

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### APPENDIX 5 to Draft Cabinet Report

#### Purpose of this appendix

1. The purpose of this appendix is to provide Cabinet with further detail of the Savings Programme 2025 (SP25) proposal on **Rural Countryside Parking** and the specific recommendations relating to this proposal for Cabinet approval as part of the overarching decision report '**Savings Programme to 2025 Revenue Savings Proposals**'.

#### Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet approves the following recommendations:

2. To note the outcome of the 2024 Future Services Consultation in relation to the proposals on Rural Countryside Parking.
3. Implementation of charging at rural countryside car parking sites wholly owned by the Council with 20 or more spaces where commercially viable from April 2025, with a phased introduction to allow supporting infrastructure to be put in place.
4. Implementation of charging at rural countryside car parking sites in joint ownership with the Council and/or under 20 spaces where commercially viable. This may include consolidation of sites within a local area, or expansion of existing sites.
5. Where implemented, charges at rural countryside car parking sites would be reviewed annually and amended in accordance with the current pricing policy (as amended from time to time).
6. Income from car parking charging would contribute to the costs to Hampshire County Council of managing Hampshire Countryside Sites.
7. That authority is delegated to the Director of Universal Services, in consultation with the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services, to progress and make any necessary arrangements to implement these decisions.

#### Executive Summary

8. This paper seeks approval to implement charging at rural countryside car parks where it is commercially viable.
9. Following the feedback received on the consultation the proposal set out in this paper differs slightly from that originally set out in the consultation. The

original proposal named 10 sites with the potential to introduce charging. Following the consultation it is now proposed that the following sites, which each have 20 or more spaces, are reviewed to ascertain if charging for parking is commercially viable and, if so, to implement charging at each location:

- A354 Martin Down
- Abbots Well Road, Frogham – Hyde Common
- Crab Wood, Sarum Road, Winchester
- Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (lower)
- Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (upper)
- Fort Nelson Overflow
- Wall Lane, Silchester

10. In addition, as set out in the original consultation, the County Council would also review sites with fewer than 20 spaces, or which are in joint ownership with other organisations, to ascertain if charging for parking is commercially viable. Where it is commercially viable, charging would then be implemented.
11. Hampshire County Council has over 100 rural countryside car parking sites across Hampshire that help provide access to nature reserves, country parks and the wider countryside.
12. The County Council have proposed to introduce car parking charges at the rural countryside car parks that the County Council manage, where the County Council expect doing so would be commercially viable. The County Council anticipate this could raise around £65,000 each year that could be used to help maintain countryside sites.
13. Between 8th January and 31st March 2024, the County Council consulted on proposals to introduce charging for parking at rural countryside car parks where it is commercially viable to do so – asking respondents to comment on sites that are 20 or more spaces (proposal one) and those that are fewer than 20 spaces or jointly owned with other organisations (proposal two). The proposals received over 4,500 responses. This consultation formed part of the County Council's wider Future Services consultation.
14. The results from the consultation were broadly supportive of both elements of this proposal, with both potential positive and negative impacts cited by respondents. A summary of the overall responses to the proposals is shown below with more detail from paragraph 48.
15. Overall the responses to the consultation were positive, with 53% agreeing overall and 33% disagreeing overall with proposal 1, and 45% agreeing overall and 42% disagreeing overall with proposal 2.

16. Responses were proactively sought from stakeholder groups that may be particularly impacted by the implementation of the proposal. Those identified were contacted to ensure that they had the opportunity to have their say on this and the other proposals put forward in the County Council's Future Services consultation.
17. Analysis of the comments left by respondents indicate that the main concerns in relation to the proposals were creating financial barriers to access the countryside, displacement of parking and cost exceeding the revenue. There would be an initial investment required to ensure charging can occur at each site (such as infrastructure – car parking machines etc.). More detailed information on concerns and mitigation can be found in paragraph 63.
18. Comments in favour of the proposals were focused on car parking charges seen as normal in other places, that the Council should be charging for non-essential services, and that the money would allow investment back into the rural areas.
19. The proposed changes may reduce the number of car journeys or encourage car sharing. This could have a positive impact on local air quality and traffic/journey times and support/protect some at risk habitats at protected sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar sites.
20. Where implemented, charges at rural countryside car parking sites would be reviewed annually in accordance with the current pricing policy as amended from time to time.

### **Contextual information**

21. Hampshire County Council has over 100 rural countryside car parking sites across Hampshire that help provide access to nature reserves, country parks and the wider countryside. These range in size from lay-bys for two vehicles to large car parks with over 70 spaces. There is a cost to maintain these sites – for example, a 40-space rural car park costs approximately £1,100 per year to directly maintain.
22. The County Council currently charge for car parking at our country park sites, and at Reading Road in Fleet, but the County Council do not charge at other rural locations. The income generated from car parking at these sites is used to invest in countryside services including the sites that the car park serves.
23. In the Budget Consultation undertaken in summer 2023, 48% of respondents who used country parks and other outdoor spaces agreed with the proposal to introduce new charges to sites that are currently free, compared with 41% who disagreed. While this does not indicate a strong level of agreement with the principle of charging for rural countryside car parking, it does suggest some agreement that the County Council should investigate this potential means of income generation to offset service costs.

## Summary of service area proposal

24. The County Council have proposed to introduce car parking charges at the rural countryside car parks that the County Council manage, where the County Council expect doing so would be commercially viable, i.e. the income raised would cover the costs of implementing the car parking charges (such as setting up equipment and monitoring compliance) and would go some way to covering the costs of providing and maintaining countryside car parks. The County Council anticipate this could raise around £65,000 each year.
25. The County Council initially looked at the following locations, which each have 20 or more spaces and therefore could generate the most income:
- A354 Martin Down
  - Abbots Well Road, Frogham – Hyde Common
  - Crab Wood, Sarum Road, Winchester
  - Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (lower)
  - Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (upper)
  - Fort Nelson Overflow
  - Hook Barn
  - Hyde School, Hyde
  - Wall Lane, Silchester
  - Westwood
26. As part of the consultation, there were challenges raised around Hook Barn, Hyde School and Westwood sites with regards to size, lease agreements and ownership. Therefore, the County Council would not be taking these sites forward at this time.
27. In addition, the consultation referred to there being some County Council rural countryside car parks with fewer than 20 spaces, or which are jointly owned between us and other organisations, where the use of car parking charges would be commercially viable. Where this is the case, the County Council asked for views on introducing car parking charges.
28. If charges are implemented at any of our countryside sites, fees could be structured to support short-term use, such as for dog walkers, and deter longer stays such as parking for commuting purposes. The County Council would look to ensure that charges are reasonable and in-keeping with other district/borough council charges and opportunities would be investigated to mitigate this impact such as the offer of a season ticket to bring the cost down for regular visitors, or an initial free period, if commercially viable.
29. Feedback from this consultation has helped us understand whether it is appropriate to introduce car parking charges at rural countryside car parks with 20 or more spaces that the County Council wholly own, whether there

are any other locations where the County Council should consider introducing car parking charges, and what factors the County Council should consider in making these decisions.

