



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Joe Jenkinson
Head of Planning committee
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Planning Development Management
PO Box 634
Barnsley
S70 9GG

Our Ref: MC12995

27 July 2022

Dear Joe,

Re: Yorkshire Water Planning Application – Parking Charges at Langsett Barn Car Park

I would like to express my strong objection to a proposal by Yorkshire Water to introduce parking charges at their car park at Langsett Barn, adjacent to Langsett Reservoir. The application does not appear to be active on the BMBC planning portal as yet, but I understand that it will be submitted shortly.

Langsett Reservoir is an essential part of our region's water supply network, but it is also an important environmental asset that is enjoyed by local people and many who travel from further afield. The beautiful surroundings at Langsett attract ramblers, dog-walkers, cyclists and hikers and the car park is therefore very well used, especially at weekends and during fine weather.

If allowed to proceed, the introduction of parking charges by Yorkshire Water will have serious detrimental consequences for the Langsett area. If charges are imposed, it is inevitable – and understandable – that visitors will seek alternative parking. At peak times, the displacement of such a large volume of cars into the local area will create a dangerous situation along the A616, cause difficulties for local residents and threaten the viability of local businesses.

This is exactly what happened during the pandemic, when Yorkshire Water closed Langsett Barn car park during the first 'lockdown' and hundreds of walkers instead parked their cars along the verge of the A616. This caused severe danger both to traffic using the road, but also to passengers – including children - getting out of cars into the flow of traffic and walking along this major highway (which has a speed limit of 60 mph). If large volumes of cars regularly park along this verge, it is only a matter of time until a serious accident ensues.

Yorkshire Water representatives tell me that they will collaborate with Highways England to manage this risk, and that it may be necessary to install fencing to prevent parking along the verges of the A616 (at cost to the taxpayer). The Company also intends to work with South Yorkshire Police to enforce the restrictions (at further cost to the taxpayer). If attempts to prevent parking along the verges are successful, it will only create further parking displacement onto local roads, which will then become the responsibility of BMBC (at more cost to the taxpayer).

The displacement of parked cars onto local roads will also have serious consequences for the

community. Langsett is a small rural village with no weekday bus services and so almost all travel to and from the area is by car. At peak times, residents already struggle to park outside their own homes so, if visitor parking is displaced following the introduction of charges at Langsett Barn car park, disruption for the village will be severe. This issue has been raised by many Parish Councils in the Peak District National Park recently where the introduction of charging at other car parks in the Authority has caused serious issues for local communities and impacted local road networks.

The displacement of parking from the car park into the village is likely to restrict access of emergency vehicles to the smaller residential roads in Langsett. This is of particular concern to the elderly residents of the Parish and not an unfounded fear; South Yorkshire Police recently had to be called out to the area to tow offending vehicles away.

There is also significant concern about the impact that the proposed charging and subsequent parking displacement will have on local businesses. I recently visited the Waggon and Horses and spoke to the owners of this beautiful and historic public house, which has been a core feature of the community for over 300 years.

The owners are extremely concerned that, once charges are in place, visitors will seek to park in the pub car park, leaving their cars for a significant period of time and preventing customers from parking. Following on from two years of financial struggle during the pandemic, the owners of the Waggon and Horses are in no position to fund a parking warden of their own or any other system to prevent the use of the car park by non-customers. The owners in all seriousness believe that the pub will not survive this situation, and that this historic pub will be lost forever. The impact of the loss of this community and heritage asset cannot be overstated; losing the pub would rip the heart out of the village. There are similar concerns for the Bank View Café opposite the Waggon and Horses, a café that again will not survive if there is no parking available for customers at peak times.

To make matters worse, there appears to have been no formal consultation by Yorkshire Water with local residents. Langsett Parish Council report a previously close working relationship with Yorkshire Water and yet Councillors tell me that they were given no advanced sight of the proposal, which was disclosed to the Parish Council simultaneously with the issuing of the press release to the public.

Of course, the parking charges will also have an impact for visitors to the area. As inflation puts pressure on the cost of living, more and more people – particularly families with children and pensioners on fixed incomes – are looking for low-cost recreational activities. Whilst the charges may seem small for some, for others the cost will be prohibitive (especially for regular users such as dog walkers) and the result will be that fewer people have access to the health and wellbeing benefits offered by the reservoir and the surrounding area.

Yorkshire Water claim that they need to introduce parking charges in order to pay for a team of rangers to ‘tackle issues in the area, including incidences of fly-tipping, antisocial behaviour and misuse of our car parks’ and ‘to engage with visitors to ensure they have a safe and enjoyable time’. I have no doubt that the presence of the wardens would be a ‘nice to have’, but it is hardly essential in these straightened times and the company is not contractually obliged to provide such a service.

I understand that there may be a legal restriction that prevents Yorkshire Water from using operational funds from the water network to pay for recreational expenditure, and so the argument being made by the Company is that they must recoup the costs of the ranger programme from the general public via parking charges. However, last year, Yorkshire Water recorded an operating profit of £242 million and my understanding from DEFRA is that there are no restrictions on what this profit may be spent on. The cost of employing nine rangers would probably be in the region of £400,000 per annum, less than 0.2% of the profit figure; it is hard to justify the decision to pass on the costs of the rangers to the public, even if there was a legal requirement for Yorkshire Water to deliver this service.

Finally, whilst I understand from Yorkshire Water that the application to introduce charging at the Langsett Barn car park will be for a trial period of 18 months, it seems hard to believe that the new scheme will be anything other than permanent. The infrastructure required to facilitate parking payment, number plate recognition etc. will cost a six-figure sum; it is highly unlikely that Yorkshire Water will be minded to write off this sum and rip out the infrastructure at the end of a 'trial period', however unpopular or damaging the scheme may prove to be. I also understand that Yorkshire Water would not be required to offer any sort of financial assistance or compensation to local businesses whose trade was affected during the trial period.

If this is indeed intended to be a trial scheme, it would make more financial sense to employ a parking attendant to collect payments for a short period of time to monitor the impact of the scheme rather than investing a six-figure sum in what can only be described as permanent infrastructure.

In summary then, I urge you to refuse the planning application from Yorkshire Water to introduce parking charges at Langsett Barn.

The displacement parking caused by the scheme will risk the safety of the public, damage local businesses and reduce access to this important local asset. If the ranger programme is both necessary and desirable, Yorkshire Water clearly have the financial resources to support this without passing on the costs to the general public. Furthermore, the costs of dealing with the indirect effects of this proposal will fall on Barnsley Council, South Yorkshire Police and National Highways, causing further unnecessary expense to the public purse.

Yours sincerely,

Miriam

Miriam Cates MP
Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge