

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

17th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 November 2023

PE2042: Abolish car parking charges for all Forestry and Land Scotland sites

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| Petitioner | Undine Achilles-Day on behalf of Taynuilt Community Council |
| Petition summary | Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish car parking charges at all Forestry and Land Scotland sites, helping to promote access to forests and greenspaces across Scotland. |
| Webpage | https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2042 |

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 29 August 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,146 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from Forestry and Land Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Government, and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2024: Abolish car parking charges for all Forestry and Land Scotland sites

Petitioner

Undine Achilles-Day on behalf of Taynuilt Community Council

Date Lodged

29 August 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish car parking charges at all Forestry and Land Scotland sites, helping to promote access to forests and greenspaces across Scotland.

Previous action

I have contacted Jenni Minto MSP, Brendan O'Hara MP, local councillors, and Taynuilt Community Council.

I have also set up a social media page to facilitate exchange of opinions and information in my local area. I established contact with groups in other areas nationally.

Taynuilt Community Council held 2 public meetings attended by local councillors, with local representatives from Forestry Land Scotland attending the second one. A summary was also published in the Oban Times, as well as many letters from the public.

Background information

The [Active Scotland Delivery Plan](#) states that “Being physically active is one of the very best things we can do for our physical and mental health.” It prevents diseases, strokes, diabetes, and cancers; it helps us maintain a healthy weight; and reduces the risk of depression.

The new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) highlights the need for a stronger focus on prevention, the importance of tackling poverty and inequality; and placing mental wellbeing on an equal footing with physical health.

Key to achieving these Scottish Government goals is unimpeded access to places where one can exercise, reflect, and meditate.

Parking charges were introduced, without community consultation nationally. Local people concerned about penalties are now staying away, where previously these forests were well used.

These costs are deeply unfair and create inequality in society. In a cost-of-living crisis, this is an expense that the less affluent can't afford and will have a long-term impact on the health of the nation.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is a purple rounded rectangle. The text 'SPICe' is in white, with 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in white text to its right.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2042: Abolish car parking charges for all Forestry and Land Scotland sites, submitted by Undine Achilles-Day on behalf of Taynuilt Community Council

Background

[Forestry and Land Scotland](#) (FLS) is an agency of the Scottish Government responsible for the management of Scotland's national forests and lands, which cover an area of 630,000 hectares, that is 9% of Scotland's land area. FLS land hosts over 300 visitor destinations, including [six Forest Parks](#), mountains, riversides, lochs, waterfalls, beaches and over 750 miles of waymarked trails.

FLS sets out its approach to visitor management in its [Visitor Strategy 2022-2032](#). This aims to create "Financially sustainable key visitor destinations", in part through "...the provision of additional services such as car parking, cafés, retail, accommodation and experiences."

FLS state in [written evidence to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee](#), dated 23 October 2023, that:

"In 2012, FLS expanded the number of sites where car parking incurred a charge, from 23 to 44 sites. In 2022, Ministers approved a further expansion to include an additional 66 sites over a three-year period (18 in FY 22/23, 13 in FY 23/24, 25 in FY 24/25). Taking the total number of sites where FLS will charge for car parking to 110 by the end of Financial Year 25/26."

Two thirds of FLS car parks will remain free to use after this expansion of sites subject to parking charges.

Tariffs at FLS car parks where charges are levied currently range from £1.00 to £3.00 per hour, or £3.00 to £6.00 for a full day. Annual FLS regional parking passes are available for between £40 and £90. An annual FLS national parking pass is available for £100. Blue Badge holders can park for free at all FLS car parks.

Scottish Government Action

As outlined above, Scottish Ministers approved FLS plans to apply parking charges to an additional 66 of its car parks between 2022-23 and 2024-25.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not previously considered this issue in any detail.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
7 November 2023

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Forestry and Land Scotland submission of 23 October 2023

PE2042/A: Abolish car parking charges for all Forestry and Land Scotland sites

Thank you for your correspondence on the above petition on the 31st August 2023, which was passed to Forestry and Land Scotland for response on the 12 October 2023. The petition states:

