

## Public consultation on payments for parking

### Interpretation of the consultation and recommendations

Consultation findings	Interpretations and recommendations
<b>Information about respondents</b>	
2,786 respondents completed questionnaire	<p>This is a reasonable level of response from the public – it tracks well, for example, against the 2,600 responses received by Epping Forest in their consultation exercise on a similar subject. Epping has 4.2 million visits (Ashdown 1.4m) per year which suggests the reach of the Ashdown Forest consultation has been greater.</p> <p>The independent analysis of visitor numbers to the Forest estimates 1.4 million visits per year (2016 figures). Whilst there is not an exact figure for individual, separate visitors, the 2,786 respondents represent a small proportion of the number of users of Ashdown Forest. That more Forest users did not take part in the consultation exercise may have been for a number of reasons. Response rates can vary according to the seriousness of the issue for a population. Lower response rates may mean that the issue is not considered to be highly significant or concerning for the majority, or they may consider the result to be inevitable. Similarly, it may be that those who strongly oppose something are more likely to respond to a consultation.</p> <p>The key interpretation is that a reasonable number of people have responded to the consultation.</p>
1,821 respondents made written statements. A total of 3,796 comments expressing concerns, perspectives, questions and suggestions were made	<p>65% of respondents took time to write comments in the free text box provided in the questionnaire. These comments express perspectives and/or concerns, ask questions and make suggestions.</p> <p>Of the 3,795 individual comments, 520 (14%) directly addressed the question of whether payments for parking should be introduced. Most comments therefore addressed other areas of interest or concern.</p> <p>10% of the 3,795 comments were against payment for parking.</p> <p>This information allows the consultation’s findings to be put in context. A small majority (54%) of respondents disagreed with car park payments when asked in the tick box section. Respondents then went on to reference a wider range of issues and other ideas related to the introduction of payments for parking.</p>
Significant differences in the characteristics of respondents from the 2016 Visitor Survey results were found	<p>The respondents to the consultation, as a group, gave different answers to the last independent visitor survey conducted every five years. This is to be expected as the payment consultation focused on a specific, more emotive, point. Nonetheless this does create the possibility that the respondents to the payment consultation may vary from the general Forest user. This does not negate careful interpretation of the received</p>

	<p>information but does give reason for care in interpreting the results of the consultation.</p> <p>However, the differences recorded between consultation respondents and those drawn from the random sample of Forest users interviewed in the 2016 Visitor Survey may only be relevant in as far as it indicates that respondents, as a group, had certain differences in their make-up and thus, potentially, different perspectives on payments for parking to the general Forest user.</p> <p>A potentially significant difference may be that 78% of consultation respondents reported that they had been visiting the Forest for at least 10 years. Only 48% of those interviewed in the 2016 Visitor Survey said this. This suggests that longer-term users of the Forest were more motivated to take part in the consultation than the general Forest user.</p> <p>It is a reasonable assumption that longer-term users of the Forest felt more engaged with the question of payment for parking and keener to provide their views than those with a shorter history of visiting the Forest.</p>
<p><b>Need for more funding</b></p>	
<p>70% agreed 17% disagreed 13% were unsure</p>	<p>The response to this tick box question provides convincing evidence that most visitors feel additional funding to manage and protect Ashdown Forest is required.</p> <p>This key finding supports the need to build a diversified funding model for the Forest with the broad agreement that more funds are required. The Board, similarly, are aware of the need for significant, unrestricted levels of income in the immediate future to deliver the Forest's Vision and day to day maintenance.</p> <p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>This finding supports the key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That increased, unrestricted funding will deliver the mission of the organisation, from improved car parks and access to strengthened conservation management.</li> <li>• That payment for parking is specifically included within the 1974 Ashdown Forest Act as such an income stream. The other opportunities expressed within the Act are already employed such as refreshments and licencing of horse riders. The Forest held off employing car park payments but the need for reliable, recurrent funding to deliver the demanded conservation and amenity outcomes has been recognised by visitors and payments must therefore be considered.</li> </ul>

