

Parking charges 'will hit business'

● Street meters plan 'will lead to fall in visitors'

BUSINESSES could be blighted in some of South Lakeland's busiest towns if on-street parking charges are rolled out, warn opponents.

Fears have been raised from all corners of Cumbria that charges will drive away shoppers, tourists and residents from the region's town centres.

Heavily-criticised plans to introduce charges to roads in Kendal, Windermere, Bowness and Ambleside are expected to be pushed through today (Thursday).

It comes despite county-wide petitions gathering thousands of signatures after the proposals were revealed by cash-strapped Cumbria County Council earlier this year.

Heidi Halliday, Liberal Democrat county councillor for Ambleside, will hand over a 800-strong petition today.

She has also organised a public march which will take place on July 4.

"This is not about politics," she said. "It's about protecting jobs and businesses. We all need to

stand together to show we are against this."

Exact roads and tariffs will be decided over the summer.

Homeowners are also expected to be hit with a £20 charge for parking permits.

"All our traders are just picking themselves up from the recession," said Brian Harrison, chairman of the South Lakes branch of the Federation of Small Businesses.

"The high street will likely be threatened as people are undoubtedly deterred by parking charges."

The authority says the move is necessary as it faces unprecedented cuts in central government funding.

It says it must make £24 million in savings in 2014-15.

County-wide the charges will generate £350,000 in the first year and £700,000 afterwards, say the council.

"It is not something we would do in ordinary circumstances if we were flush with cash," said leader of the Liberal Democrats coun Jo Stephenson. "But times are difficult and will continue to be difficult for the foreseeable future."

Coun Stephenson, who is also cabinet member for finance and a Windermere councillor, added: "Shopkeepers and tradesmen will think it might prove a disincentive

to visit towns but I think that is misjudged and exaggerated."

But Bill Smith, who sits on Windermere Town Council, said charges would represent a 'complete and utter downer for businesses and residents'.

A Lakes Parish Council meeting last month dubbed the charges an 'inadequately thought out money-making scheme which would have a severe impact on visitors, retailers and B&B owners'.

Adrian Faulkner, secretary of Windermere and Bowness Chamber of Trade, said its 90 members had reported a mixed view.

Council papers say rates will be set equal to or up to 20 per cent above the level of district off-street charging. It is hoped that would encourage people to use off-street car parks for longer stays and allow on-street locations to be 'pop and shop' spots.

STDC charge: £1.20 for up to one hour at most of its car parks but in Ambleside it is £1.50.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat cabinet will meet at Kendal County Hall today to agree criteria on how charges will work.

Other areas affected include Carlisle, Penrith, Barrow, Workington, Whitehaven, Maryport, Keswick and Cockermouth.

Solar-powered ticket machines could be used.



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