

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 25 September 2024  
14th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 22 November 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Forestry and Land Scotland.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from Forestry and Land Scotland which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [Forestry and Land Scotland provided the Scottish Government's initial position on this petition on 23 October 2023](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,299 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**September 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2042: 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: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2042 on 22 November 2023**

**The Convener:** The first of our new petitions is PE2042, which is lodged by Undine Achilles-Day on behalf of the Taynuilt community council. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish car parking charges at all Forestry and Land Scotland sites, to help to promote access to forests and green spaces across Scotland.

The petitioner is concerned that the introduction of car parking charges by Forestry and Land Scotland will have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of people who wish to visit those sites but who will, as a consequence of the charges, no longer be able to afford to do so.

Responding to the petition on behalf of the Scottish Government, Forestry and Land Scotland states that it has been charging for car parking at its most popular sites for 20 years. Although it is expanding the number of sites where parking charges apply, two thirds of its car parks will remain free to use.

The response goes on to note that the decision to increase the number of sites where charges are incurred followed a challenge to public bodies by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to actively increase income from visitors, to offset the increasing costs of managing visitor pressures. Abolishing charges would impact the sustainability of Forestry and Land Scotland's finances and could lead to similar calls on other parts of central and local Government that charge for parking.

The petitioner has responded to the Forestry and Land Scotland submission, raising concerns that parking charges are being introduced at sites, such as Fearnoch forest and Sutherland grove, where there are no additional facilities to justify the charges.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action? I see that we have competition among the members on this occasion. I will go to Mr Ewing first, who will perhaps be less challenging to the aims of the petition than Mr Torrance will.

**Fergus Ewing:** As this is a new petition, I think that there is quite a lot to be done. Some of that has been suggested to us, so perhaps I will leave those things out, but I want to make some specific points that I do not think have been raised with us in the advice that we received.

Number 1 is that there have long been parking charges for 23 sites. That was increased in 2012 to 44 sites, but now it has been increased to 110 sites. As it happens, I used to have the ministerial portfolio with responsibility for FLS and I have fond memories of working with it, so I appreciate that it has to cover its costs. However, many of the car parks have no facilities whatsoever—they are basically open ground. I know that because I used to do a lot of running around forests in the Highlands. I cannot see that it is justified to make charges at such sites. Some sites have facilities, but only a few.

There seems to be a lack of rationale for how and why the charges have been introduced. Why have some charges been made and not others? What is the rationale? Surely the rationale should be based on what facilities there are. Where

does an equality impact assessment come in? It seems to me that it considers various things, such as equal rights. That is absolutely desirable and fine—everybody has a right to access, which is perhaps the point—but the key decisions should be based on what facilities there are, such as toilets and whether rangers are present. I would be keen to get details of all that from FLS.

Secondly, why should the equality impact assessments not be made public? They are public documents, so can FLS explain why there is an issue?

Thirdly, if the costs of running the 300 destinations are £13 million, can we get some detail and breakdown from FLS of what that cost entails? It seems to be an awful lot of money. Is it mostly labour costs or are costs site specific? What exactly is it that FLS employees do at the sites? Most of them are basically open land. There is nothing to do. There is no grass to cut and the areas where cars park are usually unmetalled and flat.

If charges are to be imposed everywhere, some drivers, instead of parking in the car park, might park alongside roads—often single-track roads—to avoid having to pay charges. They know that they will not be detected, because no police will go by for weeks on end in some of the more remote areas.

I am not against bodies recovering their costs. It is a principle of Government that brings problems with it. I just wanted to raise those points and I am sympathetic to other points that will be raised.

**The Convener:** I am happy to write further to FLS along the lines that you have suggested to dig beneath the general point that it has made about the fact that charges have existed for a while.

**David Torrance:** Mr Ewing mentioned car parks that have no facilities, but we just need to look at Loch Morlich—he will know the area well. There are lots of car parks there, but they are seriously overused by the public. It is a really good tourist destination, and the wear and tear in those areas is incredible. Forestry and Land Scotland has to repair that, so it needs to get revenue from somewhere.

**The Convener:** As has been suggested, we need to see the equality impact assessments, as well as how the charges are established, what facilities they deliver and what benefit they provide to those who use the facilities. We thank the petitioner and will take the action suggested to see what response we get.

## Annexe C: Written submission

### Forestry and Land Scotland submission of 14 December 2023

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

Thank you for your letter, dated 24 November 2023, in relation to the above petition and outlining the Committee's wish to see further detail on the rationale for the introduction of these charges.

I have responded to their request in the order in raised your letter. Supporting documentation and links to requested documentation have also been included in this response.

#### Rationale for Charging

The Public Petitions Committee asked for more detail for the rationale for car park charging on specific sites, including sites that had "no facilities or rangers on site".

The [FLS Visitor Strategy \(https://forestryandland.gov.scot/visit\)](https://forestryandland.gov.scot/visit) sets out a key Principle (see page 7) of Long Term Financial Sustainability and seeks for us to be more financially self-sustainable. Financial Sustainability is also part of one of our four priorities (see page 10). Car Park charging is a key income source for FLS to be more financially sustainable.

