

Report on Findings of the Public Consultation on Proposed Car Park Charging



January 2022

Summary

This document sets out a headline summary, details of responses to fixed questions and an analysis of information provided in free text boxes recorded from the public consultation on a proposal to introduce car park charging to Ashdown Forest. It does not include a view or a response to these findings. The intention is to present the information received through the public consultation to the Board of Conservators.

Respondents

- The questionnaire was completed by 2,786 respondents.
- 1,821 respondents made written statements through the questionnaire. These were broken down into 3,795 comments expressing perspectives, concerns, questions and suggestions.
- Respondents answered questions about their main activities, duration of visits, and number of years visiting the Forest. These were different from the 2016 Footprint Ecology Visitor Survey results. The number of correspondents that reported being residents and commoners may indicate that those replying to the consultation were not representative of the wider community of Forest users. This suggests a need for a level of care in extrapolating findings to the wider community of Forest users.

Ashdown Forest funding

- 70% of respondents felt that Ashdown Forest needed more funding.

Reject or support

- Based on the tick box section, 43% of respondents disagreed strongly with the proposed introduction of parking charges, while 11% disagreed slightly.
- 20% agreed strongly with the proposal with 24% agreeing slightly.
- Overall, 54% of respondents disagreed, while 44% agreed.
- Respondents could also make statements within a free text box. Of the 520 that made comments expressing views in this way on the introduction of parking charges, 38% rejected the proposal, 27% rejected it claiming Ashdown Forest should be free and open to all, while 34% accepted the proposal.

Proposed tariff levels

- 74% of respondents felt the proposed hourly or daily rates were “too high” or “a bit too high”. 19% felt they were “about right”. 1% felt they were “too low” or “a bit too low”.
- 77% of respondents felt the proposed annual pass cost was “too high” or “a bit too high”. 18% felt it was “about right”. 2% felt it was “too low” or “a bit too low”.
- 16% of respondents answered that they were “very likely” to purchase an annual pass, with 12% “quite likely”. Meanwhile 45% indicated they were “very unlikely” and 18% “not very likely” to purchase an annual pass.
- 17% of respondents who made written statements included comments saying that the proposed level of charges was too high and should be reduced for a range of reasons.

Key areas of concern for respondents

- Restricted access: 28% of all comments expressed concern that parking charges would lead to restrictions on access including: exclusion of low-income households especially pensioners and families on benefits, leading to expressions of concern that Ashdown Forest

would be accessible to the relatively wealthy only; exclusion due to requirement to pay using app-based systems; exclusion from physical, mental and spiritual health services, especially for those most in need.

- Operational questions and concerns: 25% of all comments related to operational aspects of the proposed scheme. The greatest area of concern was about displacement parking, which accounted for 15% of all comments made and featured in the statements of 32% of respondents who made written statements.
- Alternative ways to raise funds: 15% of all comments were on other ways to raise funds being preferable to parking charges and that these should be more actively pursued.
- Concessions: 10% of respondents' statements proposed that locals should receive concessions on charges, accounting for 61% of all comments focused on concessions.

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1. Introduction

The Business Case that accompanied the Public Consultation set out the funding position of Ashdown Forest, making the case for new and additional sources of revenue to allow Ashdown Forest to function as an organisation and manage the Forest effectively.

The Forest's governing legislation, The Ashdown Forest Act of 1974, requires the Conservators to regulate and manage the Forest as a place of amenity and resort. The withdrawal of the East Sussex County Council funding removed the guaranteed source of funding to achieve this. The Act does, however, allow the Conservators to charge for cars parking on the Forest.

With a significant deficit in the 2021/22 budget, a long-term budget showing increasing shortfalls in funding and an uncertain charitable donation outlook, the Conservators had no option but to fully investigate charging for parking.

Based on a preliminary feasibility study, a more detailed business plan and proposal for a car park charging scheme were produced.

Following the publishing of the Business Case, Ashdown Forest undertook a public consultation process to investigate the perspectives of its users and other interested parties on the proposal to introduce car park charges. This consultation was primarily online, with the option for paper copies. It set out the primary elements of the proposed parking charge scheme followed by a questionnaire posing questions about a possible design.

The public consultation was advertised on the Forest and within local communities using posters, advertisements and social media and received considerable coverage in the media including television, radio and the printed media. It ran for 6 weeks between 26th October and 6th December 2021.

This report describes the key findings of the consultation.

It does not include a response or a view from the Conservators of Ashdown Forest to these findings. The intention is to present the information received to the Board of Conservators to assist in their decision-making process.

2. The respondents

This section looks at the information coming from questions related to the respondents themselves. The software underpinning the online questionnaire survey provides simple counts and the relative proportions of responses given¹.

Collecting information on Forest users who responded to the questionnaire was important in understanding the context of the responses given to questions about the proposed charging scheme. It also allowed comparisons of the make-up of respondents to the questionnaire with Forest users interviewed during the Footprint Ecology 2016 Visitor Survey².

A series of questions about the users of Ashdown Forest and their use of the Forest started the consultation. By comparing responses to these questions, which duplicated questions used in the 2016 Visitor Survey, it is possible to determine how typical of 'the average Forest user' respondents

¹ Citizen Space, provided by Delib. <https://www.delib.net>

² Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey, 2016. Prepared by Footprint Ecology for Wealden District Council under the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) programme.

to the public consultation were. The Forest visitors interviewed in 2016 were a random selection of people physically visiting the Forest at the time of the survey. Respondents to this consultation were a self-selected group and may have different characteristics to Forest users as a whole. Their views and perspectives may also differ from Forest users in general.

a. Main activities carried out by respondents when visiting the Forest

Respondents were asked to indicate the primary activity they visited Ashdown Forest for. Only single responses were permitted. Table 1 shows that over three quarters of respondents indicated that they visited the Forest to walk a dog or take a walk. 36% visited primarily to walk a dog while 42% of respondents indicated they visited to take a walk.

Findings in the 2016 Visitor Survey found that 69% visited to walk a dog with 18% visiting to walk. This variance suggests that respondents to the questionnaire differed in their use of Ashdown Forest to those interviewed during the 2016 Visitor Survey.

Respondents who indicated that they primarily visited the Forest for horse riding have been highlighted in Table 1 as the 2016 Visitor Survey did not give a specific option for this activity. 80 respondents indicated that they visited primarily to ride by completing the 'other' option box. This figure represents 2.9% of all respondents and is higher than the figure of 0.4% of visitors interviewed during the 2016 Visitor Survey who visited to ride.

Most of the remainder of respondents (9.4%) indicated that they visited for social purposes - spending time with friends and family. 3% visited for reasons directly related to the Forest as a conservation area (wildlife or birdwatching) and 2% used the Forest primarily for exercise other than walking.

This information assists in assessing responses to the set questions and the written statements related to the proposed parking charges scheme.

TABLE 1. Answers to: What is the main activity you undertake on Ashdown Forest?

Option	Total	Percent
Dog-walking	996	35.62%
Walking	1165	41.67%
Jogging / power walking	39	1.39%
Outing with family / picnicking	144	5.15%
Cycling	25	0.89%
Wildlife / bird watching	83	2.97%
Photography	39	1.39%
Meet up with friends	119	4.26%
Visiting the Forest Centre	12	0.43%
Other, please detail:	174	6.22%
Horse riding*	80	

* Horse riding as an activity was not included within the specific list of given activities in the questionnaire. The figure of 80 accounting for 2.86% of respondents was derived from responses made under the 'other' box on the questionnaire.

174 respondents indicated they visited the Forest for other reasons not included in the provided list of reasons for visiting. These, plus a further 45 respondents, provided more tailored or nuanced responses to why they visited the Forest. One or more of 253 reasons were given, scored under 34 categories.

39 respondents indicated they undertook multiple activities when visiting the Forest.