30. All car parks where charging is proposed would be assessed for the likely impact on the surrounding area, with discussions held with relevant neighbouring landowners, local and highway authorities on how to dissuade unsafe parking in the surrounding areas and to consider displacement of car parking. A Habitats Regulations Assessment would be undertaken and SSSI assent sought at sites where this is required.
31. Most visitors would expect to pay for parking for a day out and there are many remote Hampshire sites that are still free to explore. The County Council maintain an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside. The County Council would look to ensure that charges are reasonable and in-keeping with other district/borough council charges. Opportunities would be investigated to mitigate the cost such as the offer of a season ticket to bring the cost down for regular visitors, or an initial free period, if commercially viable.
32. The County Council would look at a range of ways customers could choose to pay, but the County Council are not likely to implement any collection systems that require cash to be collected on site due to the high risk of theft and/or vandalism.
33. A comprehensive review would be undertaken at each site to determine which sites are commercially viable and only these would be taken forward for implementation. The County Council may undertake a pilot at a couple of sites first to ensure viability.
34. The money from car parking charges would be used to invest in countryside services, both to maintain but also to enable ongoing improvements to the biodiversity, landscape and access for the benefit of our visitors and the natural environment, including the sites that the car park serves. We would explore opportunities to improve the visitor experience, for example signage and path improvements, (where minimal costs were involved and a robust business case in place), and generate income, for example a temporary catering offer at suitable sites. Other nearby sites such as Country Parks where there are existing visitor facilities could be signposted to inform visitors of other opportunities to access the countryside. For each site, there would be an initial outlay to allow car parking charges to be implemented. This would include cost of charging infrastructure (such as car parking machines), improvements and maintenance of the site (such as regrading of the surface), and costs associated with legislative requirements including monitoring. Such outlays would be carefully considered when ascertaining if a particular site is commercially viable.
35. Any income from this proposal, including from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) would be used to help maintain the countryside service.

36. If approved, the County Council would expect to start implementing charges at some rural car parks from April 2025. This is likely to be a phased introduction to allow the supporting infrastructure to be put in place. Where implemented, charges at rural countryside car parking sites would be reviewed annually in accordance with the current pricing policy as amended from time to time.

### **Legal, financial and performance implications**

37. It should be noted that if the sites are classified as off-street parking, the income would be subject to VAT.
38. If these sites are progressed and enforced under Civil Parking Enforcement, the County Council would need to introduce a traffic regulation order (TRO) to allow enforcement, as part of the TRO process statutory consultation is undertaken for 21 days on the proposal.
39. The Equalities Act (2010) protects people from discrimination based on 'protected characteristics'. The County Council do not believe the implementation of charging at rural car parks would significantly impact those with any specific protected characteristics. For more information on protected characteristics and this proposal, see the Equalities Impact Assessment section of this report (from paragraph 64).
40. The County Council has a duty under the National Parks and Countryside Act 1949 (as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023). This requires the County Council to seek to further the purposes of the National Park when considering proposals that relate to, or affect, land within a National Park. In this instance, the relevant purposes are of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas and of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public.
41. The County Council recognises its duty in respect of the National Parks and continues to seek to further their relevant purposes through its services. This proposal would have a neutral impact on this duty as although it may deter cars from visiting the area, this should then in turn encourage public transport use to visit, therefore having less of an impact on the surroundings. Further, our Countryside Service work closely with both National Parks managing Rights of Way and helping with signage to promote understanding within the parks. It also supports Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and National Nature Reserves aiming to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage.
42. Where these proposals concern land within or near to a special area of conservation (SAC), a special protection area (SPA) or a wetland of international importance (Ramsar site) then a habitats regulation assessment would be carried out prior to implementation in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended.

43. Where proposals concern land that is within or adjacent to a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), an assessment would be carried out to consider the potential impact of the proposals on the SSSI and any special habitats and species. The County Council would seek advice and assent from Natural England before any work at those locations is carried out.

### **Future Services Consultation - Approach**

44. This was one of 13 proposals included within the 'Future Services Consultation', which sought to understand the potential impacts of each proposal in more detail, to consult on the potential options being considered, and to clarify whether there could be other ways to deliver the savings.
45. An overview of the approach to the Future Services Consultation is set out within paragraphs 17 to 24 of the draft Cabinet report, including the approach taken to communicating and promoting the consultation (informed by a stakeholder analysis) to invite respondents to share their views on some or all of the proposals.
46. The sites identified in the consultation are the result of analysis of all existing rural countryside car parks owned or partially owned by Hampshire County Council with the relevant Site Managers.
47. The consultation was promoted via posters at the ten car parking sites highlighted to engage with existing users. Relevant key organisations who are known to utilise the sites or represent people that could have an interest in the proposals were contacted directly via email with a link to the consultation, inviting them to review and respond. This included English Heritage, the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum and the New Forest National Park Authority.

### **Future Services Consultation – Feedback**

48. A third (33%) of those responding to the Future Services Consultation via the Response Form overall elected to respond on rural car parking, generating just over 4,500 responses. 4,459 responses came from individuals, 39 from organisations, and a further 33 from elected representatives. In addition, 37 respondents provided 'unstructured' responses (via email or letter), of whom 17 provided the official response of an organisation and 5 responded in the capacity of an elected representative.
49. Feedback was received from a number of organisations with a significant interest in the sites referenced in proposal 1 including the New Forest National Park Authority, Forestry England, New Forest Verderers, Natural England and a number of District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils. The majority of concerns from these stakeholders centred around displacement parking, specifically along verges, and the potential knock-on impact on vulnerable road users and access for emergency vehicles. This was of particular concern for organisations when referencing potential sites in the New Forest, specifically those within designations such as SSSIs. Natural

England in their response made it clear that a change to charging for parking within the New Forest SSSI is likely to impact the features of the SSSI, therefore a Habitats Regulation Assessment would need to be undertaken and a SSSI assent would be required. There was acknowledgement that income generated from parking fees could be beneficial to the maintenance of the surrounding site(s) and that the concept of an initial free parking period and the option of season tickets would be welcomed.

50. Respondents completing the Response Form were invited to add further comments to support their views on the proposal via open-ended questions. These allowed people to expand on impacts they felt the proposed changes would cause and suggest alternative courses of action. Of those responding to this particular proposal, just over a third (1,505 people) chose to provide open-ended comments. In addition, 77 respondents commented on rural car parking via a further, general, open-ended question for any other feedback at the end of the consultation.
51. Both options saw greater levels of agreement than disagreement amongst respondents, although there were variations in the views of different groups. Respondents who said they visited a countryside car parking site not specified under Proposal 1 (those named car parks listed within the consultation with 20+ spaces) were more in favour of Proposal 1, and more opposed to Proposal 2 (car parks with fewer than 20 spaces or under joint ownership). This was potentially as there is a greater risk that Proposal 2 could impact sites where they park.

