

Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee

13th July 2015

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Parking charges in Mote Park

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Director or Head of Service	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Marcus Lawler, Commercial Projects Manager
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to the Committee:

1. That parking charges are introduced in Mote Park.
2. That the preferred options at para. 4 are approved to enforce the charges.
3. That authority to be delegated to the Parking Services Manager to issue concessions and free parking permits to volunteers of the Mote Park Fellowship; community and special interest groups that already pay to use the park (such as Maidstone Victory Angling Club; Big Bang Productions; Cygnet Model Boat Club; etc.); park residents; and charitable or community groups (such as MENCAP) based on agreed criteria.
4. That a budget of £77,000 is earmarked for the delivery of this project from the capital programme funding for commercial projects.
5. That authority is delegated to the Head of Commercial and Economic Development to spend the budget to implement the proposal.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all: Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	Not required
Council	Not required
Other Committee	Not required

Parking charges in Mote Park

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 On 28th June 2013 the Council considered a report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities entitled Leisure and Culture Services. The decision record shows that:

2. *That the establishment of a new business team called Maidstone Culture and Leisure (MCL) under the Head of Commercial and Economic Development be agreed.*
3. *That the principle of reducing the net cost of cultural and leisure services to the Council be agreed and delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Communities to progress the projects identified in paragraphs 1.3.7 – 1.3.9 of the report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities and, in particular, agree:-*
 - vi) *A review of parking demand and traffic management inside and outside Mote Park be undertaken including consultation with residents living adjacent to the park and park users regarding both day to day arrangements and those put in place when events are held in the park.*

1.2 This report is the culmination of that review and recommends the introduction of a nominal parking charge at Mote Park as the third of three measures, (the others including the Mote Park Adventure Zone and bringing catering in the park back in-house), designed to contribute to the operating budget of the council's Parks and Open spaces and to allow investment in improving the infrastructure in the park; particularly the café and toilets.

1.3 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved, as part of the Council's budget in February 2015. The MTFS contains a £200k contribution from the council's commercialisation programme, including introducing parking charges in Mote Park. Savings from the operating costs or from other sources of revenue will be required in order to balance the Council's budget if the nominal charge for parking is not approved.

1.4 Implementing the recommendations in this report is estimated to generate an income contribution in excess of £180k per annum, for an up-front capital investment of £77,000.

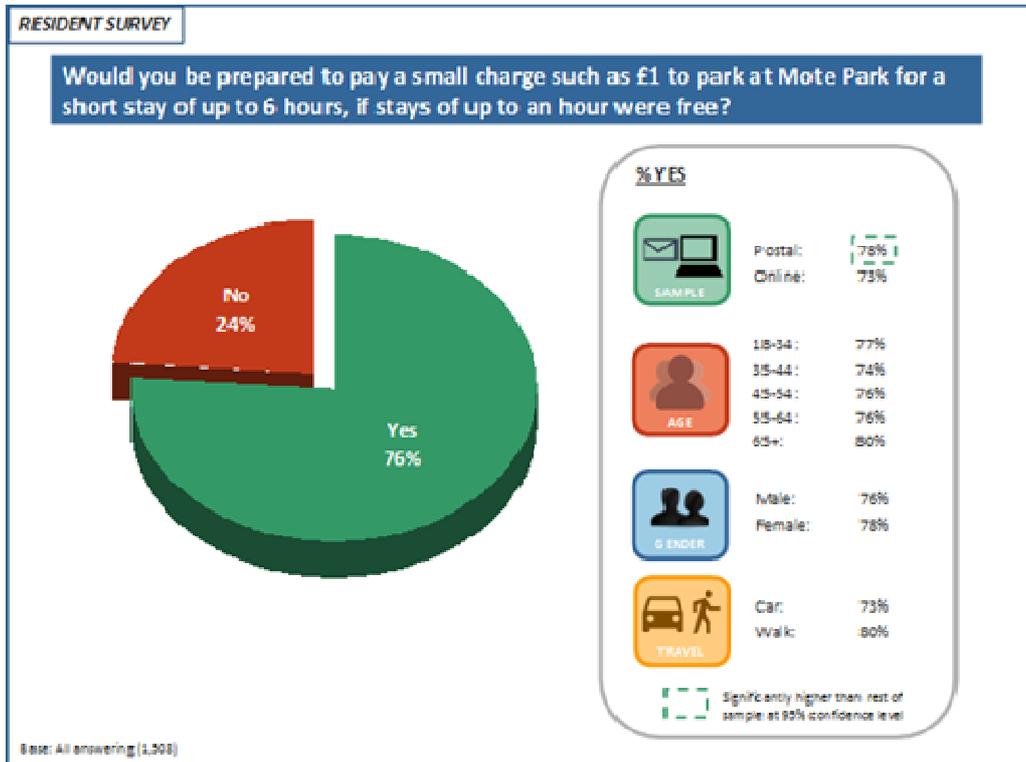
2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is responsible for around 70 parks and open spaces of which 6 are major parks. The council has a budget of £1.8 million for day-to-day maintenance and Health and Safety remedial work (for example removing branches that are at risk of falling) for parks and open spaces. This is a significant investment, which represents approximately 10% of the council's total operating budget.