For example:

“Could I please say a combination of wildlife/landscape, dog walking, photography please. Because I can't separate them”.

Such responses suggest that some visitors have a multifaceted relationship with the Forest.

26 respondents made answers indicating that they were residents or lived on the Forest.

For example:

“I live here.”

“Our house is on the Forest”.

These answers suggest that these respondents set themselves apart from others spending time on the Forest as ‘visitors’.

74 respondents indicated one or more other reasons for visiting Ashdown Forest. 23 referred to enjoying nature, “being with nature” and in one case, “forest bathing”. Other reasons for visiting Ashdown Forest included historical and ecological research, volunteering, undertaking activities as a commoner, painting and others.

b. How long have respondents been visiting the Forest

Some respondents who provided written statements made specific mention of the length of time they had been visiting Ashdown Forest to explain their perspective to the idea of car park charges.

For example:

“Why should locals have to pay car park charges to walk on an area we have been using for years.”

78% of respondents indicated that they had been visiting the Forest for more than 10 years. This is higher than the 48% of visitors interviewed during the 2016 Visitor Survey who made the same statement. Table 2 shows the number of years respondents had been visiting the Forest. Those having been visiting the Forest for less than a year represent less than 2% of the 2,796 respondents.

Many of the written statements made by respondents gave a feeling of connection with the Forest based on a history of association. Long personal use of the Forest appears to be associated with stronger objections to car park charging.

For example:

“I feel saddened that our beautiful countryside is going to be charged for... I have lived locally for my entire life (59 years!) and have enjoyed visiting Ashdown Forest on a regular basis.”

TABLE 2. Answers to: How long have you been visiting Ashdown Forest?

Option	Total	Percent
6 months or less	25	0.89%
Between 6 months and 1 year	26	0.93%
Between 1 year and 3 years	96	3.43%
Between 3 years and 5 years	146	5.22%
Between 5 and 10 years	301	10.77%
More than 10 years	2190	78.33%
Don't know / not sure	12	0.43%

c. Duration of visits

There is variety within the duration of visits to the Forest. Duration is likely to be linked to the nature of the activity being undertaken.

A small number of respondents mentioned stopping for 10 or 15 minutes to buy an ice-cream, take a break on their journey home, or just to sit in their car to eat their lunch.

Table 3 shows that over half of respondents indicated that their normal visit lasted between one and two hours with a further quarter indicating they usually spent between two and three hours on the Forest. These results deviate from the results of the 2016 Visitor Survey. That survey found that over half of those interviewed (59%) had, or intended to spend, less than an hour visiting on that occasion.

This discrepancy may demonstrate a difference between what people think their behaviour is and what their behaviour actually is. This is found in other datasets around habits and activity. These findings may also indicate that a higher proportion of respondents are drawn from those who spend more time on the Forest than those who spend less time.

TABLE 3. Answers to: How long do you normally spend when you visit Ashdown Forest?

Option	Total	Percent
Less than 30 minutes	9	0.32%
Between 30 minutes and 1 hour	336	12.02%
Between 1 hour to 2 hours	1471	52.61%
Between 2 hours to 3 hours	718	25.68%
More than 3 hours	240	8.58%
Don't know / not sure	22	0.79%

d. Frequency of visits

Table 4 shows that 44% of respondents are frequent visitors to the Forest, visiting at least weekly. This is lower than the 63% that reported visiting at least weekly when interviewed during the 2016 Visitor Survey.

The small number (75) of respondents that answered “other” mainly indicated that they were living on the Forest and therefore did not “visit” even if they spent time on it (28). This group are likely to

be the same respondents who indicated that they did not “visit” Ashdown Forest as they lived on it or were residents.

A further 16 respondents indicated that they had been visiting less frequently than usual due to the Covid 19 pandemic, while seven respondents answered that they were visiting less due to illness or age.

TABLE 4. Answers to: In the past year, roughly how often have you visited Ashdown Forest?

Option	Total	Percent
Daily	294	10.52%
Most days (180+ visits)	308	11.02%
1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)	622	22.25%
2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)	577	20.64%
Once a month (6-15 visits)	501	17.92%
Less than once a month (2-5 visits)	377	13.48%
Don't know	32	1.14%
First visit	10	0.36%
Other, please detail	75	2.68%

e. Impact of Covid 19 on visits

A question was put to determine how the Covid 19 pandemic had changed people’s frequency of visits.

Table 5 shows that 66% of respondents indicated that the pandemic had not changed the frequency of their visits. Of the 31% that did indicate a change, two thirds indicated they had visited more frequently during the pandemic than before.

TABLE 5. Answers to: Has the coronavirus pandemic changed how often you visit Ashdown Forest?

Option	Total	Percent
No, visiting the same as before	1852	66.24%
Yes, visiting more	547	19.56%
Yes, visiting less	340	12.16%
Don't know	57	2.04%

f. Future visits

The majority (73%) of respondents indicated that there would be no change to the frequency of their visits in the future (Table 6). Of those that did suggest there would be a change, 13% indicated that they would visit more frequently with 5% suggesting they would reduce their visits in the future.

TABLE 6. Answers to: Do you think your visits to Ashdown Forest will change in the future?

Option	Total	Percent
No, will visit the same as before	2029	72.57%

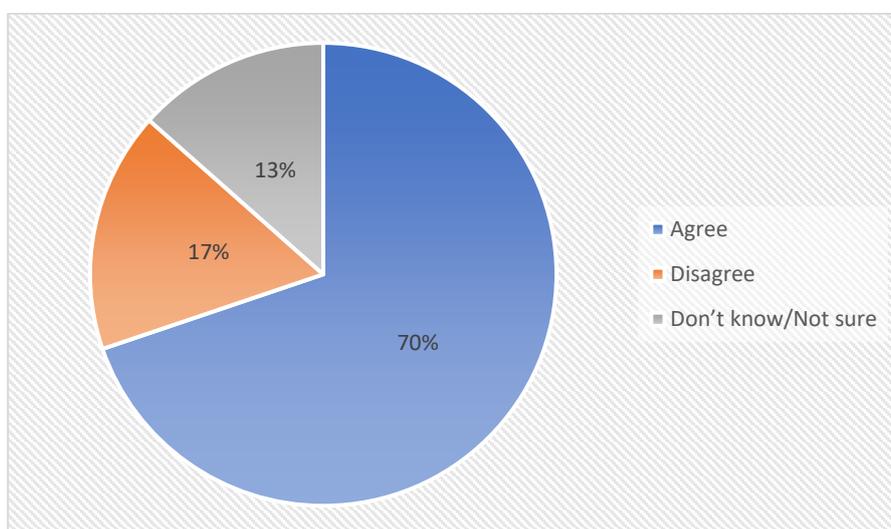
Yes, will visit more often	368	13.16%
Yes, will visit less often	138	4.94%
Don't know	261	9.33%

The responses to the questions shown in Tables 5 and 6 suggest the increase in visitor numbers over the past year will be extended into the future.

g. Funding requirements for Ashdown Forest

Table 7 shows that 70% of respondents agreed with the statement that Ashdown Forest needed more funding, with more than half of these indicating strong agreement with the statement. 17% of respondents disagreed that Ashdown Forest needed more funds to manage its amenity and conservation functions adequately.

Figure 1. Proportions of respondents agreeing or disagreeing that Ashdown Forest needed increased funding



13% of respondents answered that they were unsure or didn't know whether Ashdown Forest required additional funding.

TABLE 7. Answers to: "Ashdown Forest requires increased funding to be managed as a place of public amenity and nature conservation." How far do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Option	Total	Percent
Agree strongly	1106	39.56%
Agree slightly	845	30.22%
Disagree slightly	253	9.05%
Disagree strongly	217	7.76%
Don't know/not sure	375	13.41%

h. Connections to Ashdown Forest related bodies

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had any formal connections to Ashdown Forest or related organisations by specifying whether they were commoners, residents, members of the Friends of Ashdown Forest, or donors to The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) (Table 8).

22% stated a connection to one or more of these groups. The largest number, representing nearly 8% of respondents, were members of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. As membership of this charity stands at around 800, members of Friends of Ashdown Forest are more highly represented amongst respondents than they are amongst Forest users in general.

The same is true for the 11% of respondents that indicated they were commoners and/or residents of Ashdown Forest.

Interpretation of the survey's findings requires consideration of the make-up of respondents as these were not a randomly selected sub-set of all Forest users.

TABLE 8. Answers to: Are you any of the below?

Option	Total	Percent
A Commoner of Ashdown Forest (pay an annual Commoner's Rate)	151	5.40%
A Resident of Ashdown Forest (pay annually to access your property)	153	5.47%
A member of the Friends of Ashdown Forest	211	7.55%
A donor to the Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF)	75	2.68%
A member of the Board of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest	5	0.18%
Not Answered	2305	82.44%

3. Perspectives on proposed car park charges

These questions form the part of the public consultation where information is gathered on the attitudes of respondents towards the proposed car park charging scheme.

a. Agreement or disagreement with charging

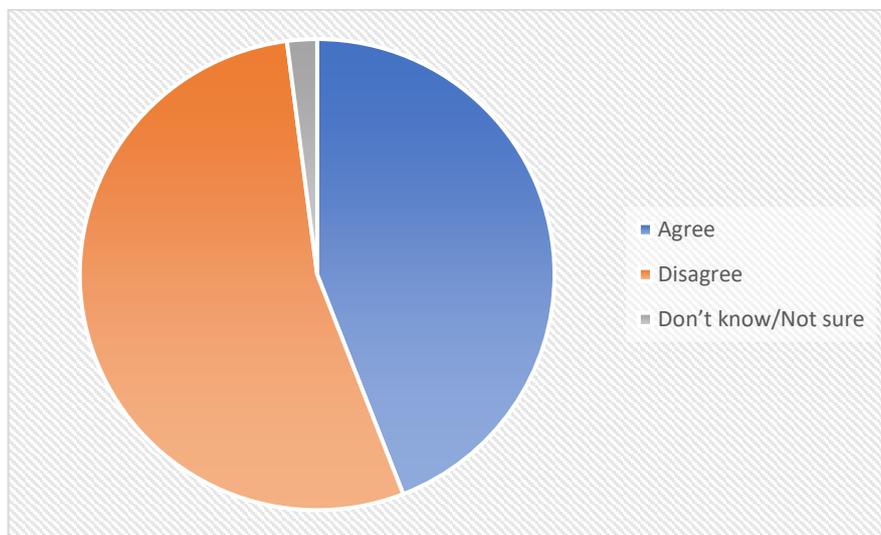
This question provides the most basic measure of the degree of support for, or rejection of, the idea to introduce car park charging on Ashdown Forest amongst respondents.

Table 9 shows that 1,203 respondents "disagreed strongly" with the idea of introducing car park charging. This represents over 40% of all responses.

20% of respondents, "agreed strongly" with the proposal to introduce car park charging.

The subject of car park charges produced strong responses with 60% of respondents giving answers indicating strongly held positions. The remaining 40% indicated less strong opinions on the key question. Nearly a quarter of respondents "agreed slightly" with the proposal while 10% "disagreed slightly" with it. When grouped with the strongly held positions, 54% of the respondents disagreed with the suggestion of introducing parking charges while 44% agreed.

Figure 2. Proportions of respondents agreeing or disagreeing with the introduction of parking charges



57 respondents (2%) indicated that they were unsure or didn't know what to think about the introduction of parking charges.

TABLE 9. Answers to: After reading why the Conservators of Ashdown Forest are considering introducing a car park charging scheme, do you:

Option	Total	Percent
Agree strongly?	551	19.71%
Agree slightly?	682	24.39%
Disagree slightly?	303	10.84%
Disagree strongly?	1203	43.03%
Don't know/not sure	57	2.04%

b. Proposed charging levels

The questionnaire provided information on the proposed levels of charging should a decision be made to introduce charges. Based on the 'medium tariff' proposed in the Business Case these were:

- £2.00 for up to 1 hour
- £2.50 for up to 2 hours
- £4.00 for up to 4 hours
- £6.00 for all day (16 hours)

An annual parking pass was set at £80 to £100 in the medium tariff.

Respondents were asked what they thought about these charges, one question looking at the hourly and daily tariffs proposed and another looking at the proposed cost of an annual pass.

Table 10 shows that a majority of respondents felt the hourly charges were high, with over half finding them "too high". This is compared to 11 respondents who thought the charges were "too

low” and 24 who thought them ”a bit too low”. 19% of respondents considered the charges to be ”about right”.

Table 11 shows responses to the proposed cost of an annual pass. 52% of respondents found the cost ”too high” and 22% found it ”a bit high”, with 19% finding it ”about right”.

TABLE 10. Answers to: After reading about the need to increase the budget of Ashdown Forest to keep it open and safe for visitors and ensure its protection, do you feel the proposed rates for proposed car park charges are:

Option	Total	Percent
Too high?	1446	51.72%
A bit high?	628	22.46%
About right?	528	18.88%
A bit low?	24	0.86%
Too low?	11	0.39%
Don't know/not sure	159	5.69%

TABLE 11. Answers to: Do you feel the proposed rate of between £80 and £100 for any annual car park pass is:

Option	Total	Percent
Too high?	1626	58.15%
A bit high?	535	19.13%
About right?	490	17.53%
A bit low?	32	1.14%
Too low?	14	0.50%

c. Likelihood of buying an annual parking permit

Table 12 shows that 63% of respondents indicated that they may choose not to purchase an annual parking pass. 45% answered that they would be ”very unlikely” to purchase an annual pass.

TABLE 12. Answers to: How likely would you be to buy an annual parking pass?

Option	Total	Percent
Very likely?	454	16.24%
Quite likely?	332	11.87%
Not likely?	492	17.60%
Very unlikely?	1258	44.99%
Don't know/not sure	260	9.30%

d. Location and type of parking machines

This question puts two considerations together, the first being the suggestion to place parking machines within five of the largest car parks, and the second being that they would take card or phone payments only with no option to pay using cash.

Table 13 shows that 20% of respondents “agreed strongly” with the proposal and 41% “disagreed strongly”. With the “agree/disagree slightly” answer added the result shows 50% of respondents disagreeing with the proposed type and placement of the machines and 40% agreeing.

There is additional information provided by respondents in their written statements about this section (see Section 4.c.I below).

TABLE 13. Answers to: Do you agree with the proposed placement and design of payment machines?

Option	Total	Percent
Agree strongly?	555	19.85%
Agree slightly?	567	20.28%
Disagree slightly?	256	9.16%
Disagree strongly?	1144	40.92%
Don't know/not sure	274	9.80%

e. Timing for which car park charges apply

The proposal for the times over which car park charges would apply were from dawn to midnight on every day of the year.

Table 14 shows that 60% expressed slight or strong disagreement, compared with 35% who expressed slight or strong agreement. It is not possible, from the question asked, to determine whether support or rejection related to the proposed times, the proposed days or both.

Additional text comments provided by respondents are within Section 4.c.VI.

TABLE 14. Answers to: Do you agree with the days and times when it is proposed that charges would apply?

Option	Total	Percent
Agree strongly?	586	20.96%
Agree slightly?	405	14.48%
Disagree slightly?	308	11.02%
Disagree strongly?	1384	49.50%
Don't know/not sure	113	4.04%

point being made. This method required the textual material to be interpreted to allow it to be scored. This creates the potential for a degree of error in interpretation.

This process of representing and scoring ideas expressed does, nonetheless, allow the relative frequency with which different points were made to be calculated, giving an indication of their importance to the respondents as a group.