		All responses							Summarised excluding "Don't know"	
		Base	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Disagree overall	Agree overall
<b>Proposal 1</b>	<b>To what extent do you agree, or disagree with the proposal to introduce charging for parking at rural countryside car parks with 20 or more spaces, where it is commercially viable to do so?</b>	4464	21%	12%	13%	32%	21%	1%	33%	53%
<b>Proposal 2</b>	<b>To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the proposal to introduce charging for parking at rural countryside car parks with fewer than 20 spaces, or which are in joint ownership with other organisations,</b>	4319	25%	17%	13%	29%	15%	1%	42%	45%



	where it is commercially viable to do so?									
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Table 1. Level of agreement and disagreement with proposals related to rural countryside car parking

52. Comments suggest that agreement for the proposal was driven by feelings that car parking charges were normal in other places, that the Council should be charging for non-essential services, and that the money would allow investment back into the rural areas. There was also a sense that charging for these car parks would be better than withdrawing funding from other services, and that the impact of this proposal would fall more on people who could afford, or choose, to pay.
53. For the greater proportion of supporters of each proposal who agreed, but less strongly, their more muted support often contained caveats to their views which could be grouped into the following:
- **Agreement, but tempered with observations on the impact** (e.g. to those on lower incomes or with disabilities) and suggestions for mitigation for these groups (e.g. exemption for Blue Badge holders)
  - **Reluctant agreement that charges for car parking were a less bad option than other service reduction** (e.g. for vulnerable residents in Hampshire)
  - **Agreement, but tempered with stipulation around the proposed charges** (e.g. the money should be used for reinvestment in the countryside, the quality and safety of the car parks should be maintained, the Council should ensure the charges are reasonable)
54. The consultation asked questions on potential parking prices. Feedback suggests that while the principle of parking charges may be acceptable to many, there may be some resistance to the amounts potentially involved – especially from service users and those opposed to the proposals.
55. The consultation asked ‘We are thinking about allowing stays of up to an hour free of charge, to support short visits. Do you agree with this idea?’. There was strong agreement that an initial period should be free. Further consideration would need to be given to analyse how to offer an initial free period whilst making the site commercially viable. Offering an initial free period does not fairly apportion the overall cost of maintenance amongst those using the car park.

	Base	Yes, short stays of up to an hour should be free	No, short stays of up to an hour should be charged	Not sure
All responses	4395	79%	14%	7%
Respondents living in urban areas	1604	77%	17%	6%
Respondents living in rural areas	820	77%	15%	8%
Respondents living in Basingstoke and Deane	205	78%	18%	4%
Respondents living in East Hampshire	591	79%	14%	8%
Respondents living in Eastleigh	256	77%	14%	8%

Respondents living in Fareham	224	83%	13%	4%
Respondents living in Gosport	116	76%	17%	7%
Respondents living in Hart	155	79%	12%	8%
Respondents living in Havant	135	78%	17%	5%
Respondents living in New Forest	519	80%	12%	9%
Respondents living in Rushmoor	116	78%	16%	5%
Respondents living in Test Valley	271	77%	15%	8%
Respondents living in Winchester	445	74%	20%	6%

Table 2. Responses to the question ‘We are thinking about allowing stays of up to an hour free of charge, to support short visits. Do you agree with this?’

56. The average amount respondents felt to be appropriate for a 2-hour stay was typically between £1.80 and £2.10. Respondents were asked how they felt about a proposed £3 charge for a 2 hour stay at a rural countryside car park. Where they responded that it was “too low” or “too high” they were asked for suggest an appropriate amount. For those who responded that £3 was “about right”, £3 was used as an ‘appropriate amount’ in their view. This analysis takes an average of all these suggested amounts.

	Base	Average (mean)
All responses	4451	£1.83
Respondents living in urban areas	1620	£2.09
Respondents living in rural areas	833	£1.76
Respondents living in Basingstoke and Deane	210	£2.39
Respondents living in East Hampshire	593	£1.85
Respondents living in Eastleigh	261	£1.93
Respondents living in Fareham	225	£1.72
Respondents living in Gosport	115	£2.06
Respondents living in Hart	154	£1.80
Respondents living in Havant	140	£2.01
Respondents living in New Forest	526	£1.54
Respondents living in Rushmoor	118	£1.83
Respondents living in Test Valley	277	£2.16
Respondents living in Winchester	452	£2.01

Table 3. Average amount felt appropriate for a 2 hour stay at a rural countryside car park

57. Despite overall support for both proposals, those disagreeing with them were more typically service users:

58. Users of any of the sites **where changes are proposed:**

**Proposal 1 (those named car parks listed within the consultation with 20+ spaces):** still overall in favour but by a lower margin (50% agreed / 39% disagreed)

**Proposal 2 (car parks with fewer than 20 spaces or under joint ownership):** more opposed than in favour, with notably fewer in agreement than average (42% agreed / 46% disagreed).

59. Visitors of specific sites potentially impacted: **more opposition than support from users of some specific sites, more so for Proposal 2 than Proposal 1.**

**Proposal 1:**

- Martin Down Nature Reserve, Fordingbridge (30% agreed / 62% disagreed)
- Abbots Well Road, Hyde Common (36% agreed / 53% disagreed)

**Proposal 2:**

- Martin Down (25% agreed / 67% disagreed)
- Abbots Well Road, Hyde Common (30% agreed / 60% disagreed)
- Hook with Warsash Nature Reserve (40% agreed / 50% disagreed)
- Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (39% agreed / 48% disagreed)
- Silchester Roman Town (43% agreed / 47% disagreed)

60. The above indicates that users of Martin Down Nature Reserve and Abbots Well Road, Hyde Common are more opposed than average with charging in principle, rather than just in smaller or larger sites.

61. Overall views of visitors to other sites were less polarised, with levels of agreement and disagreement about the same as each other.

62. Opposition to both proposals was particularly strong in the New Forest, and amongst users of the Hyde School, Abbots Well Road (Hyde Common), and Martin Down Nature Reserve car parks.

63. Key reasons for disagreement of the proposals were predominantly driven by a mix of general negative comments around charging, and more specific impacts:

- **General negative comments:** creating financial barriers to access to the countryside (when the Council should be encouraging use), concerns about costs exceeding revenue, and the importance of the countryside generally.
- **Impacts:** primarily focused on the negative effects of inappropriate parking elsewhere, impact to groups of car park users (e.g. families) and health impacts of reduced countryside access.

Key themes/concerns from consultation	Response from Hampshire County Council
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<p>The impact of charges on displacement parking to avoid paying a charge e.g. on verges.</p>	<p>All car parks where charging is proposed would be assessed for the likely impact on the surrounding area, with discussions held with relevant neighbouring landowners, local and highway authorities on how to dissuade unsafe parking in the surrounding areas. A Habitats Regulations Assessment would be undertaken and a SSSI assent sought at sites where this is required.</p>
<p>The impact to those on lower incomes or with disabilities.</p>	<p>The County Council would look to ensure that charges are reasonable and in keeping with other district/borough council charges. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit.</p>
<p>Quality and safety of car parks.</p>	<p>The money raised from car parking charges would be used to help maintain countryside sites (including car parks).</p>
<p>The health and wellbeing impact of users if reduced access to open spaces and a potential consequential impact on health services.</p>	<p>Access to the countryside remains vitally important to the service. The County Council would look to ensure that charges are reasonable and in keeping with other district/borough council charges. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit. The County Council maintain an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside.</p>
<p>Reduction in the level of site usage.</p>	<p>The proposed changes may reduce the number of car journeys or encourage car sharing. This could have a positive impact on local air quality and traffic/journey times and support/protect some at risk habitats at protected sites such as SSSIs and Ramsar sites.</p>
<p>Impacts on vehicle usage (chiefly people driving further to visit free sites).</p>	<p>Access to the countryside remains vitally important to the service. There would still be many rural sites where car parking charges would not be implemented. Charges may also encourage car sharing.</p>
<p>Impact on finances of regular car park users such as dog walkers which could lead to dog walkers visiting less suitable areas (such as areas without dog waste bins) which may impact on the cleanliness of these areas.</p>	<p>The County Council would look to ensure that charges are reasonable and in-keeping with other district/borough council charges and opportunities would be investigated to mitigate this impact such as the offer of a season ticket to bring the cost down for regular visitors, or an initial free period, if commercially viable. Our promotion of responsible dog ownership should help to deter this type of behaviour.</p>

