



PORTISHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

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28th May 2024

**Chief Executive and
Executive Members of North Somerset Council
Town Hall,
Walliscote Grove Road,
Weston-super-Mare,
BS23 1UJ.**

Dear Executive team

Re: Parking charge consultation – Portishead Town Council Response

Following extensive discussions with Portishead residents, businesses and voluntary organisations we are writing to make it clear that Portishead Town Council are unanimous in strongly objecting to the imposition of parking charges on our High Street and Lake Grounds park.

As a testament to local feeling, on-line and paper petitions opposing the charging have gathered over 4,500 signatures from residents, high street businesses and Lake Grounds facility users.

High street retailers, the elderly, people with disabilities, people on low incomes, and volunteers will be the most affected as will residents impacted by displacement parking in already congested residential roads.

We are particularly concerned that very many elderly and digitally excluded people we've spoken to – groups likely to be particularly disadvantaged – were unaware of the consultation and so were unable to express their views.

This letter summarises our concerns, specific issues are listed in the two appendices.

Is there a problem with parking in the areas of Portishead targeted by the proposals?

It is not obvious that Portishead has any significant parking challenges in the areas where the scheme is proposed. An exception is Residents' concern about the extent of overnight camper van parking at the Lake Grounds and parking on a few busy days in the summer.

Whilst all available parking spaces in the High Street tend to be occupied at a few peak times, this does not present a major problem. Nuisance parking in residential areas will be exacerbated if a financial incentive to do so is created by the introduction of charges. These challenges may be further exacerbated by local supermarkets introducing parking charges or reducing length-of-stay times to tackle displacement parking; one has done this recently and others are signalling they may do so.

Whilst we acknowledge possible benefits in terms of reduced car use and reductions in traffic pollution, we feel these will be far outweighed by the concerns and inequalities we highlight in this letter, particularly for people who cannot use other means to visit the High Street or Lake Grounds and the mental and physical health impacts of reduced use of Lake Grounds exercise facilities.

Impact on the High Street outlets (see appendix 1 for details)

The High Street is the heart of our community and we have a major concern that charging will have an adverse impact on our already struggling High Street businesses. Portishead High Street has lost a number of much used businesses in recent years (Post Office / two pharmacists and two (soon to be three) of the four banks that previously operated on the High Street). This is already having an impact on High Street footfall. High street retailers are extremely concerned and angry about likely further loss of business; several cite a 20% downturn in business in Clifton after parking charges were introduced by Bristol City Council.

There are several charity shops on the High Street and all are worried about volunteers who volunteer for half/whole days being unable to afford parking; other shops are worried about impacts on their low paid workers (some of whom commute from outside Portishead).

Due to different ownership of the range of car parks in Portishead (North Somerset Council (NSC), Portishead Town Council, local retailers), charging for the one NSC owned car park in Portishead would be inconsistent with the local situation and lead to displacement to the other free car parks, compromising their use by people who need to park close to the location they're visiting. Charging will also lead to a) displacement parking issues on roads adjacent to the High Street, some of which only have limited on-street parking for residents and are extremely narrow b) lead to the remaining free car parks introducing charges / limit park times, further compromising the future of the High Street. Furthermore as car parks close to the destination people are visiting are particularly used by disabled and vulnerable residents, displacement parking may particularly affect these groups.

Residents of Roath Road only have access to (limited) on-street parking – if this is further compromised by displacement parking, this will cause extreme inconvenience with some residents suggesting they would be compelled to move house.

Impact on the Lake Grounds and Lake Grounds clubs, volunteers and businesses (see appendix 2 for details)

The Lake Grounds is an extremely popular local park and asset highlighted as such in our 2023 Neighbourhood Plan. Parking charges will lead to loss of local amenity and impact on volunteers and low paid employees working in clubs, leisure facilities and businesses at the Lake Grounds as well as reduce footfall at Portishead Lido, potentially threatening its future.

Local clubs estimate that around one in five Portishead residents volunteer at, or are members / users, of Lake Grounds sports facilities. Clubs elsewhere in North Somerset (and Parish Wharf – the other public swimming pool and leisure centre in Portishead) do not charge for parking. The majority of members of the Lake Grounds clubs are extremely worried about the impact of car park charging on their users and members, with the elderly and low income individuals likely to be most adversely affected. It saddens us to hear the strength of concern amongst our volunteer run clubs and facilities, which collectively estimate they have invested £1 million in their facilities over the last 7 years and were most recently successful with the award of £140k from Sport England towards solar heating for Portishead Lido. The park is not on a bus route and access to the Lake Grounds entails navigating a steep hill, making it inaccessible by cycle / foot for many users,

We would like to highlight that in the 2021 Portishead Lake Ground Survey, hosted on North Somerset Council's consultation portal, 78% of respondents thought that car parking charges would not be appropriate for the Lake Grounds.

