



REPORT TO :	COUNCIL FORUM
FROM:	EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE
ON:	1 DECEMBER 2016

SUBJECT Petition relating to the proposed introduction of car parking charges on two car parks at Witton Country Park

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To bring to the attention of elected members a petition signed by over 4200 people who have objected to the proposed introduction of parking charges on two of the car parks at Witton Country Park. The comment which accompanied the petition is stated below:

‘Do not implement Witton Park car parking charges as this will have a huge impact on the local and wider community. We need to encourage people to become healthy and happy in our community and this facility encouraging many people to do this. Charging a car park fee will only deter people from coming to Witton Park and to Blackburn and we feel that this is the wrong thing to do’.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that

1. Members note the petition
2. Maintain the current proposals to introduce parking charges on the two main car parks in Witton Country Park

3. BACKGROUND

In July 2016, members at Council Forum approved a series of recommendations contained within the 2016/17 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) update report.

One of the recommendations was to approve the introduction of car parking charges at Witton Country Park.

Witton Country Park attracts a significant number of customers who use Witton Park Arena and the AstroTurf pitches. The Park also attracts a significant number of visitors who use the play facilities, walk their dog or attend the many special events held in the park throughout the year. Whilst this high level of usage is to be welcomed, it takes its toll on the infrastructure of the park.

It is proposed that car parking charges are introduced in the main car park in front of Witton Park Arena and the car park adjacent to the Astroturf pitches. The income generated can be used to offset some of the costs associated with operating and maintaining the park and the facilities.

Prior to the car parking charges being introduced, the Council will upgrade the lighting in both car parks as the quality of lighting is poor and we have received a number of comments during the darker evenings from customers and users feeling anxious walking to their car, especially if their car was located some distance away from the main facilities.

4. RATIONALE

It is recognised that Witton Park is a well visited and valued community asset and through its many opportunities for outdoor recreation and sport it contributes positively to the health and wellbeing of residents. It is therefore important, through the budget reduction process to seek to retain and maintain this 400+ acre green space. The introduction of low level parking charges has been deemed as an appropriate means to offset some of the costs associated with Witton Park in the face of financial cuts.

A number of risks to car park charges have been identified through the consultation process. They include:-

- Pressure to the council's budgets if charges were not introduced as agreed.
- Displacement of cars from Witton car parks to on-street parking in the nearby area. Officers have attended local residents' meetings to listen to their concerns and will support them with a residents permit scheme should they deem that to be appropriate as well as continue to manage existing parking enforcement regulations.
- Reduction in use / attendance in the park due to the introduction of charges: A review of similar parks and recreation areas across Lancashire has been undertaken to inform the parking costs for Witton Park. Parking fees for upto 2hrs, an all-day price as well as an annual pass for regular users will provide a range of options to suit users' needs. The park is also serviced by regular public transport routes.
- Long queues at pay and display payment points at peak time and at the start of popular events. This concern can be mitigated with the purchase of an annual pass for regular users and with the inclusion of card and contactless payment and 'pay by phone' technology which negates the need for coins or to queue up to pay.

There are a number of stakeholders and services operating within Witton Park including Myerscough College, Blackburn Harriers Athletics Club, Park Run, Pavilion Café and Green Gym Volunteer group. They have been involved in discussions, along with the Couch to 5k group as part of the consultation process and their input has been useful in shaping the implementation process for the charging policy.

The implementation of parking charges at Witton Park is currently being worked through by officers. This process will reflect appropriate procurement requirements that the council needs to meet.

Witton Country Park is valued and used by many people from across the borough in many different ways; both formal and informally. The introduction of parking charges can be used to offset some of the costs associated with operating and maintaining the park environment and the facilities and thus retain this borough wide asset for the benefit and use of all our communities.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of car parking charges at Witton Country Park will help to achieve the Council's priority of making your money go further.

Income generated can be used to offset some of the costs associated with operating and maintaining the park and the facilities thus supporting the council's priority to improve health and wellbeing.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council estimates that a minimum of £50,000 income per annum will be generated from the introduction of the following car parking charges:

£0.50p – up to 2 hours
£1.50 – all day

This income forecast is based on the levels of income generated in other similar parks, the number of car spaces available and the level of parks use throughout the year

The installation of a car park lighting scheme has been estimated to cost £46,000, tenders for this work are being sought via the North West CHEST. These costs will be confirmed once the tenders have been received and evaluated

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council is able to levy car parking charges at Witton Country Park. There is no restrictive covenant which prohibits charging for car parking. The Council will ensure it possesses the necessary legal powers to implement a car parking charging scheme. The advertising of the proposals will allow for comments/objections from members of the public which will be appropriately considered by nominated officers, the Executive Member and if necessary, the Planning and Highways committee.

The petition is to be considered in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

It is proposed that the Council will directly operate the car park and retain all income. The Council will install pay and display parking machines and the car parks will be monitored on a regular basis throughout the day by the Council's civil enforcement officers.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The use of the park by a wide range of individuals and groups is wholly recognised and the impact of parking charges has been considered throughout the consultation and decision making process.

10. CONSULTATIONS

On 4th August 2016, the Executive member for Culture, Leisure and Young Peoples Services and council officers met with representatives of three running groups who use Witton Park and with representatives of the Witton resident association to discuss the proposed car parking charges and listen to any concerns.

One running group accepted the need to levy a charge. The other two running groups were concerned about parking charges for a number of reasons, these included;

- group participants having to join long queues at pay and display machines during the busy evenings and potentially missing the start of their group run, which could compromise the safety of novice runners.
- more group participants parking in nearby streets and the impact on residents.
- volunteers may attend less regularly if they have to pay a charge at every visit and without the volunteers, the groups couldn't operate.

The Witton residents were concerned about the possibility of more people parking on the street during the evenings as many visitors to Witton Park already park on the nearby streets as the car park is full to capacity on some evenings. If evening charges were introduced, residents commented that they would have to consider a resident parking scheme. A follow-up meeting subsequently took place with the local residents association on 14th September attended by the Executive Member Culture, Leisure and Young Peoples Services and a council officer.

On 18th August 2016 a meeting was held with representative of Blackburn Harriers Athletics Club, attended by the Director and Head of Service. The Harriers are key stakeholders at Witton Park Arena and train there 3 evenings a week, at weekends as well as holding a variety of athletics meets and cross country fixtures throughout the year. There was an acceptance from the club that the introduction of parking charges would support and protect services at Witton. The club recognise the need for their members to pay the new parking charges and wish to work with the council to identify the best way of achieving this in a streamlined way to existing payment options.

On 27th September, the Executive member for Culture, Leisure and Young People's Services also met with the lead petitioner to discuss the petition and to receive it on behalf of the Council

Chief Officer/Member

Contact Officer:	Martin Eden.
Date:	7 November 2016
Background papers	None