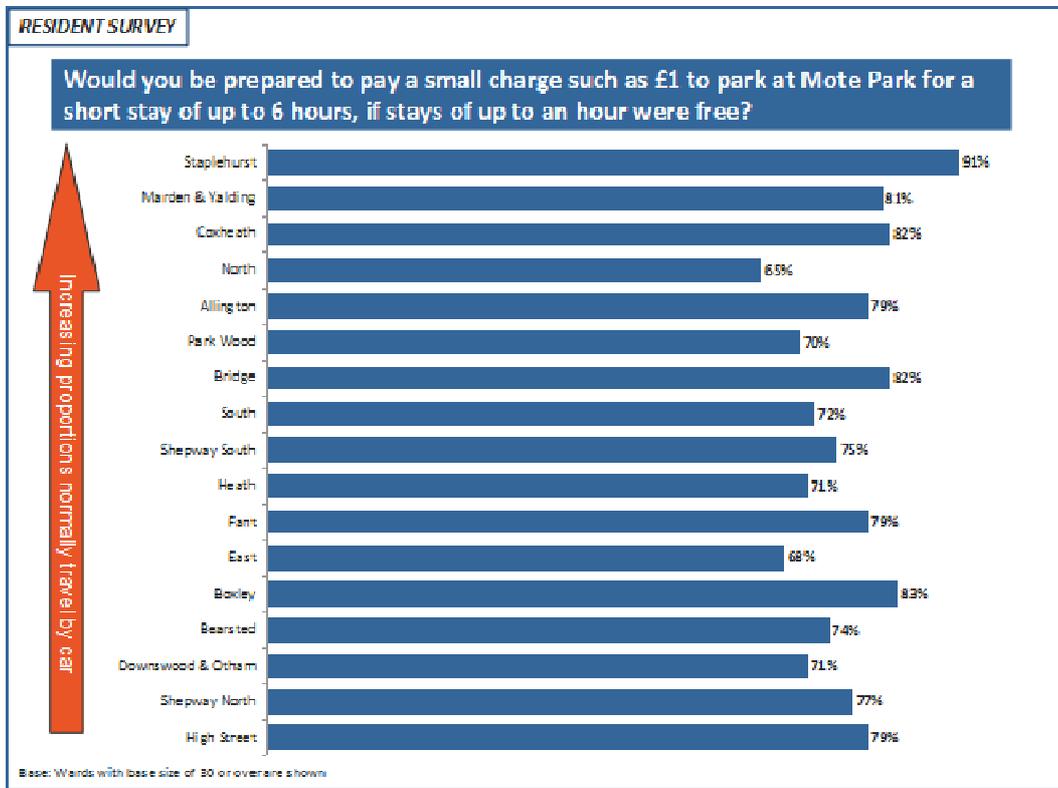
- 2.2 The council has achieved Green Flag status for Whatman Park, Clare Park and Cobtree Manor Park, with the 'jewel in the crown' undoubtedly Mote Park, a 460 acre park with easy access to Maidstone town centre. The park not only has Green Flag status but was recently voted Britain's second favourite park in a national poll.
- 2.3 Mote Park has long been a major visitor attraction. Sensory Trust surveyed user numbers and demographics in 2008 as part of preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a restoration project. Estimates for that year were 660,000 user visits and 180,000 car visits.
- 2.4 The bid was successful and Mote Park received £2.5m to fund a joint MBC and Heritage Lottery fund project completed in 2011 which significantly improved the leisure offering. It has been so successful the park has experienced an increase in visits from circa 660,000 in 2009 to over 1,000,000 in 2013/14. Cars visiting Mote Park have increased from an estimated 180,000 in 2010/11 to 385,000 in 2013/14. Numbers for both types of visits for this year are currently up 10% on previous years.
- 2.5 The increase in visits to the parks, and in particular Mote Park, has increased the pressure on the budget to maintain the current standards. There have been a range of measures to make best use of the limited resources, including the involvement of volunteers, the value of which currently stands at around £40,000 per annum (according to Heritage Lottery Fund values). However, there is a real risk that Mote Park will start to absorb a disproportionate amount of the budget allocation as the rise in visits to this park continues, to the potential detriment of the Borough's other parks and open spaces.
- 2.6 The current funding arrangements for parks and open spaces, are no longer considered sustainable and current standards cannot be maintained within existing budgets. The council's financial position continues to be challenging and it is expected that the funding settlement for future years will see even further funding reductions. In order to minimise the impact of the funding reductions, the council agreed to identify alternative sources of revenue, with the proposal to introduce parking charges one of a range of measures proposed.
- 2.7 In order to inform the proposals for Mote Park, the Council commissioned Lake Market Research to conduct a survey of users of the park and a representative sample of 5,000 homes within the borough. The on-line version of the survey was advertised on the Council's website and widely across social media. The full report can be found at Appendix 1. Key findings are as follows:
- 2.8 A large number of the people using Mote Park are travelling from outside of the Borough. Research shows 42% of people who use the park are visitors from outside the Borough; this equates to over 460,000 people and over 180,000 cars.