Financial considerations

We note that the predicted income from the overall scheme throughout North Somerset in a full year of operation is only £400,000 i.e.0.2% of North Somerset's annual budget. We also note that NSC's previous revenue estimates anticipated that the introduction of charging at the Lake Grounds would make a loss and income from the Town centre would be around £20-30k This seems far too small an amount set against the risk to our High Street businesses, inconvenience, possible decreases in physical activity and range of inequalities introduced.

It is unclear where the implementation costs for the parking scheme are coming from. If these have been estimated, we suspect that due to the complexity / series of inter-dependencies in the Lake Grounds area, implementation costs will have been greatly under-estimated. Without major planning and investment the scheme may create more problems than it solves and cost more than it generates due to associated implementation and running costs; reproducing recent experience with redesigning traffic flow on Clevedon seafront.

Not all areas of North Somerset are the same

A tourist destination such as Weston-super-Mare may not suffer from car park charges as holidaymakers expect to pay for parking close to the beach / seaside facilities. Residents do not expect to pay to access their local parks / sports facilities. We think it is extremely important that the local context is taken into consideration when considering charging. So, for example, unlike in Weston-super-Mare, Lake Grounds Parking in Portishead is in very close proximity (within less than 5 metres in some cases) to several homes and residential roads and there is likely to be substantial displacement parking to these congested streets (and others nearby), where parking is already at a premium, leading to difficulties for residents and safety concerns.

Crucially small local shopping centres, such as our High Street, will suffer a dramatic loss of trade from the introduction of charging. In North Somerset people have the opportunity of using free parking at Cribb's Causeway (15 minutes' drive from Portishead) or of shopping online. Several residents we've spoken to have said they will no longer use Portishead High Street if charges are introduced.

Payment methods and parking permits

If charging was introduced, to avoid discriminating against the elderly and digitally excluded, we would strongly encourage the use of contactless payments rather than those that are entirely dependent on downloadable Apps.

Whilst we can see that the introduction of the resident parking permit might overcome some challenges that will inevitably follow from parking charges (if these were introduced) we have a number of concerns about the proposals. First, we are very concerned that no consideration has been given to the need for longer term parking (10 hours plus) for volunteers and low paid staff working at some of the multiple Lake Grounds facilities (namely the Lido Pool on Esplanade Road, the tennis, cricket and bowling clubs, the two Cafes and businesses with low paid workers near the Lake Ground e.g. Lakehouse nursery) and in shops / businesses on the High Street; their shifts may last 4-10 hours. Second, for Portishead, if resident permits were introduced, we'd like to see the use of these extended to the Lake Grounds; we feel residents, volunteers, low paid workers (at cafes, Lakehouse Nursery, Northern Care Home for vulnerable teenagers) and local club members (tennis club, cricket club, bowling club, sailing club and teams visiting these clubs) should not be penalised; charges would certainly have the greatest adverse impact on low-income users and workers at these facilities. Third, whilst the proposed permits would allow free parking the first 2 hrs, this not really free – it's pre-paid parking which residents feel isn't realistic and represents another form of taxation.

Consultation

If, against our wishes and those of our residents, business and voluntary organisations, North Somerset progresses the parking charge proposals, we urge you to discuss these with us and our residents as part of a whole town approach to parking.

Yours sincerely

Town Clerk – on behalf of Portishead Town Council

Appx 1 Adverse impacts of charging on High Street/Roath Road Car Park

Current levels of free parking are part of the lifeblood for keeping Portishead High Street businesses going at a time of economic hardship. Local business owners are angry and extremely worried about likely impacts on their businesses and livelihoods.