<p>Car parking charges may encourage drivers to use other local car parks that charge less or not at all.</p>	<p>This could result in more use of these sites and additional income. For those car park owners who do not charge, the County Council would consult with them and highlight any potential issues or possibilities to work together in partnership.</p>
<p>The cost of implementation could outweigh the benefit (income made).</p>	<p>A comprehensive review would be undertaken at each site to determine which sites are commercially viable and only these would be taken forward for implementation. The County Council may undertake a pilot at a couple of sites first to ensure viability.</p>
<p>The cost of implementing the charges and potential negative impact of tourism.</p>	<p>Most visitors would expect to pay for parking for a day out and there are many remote Hampshire sites that are still free to explore.</p> <p>We would explore opportunities to improve the experience and generate income, for example a temporary catering offer at suitable sites. Visitors could also be signposted to other sites such as Country Parks where there are more visitor facilities such as play areas and cafes.</p>
<p>Potential impact on younger people moving out of the areas affected, with consequent knock-on effects on the age profile and economic prosperity of those regions.</p>	<p>Local people would be able to walk or cycle to the site and would therefore not be required to pay for parking</p>
<p>Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) might be an effective way of implementing the proposal and potentially giving greater feelings of safety at the sites themselves (cameras in situ).</p>	<p>ANPR is not suitable to implement at rural sites due to the infrastructure required which would be costly to put in. ANPR also requires staff on site to fix any issues such as barrier malfunctions.</p> <p>Any income from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) would be used to fund the service. Income from the car parking charges would be used to help maintain the countryside site.</p>
<p>Comments raised over the range of payment methods and ensuring there are multiple options when paying.</p>	<p>The County Council would look at a range of ways customers could choose to pay, but the County Council are not likely to implement any collection systems that require cash to be collected on site due to the high risk of theft and/or vandalism.</p>

Table 4. Key themes from consultation and response from Hampshire County Council

64. Further insights and a more detailed summary can be found in sub-appendix A.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

65. As previously noted in paragraphs 32 to 38 of the draft report to Cabinet, a key part of the SP25 Programme is ensuring that the County Council understands the impact of the SP25 proposals on people with protected characteristics and has due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
66. Whilst councils are not mandated to conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), in keeping with good practice to record the steps taken in seeking to meet the County Council's Public Sector Equality Duty, Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) previously completed in relation to the proposals set out within this Appendix have been reviewed and updated. These reflect the feedback received through the Future Services consultation and incorporate any additional impacts identified, so that these can be considered as part of the final decision taken by the Cabinet. The EIA is provided as an Annex.
67. By the very nature of the services that the County Council provides, there are inevitably changes that impact those people with protected characteristics. Whilst this does not mean that a proposal cannot be implemented, it does mean that the County Council needs to have an understanding, both individually and collectively, of the impact on those groups of people and look at ways of mitigating that impact.
68. The following paragraphs draw out any key points to note in terms of impacts identified in relation to these proposals for residents, service users, or staff, and any mitigations identified.
69. The EIA identified a low negative impact on two protected characteristics: age and disability. In addition, low negative impacts were identified in respect of poverty and rurality even though these are not protected characteristics for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.
70. Supporting this assessment, people responding to the consultation were most likely to indicate that the proposal would impact people with the following statutory protected characteristics: age (32%), and disability (30%). It is thought that these were raised largely due to concerns about ability to pay, both from a cost and ease of making the payment approach. In addition, the consultation responses flagged concerns for the impact on rurality (40%), and

poverty (36%), even though these are not protected characteristics for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

71. In the consultation responses, there were some differences depending on the respondent's characteristics themselves:
  - Older respondents and those with health or disability limitations themselves were more likely to flag that age or disability was a concern.
  - More frequent visitors to the countryside, and to the specific sites were more likely to cite rurality.
  - Those agreeing with the proposals were *less* likely than average to feel they had a poverty impact.
72. Charging for parking may discourage those less able to pay, or who struggle with the introduction of new technologies (e.g. paying parking charges by mobile phone) from using selected sites and cause them to miss out on the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the countryside. However, by not charging in all locations, alternatives would remain available for those who do not want to or cannot afford to pay. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit. The County Council maintains an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside.
73. The impact on the protected characteristic of age is determined to be low negative. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit. The County Council maintain an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside.
74. The impact on the protected characteristic of disability is determined to be low negative. The recommended approach for charging would include an option to pay by card as an alternative as well as accessible signage with clear instructions. Part of implementing charging at sites would include improvements to the sites such as resurfacing which could impact positively on people with mobility requirements.
75. Mitigating the impact on those less able to use new technologies, the recommended approach includes an option to pay by card as an alternative as well as accessible signage with clear instructions, and charges would be set at reasonable rates and in-keeping with other district/borough council charges. Opportunities would be investigated to mitigate impacts on those less able to pay such as the offer of a season ticket to bring the cost down for regular visitors, or an initial free period, if commercially viable.
76. People living in rural areas are more likely to make regular use of rural car parks and may be more car dependent and therefore more likely to have to pay for parking in certain locations. Rural residents may be more exposed to disruption caused by informal parking that may arise. All car parks where charging is proposed would be assessed for the likely impact on the surrounding area, with discussions held with relevant neighbouring landowners, local and highway authorities on how to dissuade unsafe parking

in the surrounding areas. Traffic impacts would be monitored, and mitigation put in place as necessary.

77. No specific impact on other protected characteristics has been identified. Any changes to traffic regulations are subject to Traffic Order process and therefore formal consultation would be undertaken on a scheme specific basis.

### **Climate Change Impact Assessment**

78. As noted in paragraph 39 of the draft Cabinet report, consideration is given to potential climate change impacts of decisions through the two decision-making tools which assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of a decision.
79. At this stage it is difficult to assess any specific climate change impacts relating to these proposals. However, as the implementation of these proposals progresses, we would continue to assess the potential impacts to ensure that consideration is given to how these would contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets.

### **Scrutiny Committee feedback**

80. The recommendations set out in this appendix would be scrutinised by the Universal Services Select Committee, in advance of a decision by Cabinet.
81. To support the decision, written feedback would be separately provided by the Chairman of the Select Committee to the Cabinet, outlining any feedback and potential recommendations from the Select Committee, for consideration by Cabinet.

### **Rationale for the recommendations being made**

79. As noted in the draft report to Cabinet, in response to a predicted two-year budget gap to 2025/26 of £132m, Directorates were asked last year to consider what savings could be made if they started to move towards a legal minimum service level. In October and November 2023, following a stage 1 consultation process on our options for balancing the budget, Cabinet and County Council respectively approved savings proposals totalling £90.4m. Since that time, following continued growth and high inflation across adults' and children's social care, special educational needs and school transport, the predicted budget gap for 2025/26 has increased to at least £175m, underlining the need for the County Council to secure recurring savings to help towards balancing the budget on a sustainable basis.
82. Through the Equality Impact Assessment process, it was identified that some of the proposals directly impacted on residents and users of the services and therefore a consolidated stage 2 consultation process for 13 of the proposals (totalling £17.5m) was launched at the beginning of 2024.



