholders in Afan Forest Park and rebuilding partnerships with Natural Resources Wales in order to establish a strategic direction for the future development of Afan Forest Park.
28. The Tourism Team will also be delivering marketing campaigns with the aim of increasing footfall to key attractions and increase overnight stays within the county. The team has recently secured additional external funds to deliver a high profile marketing campaign which will include tourism providers from Afan Forest Park.

Financial Impact

29. The facility achieved a small budget surplus of £1534 for the financial year 2018/19.

30. Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring/information purposes.

Valley Communities Impacts

31. No implications.

Workforce Impact

32. No implications

Legal Impact

33. No implications

Risk Management

34 No implications

Consultation

35 There is no requirement for external consultation in this instance.

Appendices

36 Appendix 1 – Car Park Plan
Appendix 2 – Formal representations from Cedar's Tea Rooms

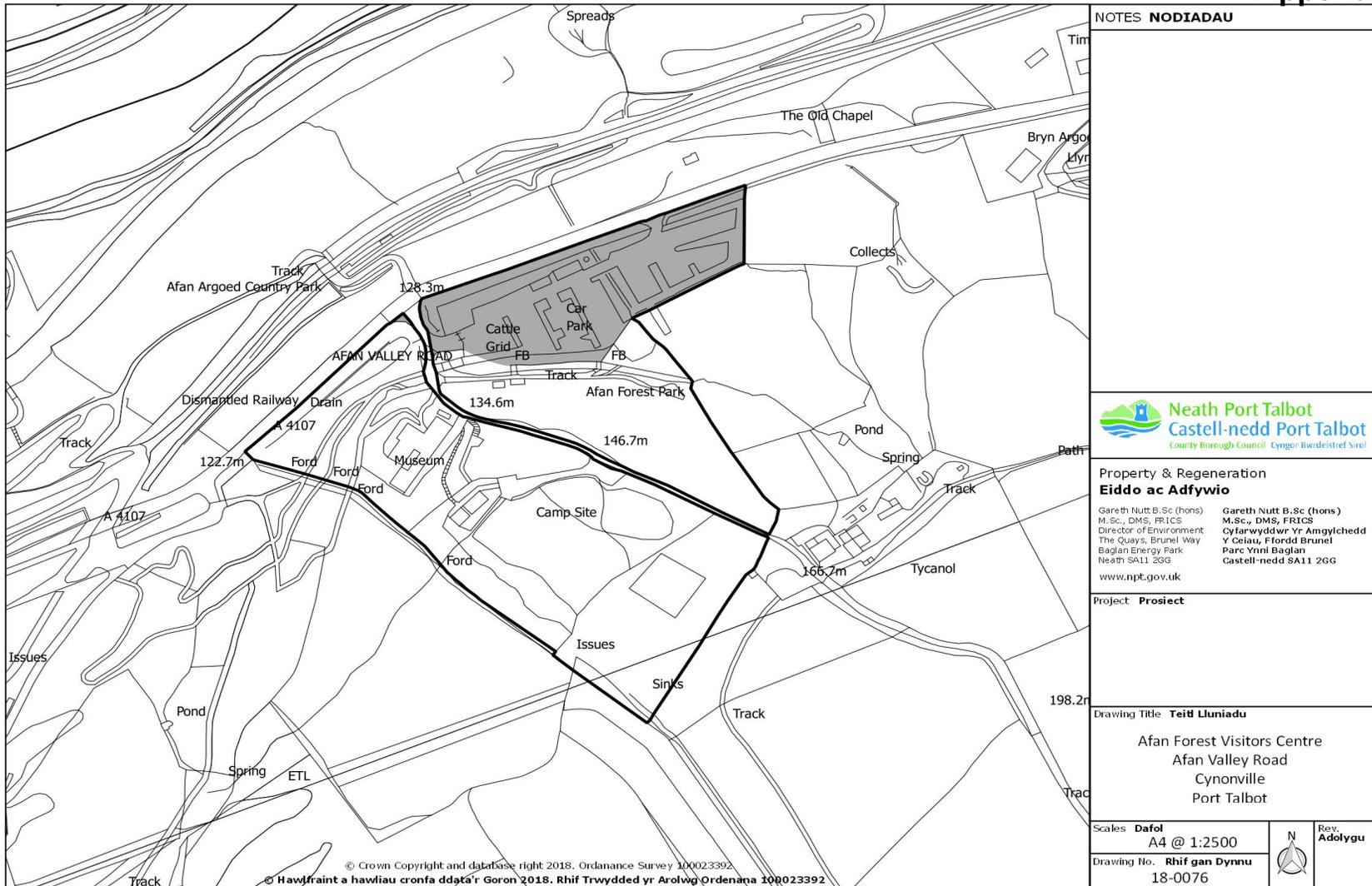
Background Papers

37 emails from the tenants in the main building

Officer Contact

38 For further information on this report item, please contact:
David Phillips, Strategic Property & Valuation Manager,
Tel: 01639 686980
E-mail: d.phillips@npt.gov.uk

Appendix 1



NOTES NODIADAU



Property & Regeneration Eiddo ac Adfywio

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Project **Prosiect**

Drawing Title **Teitl Lluniadu**

**Afan Forest Visitors Centre
 Afan Valley Road
 Cynonville
 Port Talbot**

Scales Dafol A4 @ 1:2500	 Rev. Adolygu
Drawing No. Rhif gan Dynnu 18-0076	

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Appendix 2

From: Cedars Tearoom [mailto:cedarstearoom@gmail.com]
Sent: 27 March 2019 10:34
To: Andrea S. Nicholas <a.nicholas@npt.gov.uk>; David A. Phillips <d.phillips@npt.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Increased Parking Charges at Afan Forest Park

Dear Andrea/Dave,

We are so grateful, that you have sought and intend to assess our opinions in this matter.

We fully appreciate that in life very few things are “free” and parking your vehicle safely and conveniently for no cost, can no longer be a guarantee. Particularly when the expense and upkeep of such a facility is being met from the public purse.

We believe the attractions and facilities at Afan Forest Park are exceptional for the locality and a premium must therefore be levied.

As for our early findings, which we must add, cannot be solely attributed to the parking charge at this stage, we have certainly noticed both physically and financially, a downturn in footfall over these past winter months, the cause(s) may be many fold, ie. weather, desire, destination, cost of parking, far too many to ponderables and impossible to single out the root cause as of yet.

We can though state, as a matter of fact, that this customer downturn has sadly caused us to release some part time staff to allow us to trade on a leaner basis and get through this issue of some considerable concern.

We would wish to ask that NPTCBC deeply consider the effect of, and the fairness in its current banding of the level of charging, and hopefully offer the public a greater choice of incentively priced charges with possibly monthly, seasonal, annual and short term options available, anything to improve visitor numbers to this beautiful valley. We must ALL do our utmost to fulfill the potential that this site and the surrounding area, most clearly has to offer.

May I finally add our personal observations whilst driving through the valley and viewing our neighbouring Car Park at Rhyslyn near Pontrhydyfen, this is always extremely well frequented and very popular, far more so than at the visitor centre, dare I say the fact that this is “FREE” is bound to affect the choice of parking for those fortunate enough to be still so active, that stopping there, and then cycling or walking to our destination just over the bridge, can save them a considerable sum of money (over a period of time) in the process.

We must also pose the question, is this a fair scenario for our less able members of the community and population, whose patronage and input toward any business or venture, may affect.

We thank you for this platform and look forward to any further discussion you would care for us to participate in.

Kindest regards

Jill, Peter, Holly and Adrian of Cedars

Sent from my iPad