2.9

76% of residents that responded to the survey indicated that they would be prepared to pay a small charge of up to £1. 73% of all respondents that travel to the park by car indicated that they would be prepared to pay the charge.



When analysed by ward, the results showed the majority of those surveyed would pay the nominal charge, from all Maidstone wards; particularly from those with the highest proportion of residents who travel by car.



2.10 A second piece of research was conducted to establish the numbers of cars that visit the park. When the joint Maidstone Borough Council and Heritage Lottery fund project was completed in 2012, automatic counters of pedestrian and vehicle visitors were installed. When this data is combined with the responses to the market research, it has allowed accurate analysis of car and pedestrian visits. In the year 2013/14 384,796 vehicles visited the park.

2.11 The third piece of research has been to look at major parks within Kent, to understand what provisions for parking exist, and what charging measures are in place. A summary is as follows:

Park	Owner	Weekday Charge	Weekend Charge	Season Ticket
Teston Country Park	KCC	£1.20	£1.70	£40.00
Shorne Country Park	KCC	£2.00	£2.50	£40.00
Trosley Country Park	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
Manor Park West Malling	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
White Horse Country Park	KCC	£1.00	£1.50	£40.00
Dunorlan	Tunbridge wells BC	FREE	FREE	
Tonbridge	Tonbridge and Malling BC	Town centre Parking		
Leybourne Lakes	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£25.00
Haysden Country Park	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£25.00
Bowl Water		£4.00 per person includes Parking		£35.00 per person (concessions available)
Bedgebury Pinetum	Forestry Commission	£9.50 per car Free entry to park		
National Trust		£2/£2.50 average if parking available	Cheaper if member	
Swanley Park	Swanley Town Council	£2 in school holidays	£2 weekends	