83. The final recommendations made to Cabinet have been informed by the feedback received as part of the consultation, alongside other relevant factors. These recommendations would achieve total savings of £16.3million, which is a reduction from the £17.5million originally identified, albeit there is some further work to be undertaken on some proposals. The proposals set out within this appendix account for £65,000 of this total.
84. Recognised impacts and mitigations are set out in the Consultation Feedback section of this paper as well as in the Equalities Impact Assessments for both staff and service users. However, in summary, people responding to the proposed changes were most likely to indicate that proposal would impact people because of rurality (40%), poverty (36%), age (32%), or disability (30%).
85. Some site staff (Rangers) raised concerns that they would have to become the enforcers of the new car parking charges, though it is anticipated that the County Council would use Civil Enforcement Officers for this role.
86. There was a spread of opinion towards the two options in this proposal, although for both, more people overall were in favour of the charges than against.
87. The proposed changes may reduce the number of car journeys or encourage car sharing. This could have a positive impact on local air quality and traffic/journey times and support/protect some at risk habitats at protected sites such as SSSIs and Ramsar sites.
88. Therefore, on balance, a recommendation is made to implement rural car parking charges at those sites identified as commercially viable as outlined in the recommendations section above. This would be a phased approach and the County Council would incorporate lessons learnt from previous implementations.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

<b>Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:</b>	Yes
<b>People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:</b>	Yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:</b>	Yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:</b>	Yes

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Savings Programme to 2025 – Revenue Savings Proposals <a href="#">Executive Member for Universal Services</a>	<u>18 September 2023</u>
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	



## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment:**

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out to determine the impacts of these recommendations on both residents / users of the service.

The EIA identified a low negative impact on two protected characteristics: age and disability. In addition, low negative impacts were identified in respect of poverty and rurality even though these are not protected characteristics for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

Supporting this assessment, people responding to the consultation were most likely to indicate that the withdrawal of the funding would impact people with the following statutory protected characteristics: age (32%), and disability (30%). It is thought that these were raised largely due to concerns about ability to pay, both from a cost and ease of making the payment approach. In addition, the consultation responses flagged concerns for the impact on

rurality (40%), and poverty (36%), even though these are not protected characteristics for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

In the consultation responses, there were some differences depending on the respondent's characteristics themselves:

- Older respondents and those with health or disability limitations themselves were more likely to flag that age or disability was a concern.
- More frequent visitors to the countryside, and to the specific sites were more likely to cite rurality.
- Those agreeing with the proposals were *less* likely than average to feel they had a poverty impact.

Charging for parking may discourage those less able to pay, or who struggle with the introduction of new technologies (e.g. paying parking charges by mobile phone) from using selected sites and cause them to miss out on the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the countryside. However, by not charging in all locations, alternatives would remain available for those who do not want to or cannot afford to pay. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit. The County Council maintains an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside.

The impact on the protected characteristic of age is determined to be low negative. There would still be many rural sites that are free to visit. The County Council maintain an extensive network of rights of way that provide free access to the countryside.

The impact on the protected characteristic of disability is determined to be low negative. The recommended approach for charging would include an option to pay by card as an alternative as well as accessible signage with clear instructions. Part of implementing charging at sites would include improvements to the sites such as resurfacing which could impact positively on people with mobility requirements.

Mitigating the impact on those less able to use new technologies, the recommended approach includes an option to pay by card as an alternative as well as accessible signage with clear instructions, and charges would be set at reasonable rates and in-keeping with other district/borough council charges. Opportunities would be investigated to mitigate impacts on those less able to pay such as the offer of a season ticket to bring the cost down for regular visitors, or an initial free period, if commercially viable.

People living in rural areas are more likely to make regular use of rural car parks and may be more car dependent and therefore more likely to have to pay for parking in certain locations. Rural residents may be more exposed to disruption caused by informal parking that may arise. All car parks where charging is proposed would be assessed for the likely impact on the surrounding area, with discussions held with relevant neighbouring landowners, local and highway authorities on how to dissuade unsafe parking

in the surrounding areas. Traffic impacts would be monitored, and mitigation put in place as necessary.

No specific impact on other protected characteristics has been identified. . Any changes to traffic regulations are subject to Traffic Order process and therefore formal consultation would be undertaken on a scheme specific basis.

## **Sub-appendix A Future Services Consultation 2024 Rural Countryside Car Parking Proposal Insight Summary**

### **Background**

From 8 January to 31 March 2024, Hampshire County Council (HCC) invited residents, partners, and stakeholders to provide their views on options to change and reduce some local services to help the Authority address a £132 million budget shortfall faced by April 2025.

One of the options proposed was to introduce car parking charges at the rural countryside car parks that HCC manage, where doing so would be commercially viable (i.e. the income raised would cover the costs of implementation). It is anticipated that this could raise around £65,000 each year, going some way to covering the costs of providing and maintaining countryside car parks.

Two separate proposals were considered:

- **Proposal 1:** Charges for rural countryside car parks with 20 or more spaces, Ten specific car parks were listed where the proposal could be implemented.
- **Proposal 2:** Charges for rural countryside car parks with fewer than 20 spaces, or which are in joint ownership with other organisations. No specific car parks were mentioned as part of this proposal.

### **Who responded to these proposals?**

- A third of those responding to the Future Services consultation overall elected to respond on rural car parking, generating just over 4,500 responses.
- 4,459 responses came from individuals, 39 from organisations, and a further 33 from democratically elected representatives.
  - The organisations responding were chiefly made up of charity, voluntary or local community groups (17 responses), and local authorities (10 responses).
- Respondents were invited to add further comments to support their views on the proposals via open-ended questions. These allowed people to expand on impacts they felt the proposed changes would cause and suggest alternative courses of action.
  - Of all those responding on rural car parking, just over a third (1,505 people) chose to provide open-ended comments
  - In addition, 77 respondents commented on rural car parking via a further, general, open-ended question for any other feedback at the end of the consultation.

- A further 37 unstructured responses (letters / emails) were also received including comments relating specifically to the rural countryside car parking proposal were also received. Of these:
  - 17 were from organisations
  - 15 were from individuals
  - 5 were from democratically elected representatives

These responses reflected the same themes seen from those who completed the consultation response form.

- In order to help capture the views of young people about the consultation, members of the Hampshire Youth Forum (aged between 11 and 18) were invited to consider the proposals and attend a discussion group to share their feedback.

### **Countryside and rural countryside car park users were heavily represented in the responses to the rural carparking proposals:**

- The vast majority of responses to this proposal (3,739) were from people who visit the Hampshire countryside at least once a year.
  - Many were even more frequent visitors: approximately three quarters of respondents (3,182) visit at least once a month, and just under half (2,012) visit at least weekly. Responses also included a number of daily visitors (739).
  - Respondents mainly visit the countryside sites to walk, followed by dog walking.
- Over half of the responses (2,191) were from people who visit one or more of the ten specific sites which could potentially be impacted. This means that at least 300 responses were given to these proposals from users of each site (rising to as many as 760 for some):
  - The most commonly visited by the consultation respondents were Fort Nelson (Portchester), Crabwood / Farley Mount (Winchester) and Hyde Common (New Forest)
  - The least visited were Martin Down (Fordingbridge) and Silchester (Tadley)

### **Responses also reflected groups with other characteristics:**

- Responses to these proposals came from all districts in Hampshire, with a higher proportion from East Hampshire (604), New Forest (540), and Winchester (457).
  - The lowest level of responses were from Gosport, Hart, Havant and Rushmoor (between 118 and 158 each).
- Notably more females (2,279) responded than did males (1,738) or those of non-binary gender (21).
- Almost half the individual responses (1,985) were from those aged 45 to 64, with approximately a further third (1,351) from those aged 65



or over. Just under a fifth of respondents (819) were under the age of 45, of whom just 41 were aged under 25.

