

10 December 2021

CPRE Sussex opposes parking charges in Ashdown Forest

In response to the parking charges consultation by the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, CPRE Sussex, the countryside charity, argues that it is not in the interests of the Conservators to charge the public to park in the Forest.

“Ashdown Forest is a ‘jewel in the crown’ in south-east England” says CPRE Sussex Chair, Prof Dan Osborn. “Visitors should not be deterred by parking charges from enjoying access to it”.

“The Covid pandemic demonstrated how much people value access to countryside for their physical and mental well-being. Access to Ashdown Forest should be seen as an integral part of public health policy.”

CPRE Sussex argues that the parking charges scheme is not needed. Under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974, East Sussex County Council is legally obliged to ensure that the Conservators are adequately funded to carry out maintenance of the Forest. The County Council should therefore meet the Conservators’ deficit in funding.

Other sources of funding should also be available from levies/agreements with developers of new homes, as the Forest is an integral part of green infrastructure for surrounding local authorities.

In the absence of robust evidence to the contrary, CPRE Sussex considers that the parking scheme is not financially viable. Costs will include installing charging machines; replacement of machines and signs after vandalism; wardens and enforcement; and administration.

“Displacement of vehicles from car parks to road verges could not only reduce income from parking charges, but also cause environmental damage and present safety hazards” adds Prof Osborn.

Notes to editors

CPRE Sussex’s response to the Ashdown Forest parking charges consultation is at:

www.cpresussex.org.uk/news/cpre-sussex-opposes-parking-charges-in-ashdown-forest/

The Conservators of Ashdown Forest, who care for the Forest on a day-to-day basis, asked for views on the introduction of parking charges in its 47 car parks from spring/summer 2022; how much parking charges might be; and the details of the design and operation of the proposed scheme. The consultation is at: <https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/governance-and-community-services/ashdown-forest-car-parking-charging/>

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Under the Ashdown Forest Act 1974, the Conservators are required at all times to manage and maintain Ashdown Forest for its natural beauty as (largely) a public amenity. Under the Act, East Sussex County Council is legally obliged to ensure that the Conservators are adequately funded to perform their maintenance obligations. Therefore, if Conservators' income falls short of what is needed, East Sussex County Council is responsible for meeting the deficit. This is not explained in the consultation.

The consultation also does not explain how the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring levy raised on developers of new homes around the Forest to fund the conservation of protected habitats and rare birds is benefiting the Forest. There is no reference to any discussions with local planning authorities over the use of section 106 agreement funds to supplement the income of the Conservators. CPRE Sussex questions why (if it is the case) are funds from these revenue sources not used for the Forest's maintenance and upgrading, given that the Forest is an integral part of green infrastructure for surrounding local authorities.

For more information please contact: CPRE Sussex Chair, Prof Dan Osborn: 0773 4331640 or 01444 254156

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