



CABINET - 11TH DECEMBER 2012

SUBJECT: CWMCARN FOREST AND VISITOR CENTRE CAR PARKING CHARGES

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the effects of introducing car parking charges in and around Cwmcarn Visitor Centre and to recommend a response to concerns of local residents.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 To provide Members with an overview of the impact of car park charges at Cwmcarn Forest and Visitor Centre and to recommend a scheme for the local residents.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Cwmcarn Visitor Centre and Forest area is an integral part of the Council's Regeneration framework 'People, Business, Places' and forms a key element of the objective of protecting and developing the economy through enhancing the tourism offer. Cwmcarn Visitor Centre also forms a key part of the Council's Community Strategy contributing to the aims in the Living Environment and Regeneration Objectives. As part of Welsh Government's 'Valley Regional Park', Cwmcarn is a priority listed in the Assembly's Action Plan.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 In September 2011, a report was presented to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee recommending that Cabinet endorses the principle of making a Road Traffic Order introducing car parking charges in and around the Visitor Centre at Cwmcarn Forest and Drive. The relevant order was published in December 2011 and the Head of Engineering Services confirmed the Order in January 2012.
- 4.2 Car parking charges were introduced in May 2012 following the installation of the car parking terminals and association signage. The Order and subsequent introduction of car parking charges has been met with some opposition and it has been agreed that the position would be reviewed and reported back to Members.
- 4.3 The original report highlighted that there was a net revenue cost in the region of £300k of operating, running and maintaining Cwmcarn Visitor Centre, adjoining forest, lake, walks and campsite. The introduction of charging for car parking was considered essential in reducing this major revenue short fall.
- 4.4 The current tariff is £1.00 for two hours and £3.00 for a full day.

- 4.5 Charging was introduced on 8th May and in the first six months of operation £25,800 has been generated. This is significant given that the period from May to October was one of the wettest ever and the summer was officially the worst on record.
- 4.6 The poor summer is reflected in the fact that in comparison with 2011 the number of walkers decreased by 380 to 8,110 in the period May to October in 2012 and the number of cyclists was down by 5,700 to 27,080. The number of cars parking in the main car park fell from 21,210 to 18,780.
- 4.7 In addition there have been suggestions that visitors have been avoiding car parking charges by parking on the adjacent Graig in Cwmcarn and as far down as Crosskeys.
- 4.8 In reviewing the current arrangements alternatives have been considered to lessen the financial impact on regular users including free parking for residents for up to two hours; redeemable vouchers in Raven's Café or a season ticket for local residents.
- 4.9 The first two options were discounted for practical reasons including the costs of monitoring. However, a season ticket for residents of the County Borough was considered viable.
- 4.10 In order to acknowledge the concerns of local residents it is suggested that a quarterly season ticket be available at £25.00. This would mean on average visitors would pay just £2.00 per week or 40p per day if they visited Cwmcarn say five times a week.
- 4.11 A new Off Street Parking Places Order will be required for the provision of season tickets to be introduced for Caerphilly County Borough Council residents.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No specific Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on these proposals. Car parking charges generally were decided at Cabinet in October 2011 and Members should note that the Council is undertaking a consultation exercise with disability groups and other organisations on car parking charges throughout the County Borough and this will be subject to a separate report to Scrutiny Committee.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The introduction of car parking charges should generate around £55,000 per annum and this figure is likely to increase as visitors and locals become accustomed to having to pay for the benefits of the forest and visitor centre at Cwmcarn. Similarly more mountain bikers will be using Cwmcarn when a new downhill and cross country trail are opened by the end of 2013.
- 6.2 It is not feasible to predict the likely sales of quarterly season tickets as this seen as very much a concession to local opinion. This will be monitored to gauge the attractiveness of the offer.
- 6.3 The cost of introducing a new Off Street Parking Places Order will be in the region of £3,000.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 Comments from consultees are reflected in the report.

8.2 Local Members have suggested that residents be offered two hours free car parking on evidence of a Caerphilly County Borough 'Smart Card' being displayed.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That a quarterly car parking season ticket be introduced for residents of Caerphilly County Borough to be used at Cwmcarn Forest and Visitor Centre Car Parks at a cost of £25.00 per quarter.

9.2 That off site car parking be monitored to assess highway impacts and safety.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To acknowledge the concerns of local residents who use and benefit Cwmcarn Visitor Centre on a regular basis.

10.2 To assess the impact on the local highway network of people visiting Cwmcarn.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Ian MacVicar – Group Manager Operates, Asset Based Services.
Consultees: Cllr Ken James – Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Sustainable Development.
Cllr Denver Preece – Local Member Abercarn Ward.
Cllr Michael Gray – Local Member Cross Keys Ward.
A. O'Sullivan – Chief Executive
N. Scammell – Head of Corporate Finance
T. Shaw – Head of Engineering Services
C. Campbell - Transportation and Engineering Manager
M. Owen – Manager Cwmcarn Visitor Centre.