- **Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish car parking charges at all Forestry and Land Scotland sites, helping to promote access to forests and greenspaces across Scotland.**
1. Access under Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) to Forestry and Land Scotland land, which covers 9% of Scotland, is free.
 2. FLS and its predecessor Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) have been charging for car parking at the most popular sites on Scotland's national forests and land for over twenty years. We are planning to charge at a third of sites with two-thirds of cars parks being free.
 3. Forestry and Land Scotland have two objectives with charge parking:
 - a. Sustainable finance. Annually, to provide up to £2M income to help cover the £13M costs of providing over 300 destinations for communities and visitors. This helps us maintain trails and facilities to help give 11 million visitors a year a safe and enjoyable experience.
 - b. Climate Change. Encourage communities and visitors to take active travel, public transport or car share to visit our forests and land.
 4. In 2012, FES expanded the number of sites where car parking incurred a charge, from 23 to 44 sites. In 2022, Ministers approved a further expansion to include an additional 66 sites over a three-year period (18 in FY 22/23, 13 in FY 23/24, 25 in FY 24/25). Taking the total number of sites where FLS will charge for car parking to 110 by the end of Financial Year 25/26. The majority of these sites have

been selected because they offer more facilities and a higher quality visitor experience.

5. The Ministerial decision in 2022 to increase the number of sites where charges are incurred, followed work by the Scottish Government's National Visitor Services Steering Group (NVSSG) and a challenge by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy and subsequently the Deputy First Minister, for Public Bodies to actively seek to increase income from visitors to offset the increasing costs of managing visitor pressures.
6. The introduction of car park charging (or its increased use) is mirrored across all Public Bodies / Local Authorities managing sites, particularly in Rural Scotland where public usage, especially since the pandemic has dramatically increased. Abolition of parking charges would not only impact the sustainable finance of FLS but could lead to similar calls for other parts of Scottish Government and local authorities who currently charge for parking or may wish to charge for parking in the future.
7. Car parking charging is mirrored across a number of Public Bodies / Local Authorities in any geographical area. As an example, within the Cairngorms National Park, FLS, Historic Scotland, Scottish Water, NatureScot, Crown Estate Scotland, Highland Council etc. have co-ordinated charging to try and manage visitor use across all of the park, increasing charges at 'Honey-pot' sites in conjunction with providing sites where there is no charge to disincentivise visitors from using the busy sites and incentivise the use of those quieter less popular sites.
8. Tariffs at FLS car parks range from £1.00 - £3.00 for an hour / £3.00 - £6.00 for all-day dependent on the level of facilities and visitor offer at the sites or the need to use price point to control capacity issues at honey-pot sites (in conjunction with neighbouring landowners/mangers). Free parking is provided at all sites for Blue Badge holders. Money Saving annual passes are available at regional (£40-90) and national level (£100).
9. An Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken before the introduction of charging for the first time or an increase in tariffs. Local communities are informed before implementing charging at any site.
10. FLS has procured and introduced a pay by phone contract across all sites at which parking charges currently apply. It is hoped this will

improve customer satisfaction, as it introduces further choice in how to pay.

11. FLS have considered if there any other options to refocus charging on other facilities, thus allowing car parking to be free of charge, but instead visitors paying for the added/additional facilities (if they wish to use them). We do not have pay for entry facilities at FLS sites. Unlike Historic Environment Scotland or the National Trust Scotland where the building or formal garden is the attraction, FLS visitor sites with professionally designed walking and cycling trails are outdoor visitor attractions where our equivalent to an admission charge is the car parking charge. Optional extras such as purchasing food in cafes or shops/bike hire/Go Ape is already in place at a small number of our sites but does not raise the same level of income as car parking. Charging for parking has many other visitor management benefits as detailed above beyond income.

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 26 October 2023

PE2042/B: Abolish car parking charges for all Forestry and Land Scotland sites

We appreciate the rationale behind Forestry and Land Scotland's response; however, it in no way addresses the main issues raised by our petition, i.e.: that parking charges differentially impact the well-being of the most vulnerable and least affluent in society locally and nationally.

Charges have and are being put in place in sites such as Fearnoch Forest and Sutherlands Grove where there are no additional facilities to justify these charges.

We, the public already own the forest and are *de facto* being charged to access when we should have a right to access free of charge.

The car parking charge is a stealth tax that cannot be avoided as many sites, including Fearnoch Forest and Sutherlands Grove, are in reality only accessible by private car.

The moneysaving option is a poor response aimed at placating middle-class more affluent users but is still an unacceptable financial burden on those who could best benefit from access to the forest and do not have the disposable income to do so.

To our knowledge, the Equality Impact Assessments that have been undertaken have not been released into the public domain. If they have been then they have not been advertised as such and thus have been obscured from public scrutiny.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) is a successful profitable organisation, and this is to be commended. As the public could be considered as the owners of FLS then it would be appropriate for FLS to reconsider their financial model and ensure that the owners have appropriate benefits, including free access to car parking.