For example, of the total number of 3,795 separate comments scored, 558 expressed concerns about displacement parking, while 26 objected to the proposal to allow motor bikes to park for free. Both express concerns or positions but the first was made by a larger proportion of the respondents who made written comments than the second.

b. Comment categories

As each comment was read, identifiable positions, concerns or sentiments were identified. These were scored under a series of headings established to represent them. If a suitable heading was already established, comments were scored under it. If a comment represented a new perspective or issue unable to be reasonably accommodated under an existing heading, a new heading was established. Sometimes, an existing heading was adjusted or expanded to allow similar comments to be scored together to avoid a proliferation of narrow headings.

The 1,821 statements made were scored under a total of 46 headings. To facilitate reporting, these were divided into eight higher order categories which form the basis for the following presentation of findings.

A total of 3,795 comments were scored with an average of 3.4 comments per written statement made. 39% of statements comprised a single comment, indicating these respondents were concerned primarily with a single issue. Others made multiple comments with one respondent making nine different comments in their statement.

c. Findings

The number of comments scored under each of the categories established are presented.

Each section provides the number of different comments made and gives examples of respondents' comments selected to represent the nature of the comments scored under the different headings. These are direct quotes from the written statements.

The scores for the different responses provided in tables allows comparisons to be made within and between categories, and indicates which issues, questions or concerns seemed to be most important or significant for the respondents as a group.

1. Reject or support car park charges

The analysis presented in Section 3 is of answers to the simple 'closed question' presented in the questionnaire. Respondents were required to 'tick' one of a small range of pre-determined answers on whether car park charges should be introduced. Table 9 shows that 54% of respondents rejected the introduction of parking charges while 44% supported it. The analysis presented here looks at the written statement of respondents and scored clear and unambiguous indications of rejection or support for the introduction of car park charges.

Statements considered to be against car park charges comprise negative statements against charges in principle and statements advocating for Ashdown Forest to remain freely open to all.

Rejection of charges

“I completely disagree with charges for using this outside space.”

“I feel strongly that parking should remain free in all car parks.”

Advocating free access

“The whole point of the Forest is that access is free.”

“Please don’t don’t do this. Part of the beauty of the forest is its Accessibility!”

Support for charges

“I think paid parking is a good idea.”

“I think it is an excellent idea to charge for parking. I understand the outlay may be high to start with but a worthwhile investment to help upkeep.”

As shown in Table 15, of the 1,821 respondents who made written comments, 520 (29%) made a comment that was sufficiently focused on the specific issue of the introduction of charging for parking to be scored as demonstrating rejection of or support for this. The majority of respondent statements, therefore, made comments that focused on other issues or perspectives or were more nuanced such that their position on the basic question on whether or not charges should be introduced could not be clearly determined.

Of those whose position could be clearly determined, 38.5% rejected car park charging in principle, 27.1% held that access to the Forest should be free and parking should therefore be free, and 34.4% supported car park charging in principle.

TABLE 15. Scores for rejection of or support for car park charges

	Rejecting car park charges	Demanding free access for all	Supporting car park charges
Number of responses	200	141	179
% of all respondents	7.15	5.04	6.40
% of respondents who made statements	10.98	7.74	9.83
% of all comments made	5.27	3.72	4.72

II. Restrictions on access

A wide range of comments addressed perceived impacts relating to access to Ashdown Forest and questions around how car park charges may alter this. Comments often referred to Ashdown Forest being an area for all people to enjoy and benefit from, and that restricting this in any way was a concern. These comments, where clear and unambiguous, were scored as a rejection of car park charges and entered into Section 4.c.I above. More nuanced comments were scored as indicating various concerns over restrictions on access to Ashdown Forest.

The range of comments considered to be referring to issues of access were classified as concerns related to affordability, the technology of charging, health and wellbeing, and causing people to stop or reduce their use of Ashdown Forest.

Altogether, as shown in Table 16, concerns around restrictions on access accounted for a total of 1,091 comments, were made by almost two thirds (60%) of those respondents who made written statements and represent 29% of all the comments made.

TABLE 16. Scores for comments related to perceived restrictions on access

	Afford-ability	Exclusivity	Technology	Health & Wellbeing	Deter visitors	Totals
Number of responses	307	290	205	134	155	1,091
% of respondents who commented	16.86	15.93	11.26	7.36	8.54	59.94
% of comments made	8.09	7.64	5.40	3.53	4.08	28.74

Affordability

The largest number of comments scored as indicating concerns over access, representing 8% of all comments made, were expressions of concern that proposed charges for parking, whether hourly or daily tickets or annual passes, were too high. Table 16 shows that 17% of those respondents who made a statement raised concerns over affordability and made suggestions for reducing charges to what they considered a more reasonable level. Some respondents indicated that the proposed charges were reasonable or too low.

Linked to concerns over affordability were suggestions that introducing charges at this time might be reconsidered in light of the changing financial position of many households.

“I understand the need for funding, but do you really need to charge so much?”

“I think that the payments proposed are too high.”

“I think a lower annual charge would be more realistic and you are less likely to antagonise regular users.”

“Many families I know would be unable to enjoy the forest with their families if they have to pay to park as they wouldn’t be able to afford the cost of the numerous visits they make at present.”

“We have such natural beauty on our doorstep which I won’t be able to access if I have to continually pay for parking.”

Exclusion and exclusivity

16% of those who made written statements felt that individuals or households struggling financially would be unable to pay the proposed charges (Table 16). Groups mentioned as being unable to afford to purchase hourly tickets or annual passes and who would therefore be excluded from the Forest included old age pensioners, families on low incomes, families on income support or benefits, children and young people living in low-income households, and the poor in general. Most of these

comments were from third parties raising the point on behalf of others. However, 59 respondents noted that they personally felt they would be unable to afford to pay the charges and would stop or reduce their visits.

Associated with concerns over the affordability of the proposed charges were concerns that Ashdown Forest would become an area exclusively for the wealthy or those who could afford to pay the charges, with poor households effectively excluded.

“I am concerned for those who are on universal credit and/or low wages.”

“This plan will make the forest accessible for middle class and up but those counting pennies won’t be able to access it.”

“On a personal basis I am concerned that as a pensioner my access to a public open space would be severely curtailed.”

“As a single parent, I just can't afford to pay so much on top of all the other increases and I will have to say the saddest goodbye to the forest we love.”

“Cruel to make the enjoyment of nature elitist by charging; you have no way of knowing how much people can afford.”

Exclusion by technology

Fears were expressed by 205 respondents (11% of those who made written statements) that the payment systems proposed would exclude people, especially older people who would struggle to make payments for parking using mobile phone apps and websites (Table 16). Some suggested that not accepting cash discriminated against older visitors.

It was also suggested that mobile phone services might not be good enough for the payment apps to work reliably. A small number of respondents noted that they would not normally carry bank cards or mobile phones with them during their visits.

Nested within these concerns were perspectives that having to arrange payments in advance of a visiting or carrying credit cards and phones would reduce the sense of spontaneity and freedom associated with visiting Ashdown Forest – these concerns are discussed further in Section VII below.

“Many older people do not have smart phone”

“Phone signal is poor to non-existent on most of the forest so I can foresee issues with being unable to purchase tickets”

Exclusion from health and wellbeing benefits

A number of respondents (7% of those who made written statements) referred to the importance of Ashdown Forest for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of its visitors, and raised concerns that parking charges would prevent or reduce access to these (Table 16). It was felt that low-income households might be especially in need of access to Ashdown Forest to help them deal with the challenges of their circumstances, and that these households were the most likely to struggle to pay the parking fees proposed.

“We know the importance to our physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing that being able to walk freely in nature offers. It would be a dreadful shame if the barrier of parking fees would exclude people from this.”

“The general well-being generated by thousands walking across Ashdown every week is invaluable for the individuals concerned but also for the NHS and social services.”

