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RSPB South Stack

Frequently Asked Questions

July 2018

The following seeks to provide context and information for the rationale behind a new pricing structure and concessions for the car park charge as well as infrastructure development at RSPB South Stack

Why the new pricing structure and concessions?

Charging a fee for car parking is the most appropriate way to raise additional income at RSPB South Stack, as is the case for many organisations and operators of public car parks. We have also considered the introduction of entrance fees in order to generate the income needed, but discarded this due to the significant increase in the costs that would result for visitors who aren't RSPB members.

We have carefully considered the public's views on the matter and we recognise that some people feel that the £5 flat rate during peak season is too high especially for those only planning on a short stay. We have thought long and hard about these objections and have listened to the thoughts and suggestions made.

Some people felt that the £5 flat rate during peak-season is too high if you wanted to pop in for drink, take in the view or to walk your dog for example.

We also took note that many felt that our offer of an annual pass wasn't extended far enough beyond the Holyhead area, and felt that our offer should replicate the offer at Newborough and extend to the whole of Anglesey. We have therefore extended our £20 annual concession to include all Anglesey residents.

We feel that our current package of concessions is reasonable and hope that it will enable us to generate the income required to off-set the costs of running the nature reserve and visitor attraction whilst offering the annual pass to Anglesey residents and accommodating short stayers. We will be monitoring the effectiveness of these measures. The range of concessions available is set out below:

- PEAK SEASON (Easter to end October half term): £2 for one hour / £5 daily rate
- LOW SEASON: £1.50 an hour / £2.50 daily rate
- £20 annual pass for the people of Anglesey
- Free to RSPB members

(Charging would apply between the hours of 9am-5pm)

Why are you trialling these concessions?

We are looking to introduce these rates, including the annual concession on a trial basis for a minimum of 12 months. We will monitor the use of the car park, including dwell time as well as monitor the Anglesey annual pass take-up. At the end of 12 months we will review the financial and visitor data and evidence in an open and honest way by sharing this information with local stakeholders, including town and community council members.

How will you monitor or enforce the charges?

As a charity, we will be looking to keep staffing costs for car park enforcement to a minimum. We will therefore not be hiring any new staff to monitor parking, but we may look to use existing and new volunteers, including our residential volunteers to help us check that people have paid the correct parking fee for their stay. However, to a large extent we will be trusting our visitors to pay the right fee. We take this approach at other reserves and find that through providing a great experience of wildlife and natural areas and a high standard of facilities, many of our visitors become RSPB members or are happy to support wildlife through other means, such as through their entrance fee, donations, joining an event, using our cafes and shops etc.

Why are you appealing against the council's refusal of planning permission for the installation of parking meters and associated signage?

We need planning permission to install parking meters and signs and we disagree with the local planning authority's reason for refusing planning permission, and which was contrary to the planning officer recommendations. The reason for refusal is unsubstantiated by evidence. In such instances, it is entirely legitimate to appeal the decision.

Why is building work necessary? What are you hoping to achieve?

South Stack is one of the highest footfall tourism destinations in Wales with 185,000 people visiting the site each year, 115,000 of whom make use of our visitor centre. Regular visitors to South Stack will know that this centre and staff offices are old, dilapidated and have suffered significant storm damage in the last two years. Continuing to patch up the buildings is not a long-term solution and we need to undertake this work to ensure we comply with our legal requirements as an employer to provide safe accommodation for our staff and volunteers with adequate toilet and welfare facilities. Also, these buildings were not built with the intention of supporting the entire visitor footfall of the South Stack destination. When the original café was built, footfall was lower and there were local authority public toilets that served the non-café visitors. These toilets no longer exist and the only facilities now on site are those provided by the RSPB in the visitor centre. Consequently, this has had a major impact on the on-site sewage treatment. This is just one of many serious issues which need to be addressed if the visitor centre is to be able to stay open.

Perched in such a dramatic location with incredible wildlife and iconic views the current facilities are not able to show this off. However, the improved seating area and design in the café will bring the visitors closer to this landscape no matter what the weather...with floor to ceiling glass and no pillars to interrupt the view. The café will also be more accessible and will be on one level rather than the current split level.