- Almost a quarter of respondents (1,094) had children or young people up to the age of 18 in the household.
- The majority of respondents (3,216) were not affected by health or disability, but a quarter were either were limited in their activities either a little (582) or a lot (248).
- 316 individuals from ethnic minority groups responded – nearly half (45%) of these were from white backgrounds other than English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. The remainder was made up of smaller groups from other ethnic backgrounds, most notably Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, Asian or Asian British groups, or those describing themselves as of ‘other’ ethnic backgrounds.
- Nearly three fifths of the respondents to this proposal (2,672) chose to disclose their annual household income. Of those that did, nearly half were receiving between £20,000 and £60,000 per annum, and about a further two fifths had incomes higher than £60,000. Only just over one in ten of those stating their income were earning less than £20,000 a year.

Please note that this was an open consultation the respondents were self-selecting so do not provide a representative sample of the total Hampshire population.

### **Levels of agreement with these proposals**

There was a spread of opinion towards the two options in this proposal, although for both, more people overall were in favour of the charges than against.

- **Proposal 1:** For the specified ten car parks with over 20 spaces there was a clear majority in favour: over half of the respondents (53%) agreed with the proposal to introduce charges.
- **Proposal 2:** In the case of the second proposal (charges in car parks with less than 20 spaces or jointly owned with another organisation), the difference, while still notable, was much smaller (45% agree / 42% disagree).
- For both proposals, the remaining 13% were uncommitted (neither agreeing nor disagreeing).

However, of those people *agreeing* with the proposals, agreement was generally milder (more often ‘agree’ than ‘agree strongly’), especially for Proposal 2:

- **Proposal 1:** 32% ‘agree’, 21% ‘agree strongly’
- **Proposal 2:** 29% ‘agree’, 15% ‘agree strongly’

For the people agreeing *strongly*, it was very clear from their comments that support was driven by feelings that car parking charges were normal in other places, that the Council should be charging for non-essential services, and that the money would allow investment back into the rural areas. There was also a sense that charging for these car parks would be better than withdrawing funding from other services, and that the impact of this proposal would fall more on people who could afford, or choose, to pay.

*“We are all used to hardly anywhere being free parking now. It is better to pay for parking rather than take away other services.”*

*“Charging is fair, these places need to be maintained that is not cheap. Better off people tend to use them.”*

However, for the greater proportion of supporters of each proposal who agreed, but *less strongly*, their more muted support often contained caveats to their views:

- **Agreement, but tempered with observations on the impact** (e.g. to those on lower incomes or with disabilities) and suggestions for mitigation for these groups (e.g. exemption for Blue Badge holders)
- **Agreement, but tempered with stipulation around the proposed charges** (e.g. the money should be used for reinvestment in the countryside, the quality and safety of the car parks should be maintained, the Council should ensure the charges are reasonable)
- **Reluctant agreement that charges for car parking were a less bad option than other service reduction** (e.g. for vulnerable residents in Hampshire)

*“If it has to be, then so be it. It may discourage some users, of course, so the costs need to be reasonable, & the car parks need to provide a service in return, so security of some sort & a reasonable surface to park on.”*

**There were however also those who *disagreed* with the proposals:**

- Key reasons for disagreement were predominantly driven by a mix of general negative comments around charging, and more specific impacts:
  - **General negative comments:** creating financial barriers to access to the countryside (when the Council should be encouraging use), fear about high charges, concerns about costs exceeding revenue, and importance of the countryside generally.

*“I think with the cost of living issues currently being faced by people, a walk in the fresh air with children or dogs is one of the few things that can be done on a lower budget/free, introduce car parking and that limits peoples’ access”*

*“The world is an angry place because we are stacked up on one another with no gardens, no green spaces and less and less disposable income so now this wonderful county is trying to make it harder for people to enjoy the countryside.”*

*“Short sighted option. You will just push visitors to other car parks that don't charge. The cost to set this up and manage it means you are dreaming if you think you'll generate £65K profit.”*

- **Impacts:** these are detailed more fully further on in this report, but primarily focused on the negative effects of inappropriate parking elsewhere, impact to groups of car park users (e.g. families) and health impacts of reduced countryside access.

*"You will simply end up with verge parking so damaging fragile areas of the Forest (Hyde and Abbotswell). No-one will pay if they can park elsewhere. Why these carparks which affect locals every day but not touristy carparks? An hour isn't long."*

- Unlike agreement, which was typically expressed with less strength of feeling, those who were *opposed* to either proposal tended to be more strongly against the idea (more 'disagreeing strongly' than 'disagreeing').
  - **Proposal 1:** 12% disagree, 21% disagree strongly
  - **Proposal 2:** 17% disagree, 25% disagree strongly
- Also, for both proposals, there was much greater opposition from **frequent countryside visitors**, and in the case of Proposal 2 this opposition was particularly strong. Current users of the sites specified in Proposal 1 were also more notably opposed than average.
- Opposition to both proposals was especially strong in the New Forest, and amongst users of Martin Down Nature Reserve and Hyde Common.

## **Response amongst service users**

Despite overall support for both proposals, those disagreeing with them were more typically service users:

- **Users of any of the sites where changes are proposed:**
  - Proposal 1: still overall in favour but by a lower margin (50% agree / 39% disagree)
  - Proposal 2: more opposed than in favour, with notably fewer in agreement than average (42% agree / 46% disagree).

- **Visitors of *specific* sites potentially impacted:** greater opposition than support from users of some specific sites, more so for Proposal 2 than Proposal 1.
  - Proposal 1:
    - Martin Down Nature Reserve, Fordingbridge (30% agree / 62% disagree)
    - Hyde Common, New Forest (36% agree / 53% disagree)
  - Proposal 2:
    - Martin Down (25% agree / 67% disagree)
    - Hyde Common (30% agree / 60% disagree)
    - Hook with Warsash Nature Reserve (40% agree / 50% disagree)
    - Danebury Iron Age Hillfort (39% agree / 48% disagree)
    - Silchester Roman Town (43% agree / 47% disagree)
    - Overall views of visitors to other sites were less polarised, with levels of agreement and disagreement about the same as each other.

Respondents who said they visit a countryside car parking site *not* specified under Proposal 1 were more in favour of Proposal 1 (51% agree / 35% disagree), and more opposed to Proposal 2 (41% agree / 48% disagree). This was presumably as there is greater risk that Proposal 2 could impact sites where they park.

- **Users of Hyde Common**
  - Not only were users of Hyde Common amongst those most strongly in opposition to parking charges proposals, they were more likely to comment on the proposals, indicating the strength of feeling on this site in particular, and making them a very vocal group in the overall open-ended responses (23% of which came specifically from them).
  - Comments specific to this site revolved around inappropriate alternative parking damaging the environment (verges, biodiversity) and inconveniencing the local community generally, but also highlighted impact on the car park users. This mainly included Hyde school staff who would be required to pay to park for work, but also mentioned cricket club and recreation ground users.
  - Negative impacts of charges at the Abbots Well Road car park were very frequently also mentioned alongside Hyde School car park, especially by users of Hyde Common.

*“Both have poor quality surfaces, which would surely need to be improved if users are expected to pay, and are busy and popular. One doubles as the car park for the local school and cricket club. I believe charges will drive visitors to park on verges which is both*

*environmentally bad in the Forest and potentially dangerous on narrow roads.”*

*“This would severely and unfairly impact staff at Hyde school as well as the parents, cricket team and players and public using this space for recreation. A totally unfair proposal when many other car parks in the New Forest would continue to be free”.*

- **Frequent visitors to rural countryside sites:** There was an inverse relationship between frequency of visiting and support for the proposals - the more frequently someone visited any of the rural carparks, the more they disagreed. Again, opinion was even stronger in the case of Proposal 2.
  - **Daily visitors:** Over half (53%) disagreed with Proposal 1 and over three fifths (63%) disagreed with Proposal 2 – in both cases disagreement was mainly strongly expressed.
  - **Weekly visitors** were slightly less strongly opposed
  - Only when visiting levels dropped below weekly did agreement outweigh disagreement for either proposal, with **those not visiting at all** the most in favour of the proposed charges (73% agreeing with Proposal 1, 65% agreeing with Proposal 2).

*"I think introducing further car parking will adversely affect peoples' enjoyment and mental wellbeing. We would certainly not be able to afford to take daily walks if we had to pay. £3 per day doesn't sound like much but it equates to £1095 a year."*

- **Dog walkers:** Potentially linked to frequency of use, those who used the countryside areas mainly for dog walking were less likely to be supportive of the proposals
  - Proposal 1: Balance of opinion was still supportive (51% agree / 37% disagree), but notably less so than average, and strength of opinion was much stronger for those in opposition than those in favour.
  - Proposal 2: Balance of opinion was equal (44% agree / 45% disagree), but again with stronger feeling from those opposed to the proposal.

## **Response amongst other groups**

- **People living in the New Forest / very rural areas:** Potentially linked to the views on Martin Down and Hyde School, people living in the New Forest, and in very rural areas, were notably more likely to disagree with both proposals (again, especially Proposal 2), with more strength of feeling from those disagreeing than those agreeing:
  - New Forest dwellers:
    - Proposal 1: 43% agree / 47% disagree

- Proposal 2: 34% agree / 57% disagree
- Those in very rural hamlets and isolated dwellings<sup>1</sup>:
  - Proposal 1: 42% agree / 48% disagree
  - Proposal 2: 35% agree / 55% disagree

Concerns from those living in the New Forest were mainly around the impact the charges would have on parking on verges, with consequent damage to wildlife and the environment. 65% of those from the New Forest making comments about impacts expressed a concern about inappropriate alternative parking.

*“Charging for parking will cause parking on verges and other places in the new forest leading to an erosion of the environment and is dangerous for the animals. Using the car park makes sense and should remain free.”*

- **People living in areas other than the New Forest**
  - In addition to those living in the New Forest, disagreement with the proposals was notably higher than average from those in Fareham: not enough to outweigh agreement on Proposal 1, but enough to equal it for Proposal 2.
  - On the other hand, people in Winchester, Havant, Gosport, and Basingstoke and Deane were more likely to support both proposals than average.
- **People on lower annual incomes:** Although support still outweighed disagreement, a second inverse relationship was evident between salary and support for the proposal: the lower the income, the higher the disagreement with the proposed charges.
- **Age differences:** Support for the proposal lessened the older the respondent – although disagreement did not necessarily increase correspondingly. Consequently a much greater proportion of those aged over 45 and over 65 were likely to say they neither agreed nor disagreed.

*“Like many residents of the area I’m retired, old, not wealthy, but enjoy occasional parking on the cliff top for short periods of time. The car parking is too expensive so we park on Marine Drive. Just long enough to go for a short walk or maybe sit on a bench and enjoy the views. I’m sure there are many other local people who feel the same way, so please don’t change things and price us out of this little enjoyment at our time of life.”*

- **Those with children in the household** were typically more supportive of the proposal overall than those without. There is no clear evidence from the data as to why this is, although it may be that it is linked with other factors such as age, income, location, or levels of service use.

## Environmental impact

Over a third of respondents (37%) identified the **environmental impact** of the proposals, and those who went on to give comments spoke about the effect on wildlife, and the impact of parking elsewhere on both local communities and the environment (e.g. road safety, blocked lanes, damage to verges).

The issue of environmental impact was particularly evident for the following groups:

- Service users (especially frequent ones) and those who visit any of the sites potentially impacted
- Those who mainly use the countryside for observing birds or nature
- Those living in the New Forest

*"This will lead to more parking in unofficial sites / places on predominantly narrow roads. Evidence locally demonstrates this causes damage to roadside plants, hedges, road surfaces and pathways. It also creates dangerous driving / walking conditions in rural places that often lack pathways."*

## Impact related to protected characteristics

People responding to the proposed changes were most likely to indicate that the withdrawal of the funding would impact people because of **rurality** (40%), **poverty** (36%), **age** (32%), or **disability** (30%).

*"Charging pushes people to look for free areas even if this is a passing layby in a lane, Lockdown showed this. ... Makes it a nightmare for those of us that work in the countryside with large machinery. Frequently have our farm gates blocked. The village gets grid locked ... usually by people outside the area and then villagers can't park to get to church."*

*"Access to the countryside is so important for wellbeing that the cost of parking should not be a barrier. This will disproportionately affect the poor."*

There were some differences depending on the respondent's characteristics themselves:

- Older respondents and those with health or disability limitations themselves were more likely to flag that age or disability was a concern
- More frequent visitors to the countryside, and to the specific sites were more likely to cite rurality
- Those agreeing with the proposals were *less* likely than average to feel they had a poverty impact.

## Other impacts identified:

Around 15% of respondents to these proposals (737 people in total) also identified potential impacts via the open-ended comments.

The most mentioned themes emphasised the impacts already outlined above:

- **Impact on the environment and local communities:** impact of inappropriate parking elsewhere (45%), negative impact on wildlife or diversity (6%)
- **Impact on people related to protected characteristics** (33%) – specifically poverty (10%) or rurality (6%)

However, a number of note-worthy secondary themes also emerged:

- Health impacts – the consequence of a reduction in exercise and access to open spaces on physical and mental well-being (22%), and some consequent impact on health services (4%)
- Impact on specified groups of car park users (21%) - e.g. families, parents taking children to school particularly in the New Forest / users of Hyde Common, dog walkers and commuters.
- Reduction on level of site usage (19%)
- Impact on personal finances due to cost of parking (13%)
- Road safety concerns (9%)
- Other mentions were small, but included economic impact (cost of implementation outweighing benefit, impact of reduced visitors on the local economy), positive effect on the countryside (creating investment in sites), and impacts on vehicle usage (chiefly people driving further to visit free sites)

*“Walking is encouraged to promote health and well-being. By introducing charges, you will deter people from getting out into the countryside, especially those of limited means and those with strains on finances, including families with young children, who need exercise and mental stimulation.”*

The Hampshire Youth Forum feedback also centred on the impact of people parking illegally, with concern of the cost of implementing the charges and potential negative impact of tourism. However, they also identified a potential impact on younger people moving out of the areas affected, with consequent knock-on effects on the age profile and economic prosperity of those regions.