All sites where FLS charge for parking have car parks and trails that require quarterly safety inspections and annual and periodic maintenance of the trails and car parks. Maintenance work for all promoted sites includes: vegetation management, drainage work, signage replacement, tree safety work, car park and trail surface upgrades and litter collection. The cost to manage an individual car park or trail varies annually depending on materials used for construction, storm damage and levels of use and abuse by visitors. A trail could be low cost to manage for several years, but a major washout due to flooding could cost between £50K to £100K to repair. Tree safety work can be low cost annually until a large windblow event such as Storm Arwen. Bridges have a life expectance of 20 year but have a significant cost in the year they need to be replaced. Most of this maintenance work goes unnoticed by visitors, until a major storm, which closes a site for a period. However regular maintenance is critical for visitor safety and is a considerable cost to FLS in terms of staff and cash costs.

Forestry and Land Scotland have a duty of care to keep visitors and communities safe when they are using our car parks and trails. To ensure visitor safety there are five critical steps we need to take to ensure visitors are safe and have an enjoyable experience:

1. The trail or car park needs to be designed or built by a competent designer, have full planning approval and follow Construction Design Management (CDM) principles.

2. The trail has to be built to the agreed design and be signed off by an engineer.
3. We have to inspect the trail – usually four times per year as a formal inspection.
4. We have to conduct trail and car park maintenance and keep records of the work.
5. We need to provide good quality visitor information, following principals of the Visitor Safety Group.

All the sites that FLS charge for parking have significant investment in trail and car park maintenance. In some car parks we have additional services that are a further cost to FLS to manage, and these sites generally attract a higher cost for car parking. These additional services can include public toilets, interpretation, visitor centres and play areas.

Regions considering a new site for charge parking are provided with national guidance on site selection. This considers a number of factors including: visitor numbers, financial appraisal, connectivity (solar, electricity, phone signal), visitor experience planning, health & safety and displacement, stakeholders and impacts on staff. A copy of the guidance is attached.<sup>1</sup>

### **Increase in Roadside Parking**

When introducing a new charge parking site Regions are asked to complete a Visitor Experience Plan (copy of the template is attached<sup>2</sup>). One of the key questions that is asked as part of the plan is “Will there be any displacement of visitors as a result of charging?”. The impact of roadside parking is site specific. Forestry and Land Scotland work very closely with local authorities and Police Scotland locally and nationally and seek to find pragmatic solutions to local issues. FLS have found partnership work around visitor management issues has been very effective in recent years thanks to the introduction of the Visitor Management Strategy working groups.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

The FLS Visitor Strategy has an Equality Impact Assessment which includes consideration of impact of Financial Sustainability on protected characteristics. There is also an EIA for Charge Parking. Both EIAs are published on the internet at <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/diversity-and-inclusion/legal-obligations>

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<sup>1</sup> Note from the clerk – a copy of FLS guidance titled “*Charge Parking Site Selection – process and considerations*” has been provided to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Note from the clerk – a copy of the template has been provided to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

### Revenue from Charge Parking

Financial Year	Car Parking Charges/Parking Pass Income	Stay the Night Income
2019/20	£869,373	N/A
2020/21	£415,639	N/A
2021/22	£935,415	N/A
2022/23	£1,065,239	N/A
2023/24	£447,992 (income to 31/07/2023 only)	£36,610 (income to 31/08/2023 only)

### FLS Visitor Management Costs

The below costs are for the five Regions to deliver visitor services across Scotland. FLS are the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Scotland managing 9% of the land area.

2023 / 24 Business Plan	Description	Staff Costs	Cash Costs
Urban Woodlands	Trail management and car parks for woodland in urban areas	£353,000	£308,000
Access	Work to improve access for visitor to trail network	£220,000	£18,000
Existing Facilities	Maintenance of trail, public toilet and car park network	£2,186,000	£1,762,000
Motor Rallies	Cost to repair forest roads after motorsport – covered by permission income	£109,000	£200,000
Christmas Trees	Christmas tree sales also linked with income to cover costs.	£200,000	£17,000
Specialist Recreation	Support of activities other than walking and cycling	£57,000	0

Commercial Recreation	Management of commercial income opportunities including events and leases	£239,000	£35,000
Visitor Centres	Costs to run and maintain visitor centres.	£505,000	£3,391,000
Community Development	Staff time to support and work with communities and community partnership projects	£566,000	£115,000
Tourism & Other Economic Development	Partnership projects to support rural economy growth	£104,000	£53,000
Recreation Infrastructure	Management and improvement of trail and car park network	£499,000	£692,000
Forestry Skills	Volunteering support	£12,000	0
Wider Employment Skills	Training projects	£1,000	0
<b>VISITOR SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES</b>		<b>£5,052,000</b>	<b>£6,592,000</b>

The above staff costs and cash costs of £11.6M exclude costs of Vehicles, Admin and exclude costs of the National Visitor Services team (£754,000) which brings the total cost to around £13M.

Management of the trails and car parks are covered by the headings urban woodlands, existing facilities and recreation infrastructure which is a total cost of £5.8M which is considerably more than the £1M income we received from car parking in 2022/23.

Forestry and Land Scotland welcome over 10 million visits annually. The management of trails and car parks costs us £5.8M annually and the delivery of visitor services costs around £13M. Car Park income of £1M is important to help Forestry and Land Scotland be more financially sustainable and allow us to maintain trails and car parks and keep visitors safe and give them an enjoyable experience. The cost of a family visiting one of our charge car parks is between £3 and £9 per day, which is brilliant value for money, when the cost of one large coffee is around £5 in the UK. For regular visits we offer an annual pass which is even better value. We appreciate some visitors do not want to pay for parking, but the vast majority willingly pay recognising the value a visit to our woodland trails provide for their mental and physical health.

**CPPP/S6/24/14/6**

I trust that this response provides you with all the detail the Committee sought however FLS is happy to provide any additional information or clarification on this issue if required.