

Reasoning against Parking Charges at Newlands Corner

No Consultation

Surrey County Council (SCC) did not consult with people about parking charges at Newlands Corner. SCC did consult with people about parking charges in 15 other countryside car parks at Chobham, Whitmoor, Rodborough, Ockham and Wisley Commons and Norbury Park, and then totally ignored the results.

Parking Charges Unreasonably High

The charges are £1.30 an hour, up to £5 for more than 3 hours. This is more than Guildford town centre. Stays of under 20 minutes are free but a ticket is still needed. Charging is 7 days a week from 7am to 9pm. Cash payments are not accepted, a card or smart phone must be used. Motorcycles are free if parked in the motorcycle area. A season ticket is £60 a year but can only be used at this site; the National Trust costs £69 a year for access to all its 500 sites. Penalties are £70, or £35 if paid within 14 days.

Scheme Highly Unlikely to make a Profit

There will be less cars due to the charges. The cost of maintaining Newlands Corner (SCC is only responsible for the car park, toilets and visitor centre and keeping the trails accessible) is an astonishing £157,000 a year and the cost of running the parking scheme is £59,000 a year. Also, at least 25%, perhaps as much as 50%, of net income will be paid to Albury Estate. The cost of installing this scheme, as well as the money already wasted on the plans for a large development and artificial play structures, is on top of this.

SCC has refused to provide its business plan for Newlands Corner. It says this is still in draft, to avoid our Freedom of Information requests, despite parking charges being approved by its Cabinet on 27 October 2015. Figures released for the other 15 car parks show that more than half the money raised will be used just to run the parking schemes. At Newlands Corner, payments will also be made to Albury Estate.

Increase in Social Care Costs

Those who cannot afford the charges will stay away, including elderly people and families. Those who can only pay cash will also stay away, especially elderly people. Those that disagree with the scheme will stay away. This will lead to an increase in Surrey County Council's care costs which will probably dwarf any profits. Regular exercise keeps people out of care homes, saving hundreds of millions of pounds; recent studies have confirmed this. SCC has not taken account of this at all. And Newlands Corner is not even served by public transport.

Other Funding Options Ignored

The savings in SCC's social care costs by allowing free access for all income levels and ages will heavily outweigh the maintenance costs over the longer term, so the maintenance costs should be met from council tax.

An offer to set up a charitable trust to fund and maintain Newlands Corner without parking charges or play structures was rejected by SCC.

Other Maintenance Options Ignored

The contract to maintain the Surrey Countryside Estate was not put out to tender when it was reviewed last year. Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) was re-engaged without a tender process. Large savings could well have been made. The qualifications of SWT to manage such sensitive areas should also have been reconsidered following its move towards being a commercial operation, including making its countryside rangers redundant.

Countryside Spoilt

Long lines of wooden bollards have been installed all around the site, to stop people parking on the verges, so that SCC does not miss out on parking charges. These urbanise Newlands Corner. It is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which means there is a duty to conserve and enhance the natural environment. The wooden bollards do the opposite.

Character of Newlands Corner Spoilt

Newlands Corner is common land. People of all different types following all sorts of pursuits have mixed together there since before people can remember. It had its own character which will be completely changed, in most people's opinions for the worse, by the parking charges. This character had a huge value which SCC has totally ignored.

The Scheme is Legally Dubious

We believe that

- Parking charges should be levied only at a rate required to pay for the parking scheme
- SCC should have sought the consent of the Planning Inspectorate when it decided to change the scheme to cashless, as this will prevent or restrict access to many people. SCC's original application was for parking machines that accept cash
- SCC should have sought the consent of the Planning Inspectorate before it installed/replaced the long rows of wooden bollards.

SCC appears to have taken a pragmatic approach to ignore legal requirements, as it has for other aspects of its management of Newlands Corner, on the grounds that it will be too difficult, costly and risky for any individual to take it to court.

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