## **Pricing**

Response to questions on potential parking prices suggests that while the principle of parking charges may be acceptable to many, there may be some resistance to the amounts potentially involved – especially from service users and those opposed to the proposals.

- **People do not want to be charged for the first hour.** Universally, people felt that short stays of up to an hour should be free: a majority of 79% supported free parking for short stays, with only a minority of 14% opposed (and a further 7% unsure).
  - Amongst some groups there was slightly less opposition to potential charges for the first hour, but this was still a minority view:



- Support for charging for short stays of up to an hour rose to 20% from those in Winchester
  - Support for charging for short stays rose to 23% amongst those who agreed with the rural car parking proposals overall
- **People do not want to pay as much as £3 for 2 hours.** Asked whether a charge of £3 for a stay of up to two hours at countryside sites was appropriate, a majority (57%) said it was too much, with a further 37% saying it was about right. Only 4% were unsure and 1% felt it was too low.
    - Amongst daily users of rural countryside parking, the percentage of those saying it was too high rose to 70%.
    - Over 80% of those who disagreed with the proposals said a £3 charge was too high.
    - While only a very small proportion of overall responses (14), charities or voluntary / local community groups were also particularly likely to say £3 was too much.
    - The average amount<sup>2</sup> felt to be appropriate for a 2 hour stay was £1.83. However, this varied by district from around £1.50 (New Forest) to around £2.40 (Basingstoke and Deane), with most other districts falling between £1.80 and £2.10.

*“£3 for 2 hours is ludicrous, especially considering the absolute state of some of these car parks. Not to mention they're unsafe after dark. Made out of mud, potholes everywhere and huge puddles in winter. Not to mention the lack of bins. Free hour then £1 for 2 hours is far more reasonable. £3 is just pure greed on the council's behalf.”*

Linking with views on the pricing, people disagreeing with the proposal (both via the response form and in some of the unstructured responses received by letter / email) suggest that the price of implementing car parking charges is likely to exceed the revenue gained by them, especially if the consequent cost of verge repairs and maintenance is taken into consideration.

*“It is a criminal offence to park on the verges in the New Forest and introducing parking fees will only encourage visitors from outside the forest to park illegally. These laws are currently never enforced and I cannot see the local authorities funding the policing/parking attendants to enforce an increase in parking violations as a result of charges being introduced, it would defeat the object of introducing the charges in the first place.”*

### **What do people believe we should be doing differently?**

Just under one in ten people responding about rural car parks offered suggestions on the topic (418 in total). Most of these were about ways in which the proposal could or should be implemented rather than alternative courses of action, but some related to finding additional funding.

- **Find alternative sources of funding** (11%) – mostly such comments related to increasing revenue at sites by raising or introducing other charges or services. Suggestions were varied with no clear single recommendation emerging - e.g. donation schemes / honesty boxes, raise prices for car parking at larger sites such as Country Parks, charges for overnight motorhome parking, charges for activities such as guided walks, renting car parking pitches to coffee or food vendors, charges for commercial dog-walking, charges for site amenities such as BBQ or toilet usage. There were also some low levels of accompanying suggestions around introducing fines – both to generate income, but also to control the adverse impact of the proposed changes.

*“Commercial dog walkers should also be required to purchase annual permits to use County Council car parks - after all, they are making money from using these facilities and could pass the costs on to customers”*

*“Lease out the Hampshire Country Parks. This will reduce the staffing costs, reduce HCC liability and insurance costs, and will result in a fixed annual receipt.”*

*“I live in [redacted] and visitors don’t use the free car parking already but instead have destroyed verges and park dangerously on sharp bends. Why not fine these drivers to raise funds? I would volunteer my time locally to issue warnings and or fines.”*

*“Could the council rent pitches in these car parks to food and/or drink vendors?”*

- **Make changes to other budgets** (7%). Typically this was about reducing spend on other council costs and services - suggestions here largely referred to Hampshire County Council salaries, expenses, and perception of wasted or inefficient spend elsewhere.

*“Again, £65,000 is a drop in the ocean. I'm sure the salaries of your executives could be cut - or even culled to raise this amount.”*

- The **suggestions about how the proposals could be implemented** typically fell into the following categories:

- Suggestions about **payment mechanisms** (26%) – predominantly requesting that ‘smart’ payment systems be avoided

*“Any payment system must also allow for the mobile phone needed and those that don’t have tech”*

- Suggestions for **differential rates**:

- cheaper rates for frequent users (16%) – chiefly season-tickets
  - exemptions (13%) e.g. for Blue Badge holders, or for local residents
  - higher tariffs for some users (4%) e.g. business users, larger vehicles
- Suggestions around **charges for different lengths of stay**:
  - Charging for short stays (5%)
  - A charging structure to encourage longer stays (4%) – e.g. for hikers or days out
- 21% of those making suggestions also noted that car parks needed to be better maintained or improved, or that better access to them via public transport was needed.

*"The carparks provide a vital lifeline for people to be able to escape from the towns and cities, an affordable annual parking ticket would work better for those regularly visiting the carparks, an hour or 2 hours is not long enough for meaningful exercise to take place."*

*"People are generally ok with parking charges, assuming they are fair and reasonable, can be paid easily, i.e. doesn't require fifteen minutes setting it up over the phone, and the car park is well maintained."*

- The Hampshire Youth Forum additionally noted that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) might be good way of implementing the proposal, keeping charging simple for visitors, resulting potentially in lower implementation costs (seen as cheaper than enforcement officer costs), and potentially giving greater feelings of safety at the sites themselves (cameras in situ).

### **Specific offers to work with HCC around rural countryside car parking**

- Apart from one individual who said they would happily deploy fine notices to cars parked inappropriately locally, there were no comments or offers from individuals or organisations to run rural car parking.
- However, Forestry England have expressed a desire to work together to create a joint strategy for car park charging across Hampshire.
- Additionally, there were suggestions from a few respondents about other areas that Hampshire could learn from:
  - Positive examples:
    - Dorset (but no specifics stated)
    - Midhurst (charges are lower)

- Alton and Petersfield (charge in the same way in other villages, but allow the first hour free)
- Andover (£1 for up to two hours)
- Petersfield (£1.80 for up to two hours)
- Bishop's Waltham (short stay is free)
- Buckinghamshire Country Parks (£3.50 for unlimited time)
- Waverley Borough Council (no charge for local disabled permit holders)
  - Areas where motorhomes are charged for overnight stays (e.g. Torrington, Pembrokeshire)
  - Further afield in Europe (no charges for attractions and nature parks)
- A negative example was also cited in terms of Surrey where car parking charges were not perceived as having been successful (but no further detail given)
- There were also two suggestions about outsourcing car parking to a third party to manage, or to local and parish councils.

### **Comments on the consultation**

- Councillor for Fareham and Warsash raised challenges around the Hook Barn criteria for inclusion (believes the size and shape fails the '20 car' test).
- Amongst the unstructured responses there was also mention from Hyde Cricket Club that the land, including the car park rights, is subject to a lease to the cricket club.