How can the RSPB say it needs to introduce a car-parking charge at South Stack because you're running the site at a financial loss and then, at the same time, submit a planning application to rebuild a number of the buildings at a cost of several hundred thousand pounds? How can you afford it?

The introduction of a car park charge and this new planning application are linked with each other. The RSPB's Trustees have pledged this sum of money (see below) to invest at South Stack on condition that we are able to eliminate the annual debt we incur running the reserve and that we can demonstrate how we can cover the costs of the investment. This is good financial management: it would be unwise for anybody, let alone a charity, to make an investment at a site which is running at a loss. If we aren't able to deliver against these two objectives we will not be able to make such an ambitious investment at South Stack, with its ongoing benefits for visitors, for nature and for the local economy.

To make the case for this major investment at South Stack, we have had to put together a detailed business case to show our Trustees and funders – and to show financial responsibility to our members, supporters and the Charity Commission – that we have the sources of income over the long term to be able to afford it. Included in this business plan are all the activities which currently bring in income at South Stack: a café, a small shop, events, fundraising, land management that brings in agri-environment payments etc. The money generated from these activities is insufficient to eliminate our annual debt and provide sustainable income in the future, hence the need to introduce a car parking charge.

What will the work entail?

The existing two storey structure which houses the reserve offices, staff welfare facilities and public toilets at the RSPB South Stack Visitors Centre is reaching the end of its natural life. The building is no longer fit for purpose, is outdated, has a domestic grade kitchen, toilets that are not compliant with the Equality Act, has numerous leaks and temporary repairs that need a long-term solution. It was badly damaged by storms over the winter period which has compounded an already degrading building. We have made repairs where we can, but we have been forced to close the office space as it was seen as unsafe and have had to install a temporary facility for staff. This new staffing facility is also not fit for purpose in the long-term.

We are therefore proposing to partially demolish the two storey structure and part of the single storey structure (focusing on the rear portion of the property), replacing them with a purpose built modern facility for the 21st Century. The new building would include a café space, visitor toilets and storage on the ground floor. The first floor would consist of a meeting room, staff changing area, staff kitchen, staff toilets, storage and office space. This development will offer much improved facilities to staff and the 185,000 visitors to the reserve.

The new extension has been designed to reflect the local landscape. The new building, through ground-to-ceiling window panes, will further open-up the dramatic South Stack vista, encourage participation in, and showcase the natural beauty of, this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The workings of the building itself will be far more efficient and environmentally friendly than they are currently. It will be well-insulated and double glazed and include more efficient, water-saving and toilets.

The proposal will also replace an existing septic tank with a new sewage treatment plant. The position and type of sewage treatment work has been completed in close consultation with NRW and will dramatically improve on the existing and costly system which is reaching the end of its life.

What impact will it have on visitors to the reserve in the short terms while the building work is underway?

- If the application is granted consent, the visitor centre and the children's play area will be closed for a period of several months over next winter and spring whilst the building work takes place. We are still discussing what approach to take for visitors during the build period and whether there will be temporary catering available on site.
- Subject to practical considerations, there will be parking available throughout this period, although it will be more restricted as an area of the visitor centre car park will need to be used for contractors. The charge during the building period will be £1.50 one hour / £2.50 full day.
- We have proposed a steel framed structure to ensure the building goes up as quickly as possible to minimise disturbance.
- We will attempt to minimise construction to certain time restrictions within working hours on weekdays only to minimise noise disturbance to neighbours and will specify a clause on agreed working hours within the building contract. We will also specify that contractors provide details of how they will minimise nuisances as much as possible as part of building tender process.
- We will need to close the road for brief periods during the build / demolition. We will do our utmost to minimise this disturbance and communicate this well in advance.
- We will carry out demolition during winter months to minimise any impact on nesting birds
- We have undertaken an independent ecology survey to ensure that the build minimises impact on the SSSI.

If you have any further questions relating to any of the above, please email us at cymru@rspb.org.uk.