2.12 The final piece of research has been to ascertain the views of stakeholder groups on the impact of the introduction of parking charges. These have included: Maidstone Victory Angling Club; Cygnet Model Boat Club; residents of the park; residents around the park; Mote Park Fellowship; ecological interest groups; Maidstone Model Engineering Society; British Military Fitness; Mote Park Watersports Centre; Mencap Charitable Trust. Initial verbal feedback from these groups has been positive, given the context of the Council's funding position. The implementation plans will include arrangements for free parking permits and discounts based on set criteria.

2.13 The financial and operational position of the park has also been reviewed, with the principal findings including:

- The park has an existing income target of £30k originally set in previous years which it has not been able to achieve.
- The Mote park officer funding ends in October 2015. The Mote Park office post has been funded by Heritage Lottery project which was for a 3 year period ending this October. The post, originally funded by the Heritage Lottery Project, has been crucial in driving the park forward. Achievements include: Green Flag; exceptionally high levels of volunteering in the park; Trip Advisor certificate of excellence; second most loved park in the country; 6,000 friends on the Mote Park Facebook Page; establishment of an active and vibrant Friends group; and the establishment of a strong events offer in the park. Currently there is no provision to extend this post past October this year.
- The tree stock in the park requires a rolling programme of maintenance to prolong its life. To make a significant improvement to the tree stock an annual budget of £25,000 per annum should be allowed for inspection and works for five years.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 A range of options have been considered in relation to the introduction of parking charges in Mote Park.
- 3.2 The first option is to consider whether a nominal charge should be introduced or not.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Implement charges	<p>Allows the parks budgets to balance by meeting the £30k income target from the Medium Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>Contributes to the maintenance of the parks and allows capital improvements (i.e. café and toilets) in Mote Park.</p> <p>Small cost incurred by car users</p> <p>Parking outside of the park may be impacted, which will require measures to be put in place.</p>	Recommended
Do not implement charges	<p>Alternative savings or revenue of £200k will have to be identified.</p> <p>Maintaining current standards becomes unsustainable without additional revenue funding</p>	Not recommended

3.3 Analysis of the patterns of car park use shows that over 98.5% of parking visits are up to 6 hours in length. The charge proposed is a nominal charge of £1, which if introduced would need to deter commuters, who usually require a parking period in excess of 6 hours. The proposal would introduce a charge of twice the town centre rate for stays over 6 hours to minimise the risk of commuters using the park.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Charge £1	Least cost to motorists Potential gross revenue of £214k based on 100% current estimated visits	This will allow a substantial contribution to the revenue target in the MTFS – recommended.
Charge £1.5	Medium cost to motorists Potential gross revenue of £480k based on 100% current estimated visits	Not recommended.
Charge £2	Highest cost to motorists Potential gross revenue of £640nt estimated visits	Not recommended.

3.4 If a charge is introduced an option could be to provide a short period of free parking as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2015.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Offer 1 hour free parking	<p>Meets the aspirations of some special interest groups</p> <p>Meets the recommendation of Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Having a two stage parking approach will require more complex implementation and operational arrangements</p> <p>Having a two stage parking approach will be more difficult and costly to enforce</p> <p>A free hour period reduces revenue opportunities by at least £54k if charges are set at £1 based on current usage.</p>	Not recommended
Do not offer 1 hour free parking	<p>A standard charging period is easier for the public to understand and is cost effective to implement and enforce</p> <p>Does not reduce revenue opportunity</p>	Recommended

3.5 If charges are introduced there would be the option to introduce season tickets that would be available for residents that are regular users of the park, as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2015 2015. A season ticket costing £40 would be proposed to keep the cost in line with the other season ticket prices for car parking in parks (for example in KCC's parks).

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Offer a season ticket	<p>Ensures that regular park users are not penalised</p> <p>Allows residents of the borough greater flexibility</p> <p>Weighs the balance of charges towards non-borough residents</p> <p>Administrative burden and cost of £25 to issue each ticket (based on charge for existing resident's parking scheme).</p> <p>Meets the aspirations of previous committees</p> <p>Loss of some revenue</p>	Recommended
Do not offer a season ticket	<p>Regular users of the park could end up paying considerable charges</p> <p>Offers no advantage to residents</p>	Not recommended

- 3.6 If charges are introduced an option would be to offer concessions to special interest groups, including those already paying to use the park, as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2015.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Offer concessions	<p>Meets the recommendation of Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny</p> <p>Ensures special interest groups already paying to use the park do not pay twice to use the park</p> <p>Allows continued use of the park by charitable groups</p>	Recommended
Do not offer concessions	May restrict the ability of charities to continue using the park	Not recommended

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Based on the options set out above in section 3, the preferred option is to introduce parking charges in Mote Park with the following conditions:

- The charge will be set at £1 for stays of up to six hours (with no return in 2 hours).
- Stays of longer than six hours will be charged at twice the rate of the town centre car parks.
- A season ticket will be offered to borough residents at an annual cost of £40. (Maximum stay of six hours with no return in 2 hours)
- Special interest groups will qualify for concessions. (No maximum stay)

4.2 It is proposed that authority is delegated to the Head of Commercial and Economic Development to finalise operational details in conjunction with the Parking Services Manager; spend the budget in support of delivery of the project; to obtain the relevant permissions and licences to implement charges.

4.3 If the Committee approves the preferred option then the Council will be required to enforce the scheme by way of a Traffic Regulation Order. It is proposed that the enforcement function is delegated to Parking Services. The cost of

enforcement will be part of the operating costs. The council will also monitor and review the impact on parking in the areas around the park and identify measures to mitigate any adverse impact that may arise due to the introduction of charges.

4.4 As described at para.4.6 the report has made prudent assumptions for the contribution this proposal will generate. After the first year of operation quantitative data will be available on the actual revenue generated and at that time future estimates, assumptions and allocations will be revised. For the initial year of operation it is recommended that the net revenue from the introduction of charges is used to fund the following , in the order set out below:

- Meeting the remainder of the existing income target of £30k; any surplus then being deployed to:
- Contribution to the £33k cost of retaining the Mote Park Officer; any surplus then being deployed to
- Contribution to a tree management programme which will be £10,000 in 2016/17; £15,000 in 2017/18; and £20,000. At this point the programme funding will be reviewed. Any surplus then being deployed to:
- Contribution to the MTFs, which if the assumptions at para.4.6 are correct will be £98,000.

4.5 A capital budget to deliver the project has been calculated as follows:

Item	Cost
Project Management and QA	£12,000
Traffic regulation order (including advertising; consultation; survey; signage; etc.).	£5,000
Pay and display machines purchase and installation.	£40,000
Signage	£10,000
Access control (bollards; crocodile teeth; etc.).	£10,000
Project manager's discretionary budget	£10,000
Total	£87,000

4.6 Operating costs and revenue are estimated as follows:

Parking Charge Income	No free period	1 hour free period (Est. 58,000 visits)
Maximum income (based on current car trips with no uptake of season tickets or concessions) with VAT deducted.	£320,000	£271,000
Costs		
Parking services (CEOs etc.)	£24,000	£36,000 (Additional enforcement visits required, increasing deployed hour costs)
Cash collection	£5,000	£5,000
Repairs and maintenance	£6,000	£6,000
Pay unit vandalism	£8,000	£8,000
Total operating costs	£43,000	£55,000
Maximum net contribution	£277,000	£216,000
Season ticket; changing use patterns; and concession discount (assumed 128,000 visits)	-£105,600	-£105,600
Estimated Net Annual Income	£171,400	£110,400

It should be noted that for financial planning purposes, the estimated net annual income assumes two thirds of the current car trips will pay the charge, to ensure that the level of income is not overstated. The actual income levels will be established in the first year of implementation and will then be used to estimate and adjust the assumptions for future years.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 Previous Committee feedback and resolutions

The consultation results are set out in section 2 of this report.

