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## HOSPITAL CAR PARKING ROW

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Residents in a North Somerset village fear a proposal by health chiefs to begin charging hospital staff for car parking will heap congestion misery on to their streets.

Concerned householders in Uphill, near Weston-super-Mare, say they are worried that workers from neighbouring Weston General Hospital will park cars in the village's roads to avoid paying the hefty charges due to be imposed this year.

Bosses at the debt-ridden hospital are set to force 1,800 workers to pay to park the Grange Road site for the first time in the hope of raking in more than £350,000 a year.

The move is part of a raft of proposals to save almost £9 million before April 2008 so the health trust can break even for the year. But villagers in Uphill have slammed the plan and say it is they who will pay as doctors, nurses and health support staff choose to park for free in residential streets.

They say the problem is already serious as outpatients and visitors already cram the quiet streets of the picturesque village with their vehicles rather than face paying up to £4 to park in the grounds of the 320-bed hospital.

Hospital chiefs deny that anything has definitely been decided and insist staff will be consulted before any charges are made.

Carole Fisher, 62, of Uphill Road South, said: "One worker at the hospital spoke to me and said they are under the impression the charges are to be introduced on July 4.

"The situation is bad enough already and there have been times when it's been so crowded that buses can't get through because inconsiderate motorists park on both sides of the road.

"If people can avoid paying for car parking they will and why should hospital staff be any different?

"This is going to be an absolute nightmare and will turn this part of the village into a giant car park. Our councillors are doing what they can but because there are no parking restrictions in this part of the village, people are not doing anything illegal.

"Motorists do not always park considerately and often residents find themselves unable to get in or out of their drives.

"One neighbour has to park a car opposite his drive in the morning so that when he wants to take his caravan out, he knows there will be some space.

"I don't blame the staff as it is grossly unfair on them to have to pay to park where they work. The hospital is at fault and they should not make their problems our problems.

"But make no mistake, it is the people of Uphill who will have to suffer the consequences." A Weston Area Health Trust spokesman said: "We are in a consultation process with staff until Friday and at present no decision has been made one way or the other.

"The trust has written to the Uphill Village Society about the consultation and we are aware of the sensitivity of the issue."

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