1. It is well established that restricting parking (or charging for it) serves to reduce the volume of trade in an area. This is why parking at Cribb's Causeway and similar shopping malls is free. Portishead High Street is already in decline. Local retailers with links / other outlets in Clifton, cite the 20% downturn in business that occurred there when Bristol CC implemented parking charges. The recent loss of Portishead's Post Office, two (soon to be three) banks and the two high street pharmacists (Boots and Lloyds) will further reduce High Street footfall. Parking charges will only exacerbate the problems High Street retailers face.
2. Short stay permits would not solve the issues for volunteers and low paid workers employed / volunteering on the High Street and would increase the challenges and costs to local businesses, many of whom already pay inflated rentals to Bristol City Council.
3. As there are relatively few parking spaces on the High Street it is difficult to imagine that the introduction of charges there (and the necessary monitoring / installation of ticket machines) will be cost-effective.
4. Limited time parking will mean people spend less time browsing as they will be watching the clock and seeking to minimise parking time.
5. Charges will reduce funds that customers might otherwise spend on local businesses.
6. Some volunteers are elderly and sometimes socially isolated. Reducing volunteering opportunities in the town because of charges related to long-stay parking close to the High Street will increase loneliness and have an adverse impact on their mental health
7. The introduction of charges / limited parking by other (currently free) car parks close to Portishead High street to deter displacement parking arising from NSC charges, will put residents off using the High Street. One retailer has already reduced free parking time and others may follow or introduce charges.
8. Displacement parking onto Roath Road will exacerbate difficulties Roath Road residents already face in terms of parking close to their houses – a particular concern for the elderly and disabled as well as families dropping of children and shopping.
9. Displacement parking to nearby free car parks reducing access to users of these businesses and facilities, particularly by people who are less mobile. For example the Town Council owned free car park on the High Street is used by visitors to the Folk Hall and Council offices. Displacement parking will make these locations less accessible, particularly for our elderly and disabled residents.
10. Some shopkeepers report that customers with limited mobility are making a positive choice to come to Portishead to shop and park due to free parking – High Street parking charges will impact on both them and local businesses.
11. One of Portishead's few priority post boxes is situated on the High Street and is frequently used for drop off of health-related priority samples. Parking charges in the area may deter use of this drop off point.

Appendix 2 Adverse impacts of charging at the Lake Grounds

1. Adverse effect on low paid workers, volunteers, staff and users at Lake Grounds clubs and facilities (the Open Air Pool; Tennis Club; Bowling Club; Cricket Club; Lakeside Café; Lido Café; Lake House Nursery; Skate park).
2. There will be a tremendous adverse effect on the viability of the community-run organisations. Portishead Open Air Pool will be faced with the twin effects of increased costs and reduced footfall. This could threaten the pool's viability.
3. Displacement parking to roads close the Lake Grounds (particularly Lake Road, Rodmoor Road, Esplanade Road, Beach Road West, Battery Lane/Road and Beech Hill) will obstruct these relatively narrow roads, may limit parking for residents with no off-street parking and create difficulties for some residents exiting their driveways (as already occurs on busy days).
4. Displacement parking onto Lake Road would force pedestrians, who often walk on its grass verges, to use the road for walking, contravening the Highway Code
5. Reduced use of Portishead Lake Grounds / Clubs by people who need to use their cars for safety reasons to avoid walking through some of the poorly lit areas of the Lake Grounds at night.
6. Potential waste of public money: many residents are concerned that, without major planning and investment, introducing car park charges in Lake Grounds area, with a number of complex interdependencies and proximity to residential areas, could create more problems than it solves, reproducing recent experience with redesigning traffic flow on Clevedon seafront and wasting scarce public money.
7. Carers and disabled groups use the Lake Grounds due to free parking and ease of access – parking charges will impact on the accessibility of these community resources to these vulnerable groups. I've spoken to several such people who state they will no longer visit the Lake Grounds if parking charges are introduced.
8. Deterioration in physical and mental health: It should be noted that the volunteer-run sports facilities at the Lake Grounds provide sport and recreation opportunities for the people of Portishead at no cost to the public purse. Introduction of parking charges will mean the Lake Grounds is likely to be less frequently used by low income individuals, the elderly and families as the area is difficult to access by cycle and foot (because of steep hills / absence of cycle lanes) or public transport (buses do not stop at the Lake Grounds; the nearest bus stop is almost 1km away from some Lake Grounds facilities). Because of the close link between physical activity and both physical and mental health, there will be an adverse impact on population health and increased costs for health services.
9. Our recently adopted Neighbourhood Plan (2023) notes the Lake Grounds is the "jewel in Portishead's crown" and highlights the need to protect this area – turning existing green spaces into tarmacked car parks (Kilkenny Fields / Cricket club) would be in contravention of this.
10. There is a concern that North Somerset Council may take out loans underwritten with the assurance of likely future profits from the car parking scheme and using the car park areas as assurance against these loans. This potentially risks losing ownership of land dear to the Portishead residents, should the loans not be paid back – especially if their profit estimates are incorrect.