“These charges will exclude possibly the people who most need to access this area.”

Exclusion from nature

A small number of respondents expressed concerns that parking charges would exclude or reduce access to nature. These concerns were expressed in the context of the importance of experiencing nature for understanding of, relationships with, and support for conserving nature. Respondents noted that personal experience of nature was or should be a critical part of education for children and young people.

“Ashdown forest is a wonderful area for families to bring children.”

“Families may be forced to keep their children out of our Forest, thereby losing a generation of committed Forest users and lovers.”

“I hate the idea of young local children not discovering the wonders of the forest due to cost.”

Reducing visitors and visits to the Forest

Expanding from concerns related to different forms of exclusion, 155 respondents, representing nearly 10% of all those who made a written statement, indicated that they or other Forest visitors would stop visiting the Forest or reduce the number of visits (Table 16). Individuals expressed personal regret at this, while others presented this as a form of resistance or to express anger at the proposal to charge for parking. Others raised the concern that reduced numbers of visitors would undermine the revenue earning intention of the proposal while some raised the concern that reduced numbers of visitors would have a negative impact on local businesses.

A number of respondents questioned whether reducing the number of people using the Forest was not in fact the motive behind the proposal for parking charges.

A small number of respondents indicated that a reduction in the number of visitors would be a good thing, either suggesting that this would be good for the Forest in terms of nature conservation, or good for those that used the Forest for recreation as it would become less busy and, noted by some, there would be fewer dogs.

“I will not be using the forest for regular walking if I have to pay to park which is very sad.”

“I am convinced that parking charges will reduce use of the Forest in the long term.”

“By introducing the high charges as suggested will deter people from visiting the forest. Maybe this is your intention.”

“I don't think I would use Ashdown Forest for my regular dog walking if I had to pay for parking. I feel this may be a common thought.”

“Visitors from outside the area will reconsider visiting the Ashdown forest, choosing to travel elsewhere for regular exercise, resulting in lost revenue for the forest and local business.”

III. Operational questions and concerns

Respondents expressed concerns that relate to operational and practical questions of introducing and managing parking charges. Concerns over mobile phone cover have been discussed above in relation to access. However, they are also related to the day-to-day operations and use of a car park payment system. Headings used to score comments related to operational aspects of a parking scheme identified them as concerns over displacement parking, the distribution of parking machines resulting in pressures on some car parks, and questions over the feasibility of running a parking charge system and implications of contracting a professional firm to operate it.

Table 17 shows that 959 comments were interpreted as raising operational concerns, meaning that over a quarter of all comments made by respondents included reference to such concerns, and that over half of all written statements raised questions or concerns about the operation of the proposed scheme.

TABLE 17. Scores for comments related to operational concerns

	Displacement parking	Car Park pressures	Profit, costs, and administration	Totals
Number of responses	588	244	127	959
Percentage of respondents who made statements	32.29	13.40	6.97	52.66
Percentage of total comments made	15.49	6.43	3.35	25.27

Displacement parking

Concern around displacement parking and its impacts was the most frequently mentioned in respondents statements (Table 17). Concerns that Forest users would avoid car parks to avoid having to pay were mentioned in a third of written statements and accounted for 15% of comments scored.

Respondents believed cars would be parked on roads and verges, in laybys and on Forest tracks. Some respondents wrote saying that they themselves would do this. Others noted that people would park in local villages and on streets in towns near the Forest. Some Forest residents were worried that their access tracks would become blocked or that they would not be able to enter or exit their properties.

In addition to damaging the road verges, with aesthetic, conservation and financial implications, respondents were worried that roads would become blocked and that driving on them would be unsafe.

“I believe introducing these charges will simply lead to large numbers of vehicles being parked on the road in order to avoid payment. This will lead to congestion and potentially cause accidents.”

“Cars destroyed verges and made it difficult to access car parks, as well as endangering the livestock and affecting the wildlife.”

Car Park use by visitors

244 respondents were concerned that the proposed system would lead to changes in the way people used the Forest’s car parks (Table 17). Of these concerns, a number were the result of misunderstanding the proposed scheme - respondents thought the proposal was to make charges on five large, busy car parks only rather than on all car parks. This, it was noted, would lead to pressure mounting in the smaller car parks. Some respondents suggested placing parking machines in all car parks to avoid this. Others used the concern to argue against the introduction of charges.

Respondents were also concerned that the five car parks with machines would become crowded as people queued to get parking permits. It was also noted that having people come to one car park to get their ticket and then drive to another to walk would increase the amount of driving across the Forest creating negative impacts for the Forest and its users.

“The five car parks where the machines are will get very busy as people once parked will stay there.”

“Queues of cars on busy days waiting to buy a parking ticket at the big 5 car parks could be very long just to then drive & park in a smaller car park? Doesn't make sense!”

“...people paying by card should have an extra 15 minutes to allow them to relocate to a car park of their choice ... avoid visitors driving more miles in the forest”

Profits, costs and administration

127 respondents raised questions around the business case made for parking charges. Suggestions made were that the scheme was not financially viable, others that the investment cost would be high, some that the cost of administration of the scheme would erode income, and some that policing to ensure compliance would be too expensive. In many cases these reservations were expressed as arguments against introducing parking charges and for raising funding through different means.

A sentiment expressed by a number of respondents was that it was undesirable or unacceptable for a commercial company to be used to manage any parking scheme. Negative comments were made about car park charging companies and their involvement rejected.

“How would this be policed and what percentage of the parking will go to the car park policing and how much will Ashdown Forest make? I think it will not be viable”

“It seems counterproductive to install a parking system to raise funds when you will then be paying out to contract an external parking management company to patrol the car parks.”

“I am extremely concerned that you propose paying a third-party organisation to enforce parking. Such organisations are generally very inflexible and avaricious which could be very damaging to the reputation of the Forest.”

“Private parking management companies have experience, but also high antipathy from users.”

IV. Alternative fundraising ideas

Though some respondents made statements arguing that more funding for Ashdown Forest was not needed, this was a minority view (Table 7). Such comments were generally made in the context of dissatisfaction with the management of Ashdown Forest in general that are discussed in Section 4.c.VIII.

Comments were made that alternative ways of meeting Ashdown Forest’s need for additional funding should be pursued. Respondents suggested this as an alternative to car park charging though some suggested fundraising activities could be in addition to car park charging. Table 18 shows that 551 respondents, a third of those who made written statements, questioned whether there were not other and better ways to fund Ashdown Forest’s needs, whether sufficient attention had been paid to exploring these, and suggesting a delay in imposing parking charges until a concerted effort had been made to raise funds through charitable donations, sponsorship and commercial activities.

The range of responses related to fundraising were grouped under three headings: those that simply suggested Ashdown Forest should find an alternative to car park charges; those that indicated that government should fund the Forest; and those that suggested licensing additional activities on the Forest.

TABLE 18. Scores for comments related to funding and fundraising

	Other ways to fund the Forest	Government to fund the Forest	License more activities	Totals
Number of responses	361	151	39	551
Percentage of respondents who made statements	19.82	8.29	2.14	30.26
Percentage of all comments made	9.51	3.89	1.03	14.52

Other way to raise funds

Table 18 shows that 361 respondents felt that Ashdown Forest should be funded by ways other than parking charges. Such comments accounted for around one in ten of all comments made. Though

the majority of respondents did not elaborate on ideas for how this could be done, a number did, suggesting ideas ranging from opening a café at the Forest Centre, to charging horse riders more, to selling plots for natural funerals and pet burials (see Annex 1 for a list of these ideas).

The most common alternatives put forward to parking charges can be summarised as ‘pursuing funding through donations’. Forest users should be encouraged to make voluntary contributions to cover the costs of managing the Forest. Some respondents argued that Forest users were not aware of the Forest’s financial plight but if they were made aware they would donate through a range of mechanisms. The Friends of Ashdown Forest was cited as an important channel for donations. Volunteering was proposed as a way to reduce the costs of management and thus the need for additional funds.