Feedback from Cabinet and the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been incorporated in this report.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Should the Committee approve the recommendations in this report, they will be implemented as part of the wider programme of improvements on going in Mote Park, which includes: a new café and visitor centre; new toilets; re-siting of the maintenance operational base; and the Adventure Zone. A project manager will be appointed and will be responsible for incorporating parking charges into wider programme. The main actions will be as follows:

Action	Start	Finish
Advertise and formally consult with all stakeholders on TRO; implementation.	Aug 2015	Nov 2015 (Dependant on Committee dates to review formal objections to TRO)
Construction of pay points and other infrastructure for parking	Nov 2015	Dec 2015
Identification of possible parking displacement and implementation remedial measures	Dec 2015	March 2016 (review of findings)
Start of charging	Jan 2016	

- 6.2 If approved this project will be communicated to stakeholders, via a communications plan designed in conjuncture with the Communications Manager.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
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<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>This report supports the corporate priority of:</p> <p><i>Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all.</i></p> <p>Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions</p> <p>Providing a clean and safe environment</p>	<p>Zena Cooke, Director of Communities and Regeneration</p>
<p>Risk Management</p>	<p>A risk register will be maintained as part of the project, setting out the likely risks and the actions that will be taken to mitigate them.</p>	<p>Richard Clarke, Head of Audit Partnership</p>
<p>Financial</p>	<p>A provision for commercial projects is contained within the capital programme and the recommendations within this report will be covered by that provision.</p> <p>The budget of £200,000 is a Council wide assumption of income from the Commercialisation Strategy. As the most significant proposal coming forward for 2016/17 this scheme will need to deliver the majority, if not all of the target.</p> <p>In addition there is a need to identify further corporate savings of £1.2m and careful consideration should be given to the use of any additional income above this target.</p>	<p>Zena Cooke, Director of Communities and Regeneration (s.151 Officer)</p> <p><i>Tbc finance officer (Maxine Mahon?)</i></p>
<p>Staffing</p>	<p>There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. Need to reference how we are dealing with the PM.</p>	
<p>Legal</p>	<p>The freehold title to Mote Park is subject to a covenant requiring Maidstone Borough Council to keep the majority of the park as public open space for the benefit of the public. It could in theory be argued that the charging of a fee for the use of the car park, albeit a nominal amount, is contrary to this covenant on the basis that it might restrict access to some users. There are previous legal cases which have held that charging for admission to parks in certain circumstances is consistent with the requirement to provide free and unrestricted access. Taking these cases into account together with (1) the results of the consultation which show the</p>	<p>John Scarborough Head of the Legal Partnership</p>

	majority of consultees are in favour of a small charge and (2) the fact that the charge is nominal and for parking only (ie not for entrance into the park), the Head of Legal Partnership supports the recommendations in the report.	
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure there are no equality implications. Blue Badge holders will enjoy an extension of the Council's existing policy which provides for free parking in Council owned car parks. Before installation of the infrastructure required for the operation of this proposal disabled groups will be invited to review plans for their input regarding ease of use for those with particular requirements.	Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer
Environmental/Sustainable Development	There are no direct implications arising from this report. Planning permission for pay and display machines should not be required: Part 12, class a, Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development (England) Order 2015.	Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager James Bailey, Development Manager
Community Safety	No implication.	
Human Rights Act	No implication.	
Procurement	The council will comply with all relevant legislation and procedures. The procurement process will be conducted with the support of the Procurement Manager.	David Tibbit, Property and Procurement Manager
Asset Management	The proposals in this report will contribute towards maintaining the current standards of Mote Park.	Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Lake Market Research report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Car Park Charges in Mote Park report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development 10th March 2015 to Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Leisure and Culture Services report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities 28th June 2013 to Cabinet.