A small number suggested that those who already donate, either directly or through the Friends of Ashdown Forest, or who volunteer for the Forest, would stop doing so, making the situation worse.

It was suggested by some respondents that the proposal to charge for parking was the result of insufficient imagination and demonstrated a lack of business knowledge within the organisation. Making better use of the Forest’s resources and attractions was proposed.

The proposal to introduce parking charges was also cited as demonstrating the Conservators’ failure to grasp the opportunity to create a supportive community of beneficiaries of the Forest.

“There are many other more creative ways to raise money that would not exclude local people from the forest and may indeed enhance the amenities available to the local community and schools and beyond. This requires vision, good project management and fund-raising skills and may require many different projects.”

“I had to search the website hard for the information on how to donate money so I think if this were better advertised and utilised it would be a better system for locals who use the forest regularly to give back.”

“It is too easy to just come to the forest and go away again. We need to take ownership of the forest and become involved by paying for membership. Perhaps that could be encouraged rather than having forced parking fees.”

“It is understandable that you need to find more funding, but this is a lazy, knee-jerk way to achieve that.”

“If I bought a permit, I would probably have to cancel my membership of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. I’m sure others may be in a similar position. I cannot afford to do both.”

Government should fund the Forest

151 respondents, nearly one in ten, argued that Ashdown Forest should be funded by government, whether central government, East Sussex County Council, or Wealden District Council. Most argued that this should come from their existing budgets though 21 respondents proposed a specific precept to be raised for Ashdown Forest.

Several respondents noted that local Forest users already paid high levels of tax and that car park charges amounted to a further tax. Wealden District Council was singled out as charging amongst the highest tiers of council rates in England and could be expected to fund Ashdown Forest.

“Local residents already pay for the Forest through Council Tax paid to ESCC - charging us for car parking means we pay twice.”

“It is not acceptable that ESCC are not funding the Conservators cost, after all the conservators are saving the council money which they would have to fund if the Conservators failed.”

“The government should be approached to subsidise the costs. If they want a healthy public then activity on the forest should be encouraged not discouraged.”

Other sources of income

As noted, some respondents backed up arguments for exploring alternatives to parking charges with suggestions for how this could be done. The range and scope of these are shown in Annex 1. There were some clear concentrations of interest for particular alternative sources of funds or support.

The most common suggestions proposed a range of means to boost voluntary contributions to Ashdown Forest. Respondents suggested that they and the public at large were unaware of the funding crisis and that now they were aware, donations would meet the Forest’s financial needs. Several respondents felt that the Conservators had failed to pursue in an effective way the large range of opportunities for generating charitable donations. Others referred to the role of the Friends of Ashdown Forest and how this could be developed. Expectations of the future role of the Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) were also referred to.

Some suggestions were made for raising funds through licensing specific activities on the Forest. 31 respondents, over 1% of respondents, suggested that mountain biking should be permitted on Ashdown Forest, most arguing that this could be licenced in the same way that horse riding is. Respondents proposed this as a way of raising funds but also as a way of encouraging more engagement with young people and supporting health and wellbeing.

Eight respondents suggested that licencing dogs on Ashdown Forest would be a significant source of income but also a way to help regulate the impact of dogs on the conservation of the Forest and on other users. It should be noted that this perspective, part of a larger narrative concerning the negative aspects of dog walking on Ashdown Forest, is evidence of the conflicting interests and perspectives of different users of Ashdown Forest.

The licencing of horse riding on Ashdown Forest was raised as an issue relevant to car park charges. Some respondents argued for increasing the cost of riding permits on the basis that the damage horses caused was a drain on Forest finances. Others argued that the value of riding on the Forest was worth more than the current charges. The majority of respondents who raised issues related to horse riding, however, argued for concessions on parking charges for those already paying to ride on the Forest (see Section V below).

“If you need to bring in an income maybe look at other ways such as opening up one area of the forest for cycling and charge for this.”

“I think the dog walkers who use it daily and make it difficult for others to enjoy should pay a licence fee to access the forest.”

“The annual riding permit could be increased as the current charge amounts to only a few pounds a week to ride in such beautiful surroundings.”

V. Concessions

271 respondents, 15% of those who made written statements, wrote about concessions. The proposal presented as part of the consultation process, proposed concessions for Blue Badge holders and motorcycles.

Only three concession headings registered high levels of support for specific proposed concessions.

TABLE 19. Scores for proposed concessions on parking permits

	'Locals'	Licensed horse riders	Residents / commoners	Others	Totals
Number of responses	165	47	29	30	271
Percentage of respondents who made statements	9.06	2.58	1.59	1.65	14.88
Percentage of total comments made	4.35	1.24	0.76	0.79	7.14

The most suggested concession was for 'locals' to be allowed to park for free or receive a significant discount. This was proposed by 165 respondents representing nearly 6% of respondents and 9% of those respondents who made written statements. Concessions for locals made up 61% of comments interpreted as related to the question of concessions. Locals were defined in different ways by different respondents. Some suggested that all East Sussex residents should be given a concession, some limited this idea to Wealden residents, while others put forward geographical areas for concessions which would be implemented using post codes or council rates bills.

47 respondents proposed concessions for horse riders arguing that they already paid for an annual permit to ride on Ashdown Forest and should not be charged to park on the Forest as well.

29 respondents proposed that residents and commoners should receive a concession as they already contributed to the income of Ashdown Forest through the fees they paid. This represents less than 10% of the 304 respondents who identified themselves as commoners and/or residents (Table 8).

Six headings represented concessions proposed for youth organisations (nine comments), volunteers (six comments), low emission vehicles (five comments), members of the Friends of Ashdown Forest (five comments), professional dog walkers (three comments), and under 18-year-olds (two comments).

A further two categories were established to score disagreement with the concessions proposed for motor bikes (26 comments) and blue badge holders (eight comments).

Respondents raised concerns about the affordability of parking charges for low-income households, which were discussed above in Section 4.c.II. Some suggested providing concessions for households that would struggle to pay the parking charges, and these were included within the scores discussed under issues around affordability.

“Local residents annual rate should be lower than is being considered.”

“Residents of the Forest should get a further discount on the parking.”

“I just would like to know what you would charge for horse boxes as we already have to pay to ride.”

“I would happily pay to visit the forest if there was a discounted rate for locals. I would happily pay for this through my council tax if it meant I could get a "residential pass". This way locals can still enjoy the forest, and visitors who come from afar can also contribute (granted at a higher rate).”

“Feel that motor cyclists should pay a parking fee too. After all they are still using the forest.”

VI. Changes to the tariff structures

The proposal presented to respondents in the questionnaire suggested a tariff for parking charges, responses to which have been discussed above (Section 4.c.II). The proposal also made suggestions for how, when and over what period charges would be made. Nearly 10% of respondents who made written statements, totalling 179, made suggestions for changes to how and when parking charges should be made. Though some of these suggestions were forms of concession, other comments proposed consideration of different forms of parking passes or changes to opening and closing hours for a range of reasons.

Suggestions made were diverse. Many respondents proposed making different charges at different times of day or different times of year. Some suggested that charges should be raised during busy times such as weekends or holidays. Some suggested the opposite.

Many respondents suggested that there should be free periods in the day or days in the week when people should be allowed to park for free, most commonly early in the morning or late in the afternoon. These suggestions were often made in the context of accommodating the interests of local Forest users including dog walkers who, it was suggested, were most likely to take short walks early or late in the day. Hence, charges for parking would be limited to, for example, 8 or 9am to 5 or 6pm. Some respondents suggested changes to these hours could be made according to the season.

52 respondents suggested that annual or other passes should be attached to a household rather than a vehicle. It was noted that many households owned two or three cars and different family members used them at different times for different reasons. To attach a fee to each car was felt to be unreasonable.

Some argued for a simplified system of charges, a single daily charge, or a half day and full day charge. Others proposed offering additional passes including weekly, monthly and seasonal passes. A weekend/weekdays pass was also proposed.

Some proposals were contradictory. Motivations for proposing changes were different, with some respondents hoping to make the Forest more accessible to local users, some hoping to make the system easier or less stressful to use, and some intending to make the system more effective at raising funds for the Forest.

One respondent suggested the idea of ‘charity passes’ that could be donated for allocation to low-income households to help them access the Forest.

“There should be a monthly direct debit concessionary scheme available to local people”

“... could you please consider reducing the hours that charges apply (maybe making it free to park up until an hour after sunrise and an hour before sunset?)”

“You could just charge Friday, Saturday and Sunday plus bank holidays/summer holiday when the forest is used more.”

“A daily ticket only would be easier to control”

“Most of the extra foot fall and vehicles occur during peak times weekends, why not have this charged and not during the weekdays - 10 till 4 pm free”

“Two car registrations per household but only one vehicle on the Forest at any time”

VII. Unintended consequences

A range of comments was interpreted as indicating concerns for consequences from introducing parking charges that might not have been considered or recognised as significant (Table 20).

TABLE 20. Scores for comments indicating concerns around changes in relations with and to Ashdown Forest

	Expect better services	Ugly and urban	Fixed times stressful	Commercial versus freedom	Fines change relations
Number of responses	81	95	47	39	12
Percentage of respondents who made statements	4.45	5.22	2.58	2.14	0.66
Percentage of total comments made	2.13	2.50	1.24	1.03	0.32

Better services expected

The first of these ‘unintended consequences’ shown in Table 20 is rather different from the remaining four and relates to expectations of improvements to services. Comments made by 81 respondents, almost 5% of those that made statements, express the view that a *quid pro quo* would be expected in return for acceptance of parking charges. Not only would the car parks need to be improved and maintained to a higher standard, but a range of other improvements were also suggested. The most common amongst these was the expectation that dog poo bins would be installed, but public toilets, bike racks and other facilities were also mentioned.

These comments indicate a connection between the introduction of charges and the state of repair of the car parks. At another level, however, these comments indicate a change in the relationship between Forest users and the Conservators. With the acceptance to pay for parking comes the expectations of a customer that a service will be provided.

“The introduction of dog waste bins, at least at the major car parks, would be welcome, and would help to reinforce the perception that the Forest is well managed and cared for.”

“If people are paying there will be an expectation that the car parks are in good condition and not full of huge holes.”

“Have you considered that by charging for parking the expectations of users will be raised and you will therefore need to potentially supply toilets, general waste and dog waste bins in the main car parks?”

Changing the Forest and users' relations to it

An important set of perspectives were interpreted as relating to concerns around how parking charges would change what the Forest “is” at a fundamental level.

95 respondents raised concerns that the machines and signs that would be needed to implement the system of charging would be ugly and urbanizing what otherwise is considered the wild and natural aspect of Ashdown Forest. This sentiment was also expressed in relation to fears that double yellow lines would be needed to control parking on roads and verges. Put together this set of concerns relates to the perceived importance of the Forest as a contrast to the increasingly contained and controlled countryside of the region.

“Care also needs to be taken to ensure that signage and infrastructure of the charging systems is sympathetically designed and installed not to detract from the natural beauty of the forest.”

“Parking charges is the urbanisation of the Forest. The reverence, awe and respect for this rare landscape would potentially be impacted. It would render the Forest little more than an NCP with some greenery.”

“The beauty of the forest is its timeless visual character cluttering it up with machines and more signs would detract from this.”

Respondents suggested that having to deal with making payments for parking in practical terms would negatively impact their experience of spending time on the Forest. Having to consider and plan for making payments would reduce the spontaneity of visiting the Forest. Managing a walk, in relation to the time paid, for would introduce stress to the experience of visiting the Forest, which was intended to be the opposite.

“What happens when your walk takes longer than the 3 hours you have paid for. Will wardens be incentivised to fine visitors not returning to their vehicles in time. Will we see families with children running across the forest to return to their cars before getting a ticket!”

“Whenever I go to the Ashdown Forest, I never plan how long I’m going to walk for. Having to decide this upfront or stressing about getting back to the car within your 1, 2hr etc slot would ruin the experience.”

“... having to either have money for machines or having to use a phone app to pay for parking (with poor phone signal) ... making it a stressful endeavour.”

Related to these concerns were suggestions that the nature of Ashdown Forest itself would be changed by the introduction of charges in abstract terms. The act of charging for parking introduced a commercial perspective to the Forest that would reduce users experience of 'freedom' while on the Forest and altered the 'wildness' of the Forest itself.

Related but distinct were comments that express concerns that having to pay parking charges would introduce stress to the experience of using the Forest, which would change the nature of the relationship between users and the Forest. Respondents were concerned by the necessity of managing a walk to fit in with the fixed-time tickets proposed by the scheme. Having to manage a walk in this way would be stressful and limiting and contrary to key values associated with a visit to Ashdown Forest. Respondents also commented that the threat of 'parking fines' due to overstaying their tickets, problems with the payment system or the feared punitive behaviour of car park management companies would create anxiety and change relationships with the Forest.

"When I go to use the forest for walking, I don't like to take any form of device or money with me."

"Any man-made installations should not be allowed to appear anywhere. How to ruin a day out - get a parking fine."

"I have lived close to the Forest for five decades. It is part of my habitat and I resent any attempts by you lot to urbanise and monetise it."

"Paying to visit would suck all the enjoyment out of visiting the Forest."

"It seems a great shame that, yet another spontaneous, healthy and free activity should have to become a pre-meditated decision based on the purse strings!"

VIII. Other perspectives, positions and points

Several respondents expressed perspectives, raised issues or made points that were important if not directly related to questions raised by the parking charges proposals.

They are worth considering here as they cast a different light on aspects of relations between Ashdown Forest and its users and therefore perspectives on the introduction of car park charges.

Criticism of the state of Ashdown Forest and its management

64 respondents used the opportunity presented by the consultation to voice concerns about the state of the Forest and its management generally. An important theme of these comments relates to the introduction of parking charges as they expressed opinions that the Conservators did not need more funding, either because they did not make good use of their current resources, or because the Forest should receive less, not more, management.

Many criticisms of the Forest's state and management were aimed at other users of the Forest. Resistance to or support for parking charges were expressed in terms of increasing or decreasing certain behaviours. The majority of this criticism was around the behaviour of dogs and by proxy their owners, and these in turn led to suggestions that parking fees could only be justified if dog poo bins were provided. However, negative comments were also directed to horse riding during the winter as this made some paths unwalkable, and at the policies and practices of the Conservators.

“All of these things have made us question why it is that attempting to raise more money by parking charges is necessary when being more efficient is probably more necessary.”

“No matter what [the Conservators] say they forget the word forest in its title going back hundreds of years and in most public trees and bushes are hacked down and cut up the ground by heavy machines and little attempt is made to correct this.”

“Ashdown Forest has been spoilt in recent years by dogs running wild and harassing walkers. Many dog walkers could not care less. I have been visiting the Forest for 40 years and it has never been so bad. If there are to be charges, then dog walkers should be charged more.”

Lack of public transport

22 respondents noted that the proposal to charge for parking was unfair as there was no other practical way of accessing the Forest. The lack of public transport should be addressed if parking charges were to be introduced to make it feasible for people to reach the Forest without driving there.

Environmental or ecological perspectives

A small proportion of respondents referred to the introduction of parking charges or how they would be implemented in terms of the Forest as a conservation area. Six respondents made comments suggesting that parking charges could be justified in ecological terms, or that the proposal to have just five ticket machines would result in additional driving on the Forest with negative environmental impacts.

Distrust of motives

A number of respondents objected to car park charges because of their distrust of the Conservators, of individuals believed to be involved in proposing the scheme, of local government, or of government and authority in general. Some respondents appeared to suggest that corrupt individuals would benefit directly from the income, while others suggested that the Forest was a private business and car park charges were designed to generate profits.

Embedded within these sentiments were concerns about the role of local government in the proposal to introduce parking charges to avoid their own obligations to fund the environment and public access to green spaces for recreation and health.

Several respondents were negative towards the consultation process, indicating that they believed the process was a deception, that all decisions had already been made, and that the questionnaire had been designed to restrict the public's opportunity to express their views

5. Conclusion

Many people gave up their time to fill out the consultation document and the Conservators of Ashdown Forest thank everyone who did. This document brings the findings of the consultation into one document. It does not include a response to or a view from the Conservators of Ashdown Forest to these findings. The intention is to present the information to the Board of Conservators to assist in their decision-making process.

Annex 1. Proposed ways to raise funds as alternatives to parking charges

The following ideas have been grouped from the 1,821 written statements provided by respondents. The majority were proposed as alternatives to the proposed introduction of parking charges.

The Conservators were urged through these suggestions to be "... creative, courageous and progressive ..." and avoid distancing a potential community of supporters through the imposition of parking charges. The Conservators were also encouraged to be "...transparent about costs and where money goes and use the talent that already exists" within local communities and Forest users.

It is understood that not all respondents will be fully aware of the detail with the Ashdown Forest Act 1974, the environmental restrictions on the Forest and the nature of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest as a statutory authority. All of these limit what is possible on the Forest. However, all the suggestions from the consultation have been included whether they would be possible to implement or not.

Suggestions have been grouped into categories.

Sponsorship and donations

- Link credit cards to Ashdown Forest
- Enrol Ashdown Forest in eBay donation process
- Place QR codes in prime locations
- Set up a way for people to donate
- Establish educational stands at all car parks, explaining what you do/what the forest provides, what we stand to lose etc. with a recommended donation
- A signage system in all the car parks, where one can contribute ANY amount via an APP
- Appeal more widely to the local population
- Offer membership and raise annual contributions toward upkeep and management
- Visitors should join Ashdown Forest Trust charity - £100 per annum for access
- Ask public using car parks through telephone permit system to make a donation in a donation box at the car park
- Encourage/enable charitable giving in support of the work of the forest
- Set up an APP to make it easy for people to donate
- Make a nominal charge for a day with the option to make a donation on top
- Develop a supporter package that included annual parking plus updates about your work with supporter badge for car
- Issue 'honorary' or 'donation' permits for those willing and able to 'donate' more than a 'lower' priced local permit
- Undertake a concerted 'donation drive' - adverts in local magazines, papers, Facebook pages
- Collections in local supermarkets
- Have a donation page via Amazon smile

Fundraising

- Access funding streams/grants for educational and/or environmental projects
- Access grants from DEFRA
- Access grants for the lotteries
- Find suitable benefactor living locally to cover the revenue lost from East Sussex Council.
- Obtaining income/sponsorship from businesses through corporate funding
- Sponsorship from local green businesses

- Sponsorship of car parks from local or national companies. A named wooden board underneath the car park they are sponsoring

Events and activities

- Give paid-for talks.
- Offer courses about the Forest and related interests
- Run paid courses to see and identify fauna and flora, fungi, birds, insects, etc.
- Promote special runs – e.g., ‘Pooh Bear Peaks Run’ – with running clubs that regularly use the Forest
- Run fun events for children in school holidays to learn about nature through hands on projects
- Educational trips for children and adults
- Guided rambles and historical tours
- Teddy bears picnics, Easter egg hunts, Santa's grotto with reindeer
- Woodland craft days
- Concerts
- Art classes
- Seasonal events - carol singing/Santa's grotto/Easter egg hunt/ Halloween festival
- Activities for families and children (around sustainability)
- Children's parties
- Art and craft workshops
- Pond dipping
- Pet zoo

Facilities

- Establish family interactive building, learning spaces.
- Have a tasteful tea stall with ability to donate to the upkeep of the Forest.
- Spaces for coffee outlets/small cafés (moveable) at the car parks
- Letting out an area for Forest Schools,
- Advertise the Ashdown Forest Centre more widely and stock local produce and items for sale that relate to the Forest and its surroundings
- Cafe provisions and toilets would be highly lucrative at the most popular sites
- Increase range of products at the Forest Centre
- The visiting centre needs extending with more to attract
- Ashdown forest made gifts and memorabilia to sell
- A dog agility course
- A parkour course
- Nature gyms
- Set up a cafe or restaurant
- Set up a hostel for walkers
- Set up an iron age or roman interactive village/museum telling the history of the area to match the school curriculum and have a steady flow of school visits
- Set up an adventure park (to include parking fees)
- Set up a sustainability centre to inspire, encourage and educate local people (link to school curriculum and invite school parties; link to Plumpton college to share information/ students/resources).

- A good hot lunch location
- A better, more central visitor centre to generate income to exploit amazing view, great for wet weather

Land and resource-based commercial activities

- Use the resources of Ashdown Forrest to create gifts such as birds houses and beehives
- Enterprises based on resources such as wood and grazing and attractions within Ashdown Forest.
- Create option for people to 'own' 2sq metres of the forest. Within that 'plot' they could bury things that are important to them, preserve the space for the future and pay for it.
- Sell the right to name any of the gates or bridges on the Forest after individuals willing to pay an annual fee. Or a lump sum for a name in perpetuity.
- Offer individuals or groups the opportunity to adopt a 100m² block, thereby raising a sense of responsibility and care for the area
- Use Google Earth to produce a virtual map of the forest in 1m²/10m² and ask people to donate a minimum amount to have a 10/20/30yr virtual square named after a loved one, or as a gift
- Keep 95% of the Forest be as wild and freely accessible as possible and use 5% for money making enterprises
- Public toilets (fee to be paid)
- Set up a pet cemetery
- Establish Ashdown Forest brewery
- Establish apiary and honey production

Charge for use

- Charge Horse riders £1,000 to use Ashdown Forest
- Charge sightseeing £500
- Charge visitors to use the Forest
- Charge for parking on Winnie the Pooh Car Parks
- Make Ashdown Forest known as a film location for which charges could be made
- The annual riding permit could be increased as the current charge amounts to only a few pounds a week to ride in such beautiful surroundings
- Wedding venue: Buckhurst Park charges £3,950 for putting up a marquee on their lawn. Clients must provide everything. Broadstone car park would be ideal.
- Improve or extending the Education Barn for weddings/events
- A dog walking pass

Cycling related

- Allow people to cycle around certain areas of the forest, charging a fee to enter
- Charge for cycling events
- Charging to access small parts of the forest for off road cycling
- Open Ashdown Forest to mountain bikers - perhaps in a similar format to the horse riding - using a ticketed/permit system on certain routes/purpose-built trails
- Lease land to facilitate activities
- Managed mountain biking routes, food and snacks available undercover, toilets, wash down points and water points.

Others

- Make the Forest more Winnie the Pooh relevant and magical.
- Negotiate with Wealden DC to introduce parking charges in built-up settings, and channel earnings to the Forest.
- Fine those allowing their dogs to foul on the forest
- Allow the hunt to meet on the Forest and charge them a proper rather than nominal amount
- Charge for the use of roads through the forest
- Set up tolls on roads through the Forest to raise revenue and reduce pollution
- Set up 'road pricing' system where use of the road would generate a charge
- Close the Information Centre to save funds
- Local Councils give a percentage of the SANGS and SAMMS developer contributions directly towards the maintenance of the Ashdown Forest
- Charge developers to 're-home' animals displaced by their developments
- Establish an Ashdown Forest lottery