Rejection of or support for payment for parking	
<p><i>Closed question responses</i></p> <p>In total, 54% disagreed, 44% agreed, 2% were unsure</p> <p><i>Written comments</i></p> <p>38.4% rejected the proposal without qualification</p> <p>27.2% rejected it because Ashdown Forest should be free and open to all</p> <p>34.5% accepted the proposal.</p>	<p>Within the tick box section, 54% of respondents disagreed with the proposal to introduce payments for parking with most of these disagreeing strongly (43% strongly to 11% slightly).</p> <p>These are understandable responses. Significant change, such as having to pay for parking that has been free since the car parks were created under the Act by the Conservators, generates comment and opposition. This is the case even when proposed in the context of the financial needs to allow enhanced management and protection of Ashdown Forest.</p> <p>Overall, 44% of respondents agreed with the payment proposal (20% strongly to 24% slightly). This level of support for payments for parking is a more surprising finding. It is an encouraging indication that payments for parking, if introduced, may find a satisfactory level of support amongst Forest users.</p> <p>These findings compare favourably with Epping Forest's public consultation where 65% of respondents disagreed with the introduction of payments for parking and 35% agreed.</p> <p>The 1,821 respondents who went on to make written comments were more likely to reject car parking than accept it (65%). This is understandable in the context that if a respondent is strongly against an issue, they wish to go further in their response. However, 34% of the respondents who made specific comments gave supportive statements about the introduction of payments for parking, which is encouraging.</p> <p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>Discussions with other organisations who have gone through this form of consultation suggested that there may be elevated levels of opposition. Against that backdrop the responses are considerably more positive than expected. If payments are introduced, then demonstrating the tangible benefits to the income is important to back up those who have initially accepted the concept.</p> <p>It is important to accept that making a substantial change, such as paying for something that has previously been free, will not be universally popular and will generate discussion. The Conservators exist to care for Ashdown Forest and to employ the Act to sustainably fund the delivery of management.</p> <p><b>The recommendation is to progress with the implementation of car park payments due to the need for unrestricted funding for Ashdown Forest. This funding will allow the delivery of the public access elements required under the Act and the supporting infrastructure.</b></p> <p>The detail of how is examined below.</p>

Proposed tariff levels	
<p><i>Hourly/daily rates</i></p> <p>74% - too high or a bit too high</p> <p>19% - about right</p> <p>1% - too low or a bit too low.</p> <p>6% - Don't know / Not sure</p>	<p>Tariff levels are an important element for visitors to the Forest who may be asked to contribute to the Forest's care by paying for parking.</p> <p>Tariffs are important for both the level of income, and therefore the work that can be carried out, and for acceptance by Forest users. On one hand, tariffs must be set at a level to generate sufficient income to support the Forest. On the other, they should reflect value for the visitor offer that is available. Other sites' charges were presented as comparables in the Business Case that the Board have considered and were used to benchmark the range of figures identified and the medium tariff proposed.</p> <p>The public consultation presented the tariff payment structure described as the medium tariff in the Business Case. Three quarters of respondents found these proposed charges too high. One in five found the medium payment tariff 'about right'.</p> <p>63% of respondents stated they were unlikely to purchase an annual pass, at least at the proposed price of £80 to £100. This is surprising as the annual pass represents a significant saving for the 63% of Forest users that visit at least three times a week.</p> <p>The tariff level is a key area for the Board to consider. Finding the balance between the Forest's financial needs and Forest users' acceptance is important.</p> <p>The business case makes three projections for revenue from the medium payment tariff; the lowest (£79,000) would fail to meet the current annual deficit; the second (£215,000) would cover the deficit and allow additional investments in Forest infrastructure and management. Under the Low payment tariff, projected revenues of £13,000 or £130,000 would result in a marginal payment scheme.</p>
<p><i>Annual pass rates</i></p> <p>77% - too high or a bit too high</p> <p>18% - about right</p> <p>2% - too low or a bit too low</p> <p>3% Don't know / Not sure</p> <p>17% written statements included comments saying proposed charges were too high and should be reduced</p>	<p>The business case makes three projections for revenue from the medium payment tariff; the lowest (£79,000) would fail to meet the current annual deficit; the second (£215,000) would cover the deficit and allow additional investments in Forest infrastructure and management. Under the Low payment tariff, projected revenues of £13,000 or £130,000 would result in a marginal payment scheme.</p>
<p><i>Annual pass purchase</i></p> <p>16% - very likely to purchase</p> <p>12% - quite likely</p> <p>45% - very unlikely</p> <p>18% - not very likely</p> <p>9% - Don't know / Not sure</p>	<p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>That most respondents said the proposed medium tariffs for tickets and passes were too high is recognised. Concerns that these tariffs may restrict access amongst low-income households are responded to below by recommending the Board consider concessions for such households. However, the key focus for the Board is the long term funding and maintenance of the Forest. The medium tariff was benchmarked against those set by comparable sites as shown in the Business Case. Ashdown Forest is a remarkable, large and beautiful site, as evidenced by the positive responses in the consultation about how much visitors care. Visitors to other sites, which in many cases are smaller, have paid the tariffs at those sites. As a further comparison, an £80 annual pass would cost £6.60 a month, about the cost of a coffee and a cake on the high-</p>

	<p>street, while a £100 annual pass equates to less than £2 a week for access to the car parks across the Forest.</p> <p><b>The medium tariff should be the basis for the initial tender process for employing a parking management firm.</b></p> <p><b>Revenue projections generated by the selected company may be revisited by the Board when the tender process is complete.</b></p> <p>More flexibility may make the longer-term pass option more attractive for visitors. Further consideration should be made for monthly passes and potential payment by monthly direct debit payments for annual passes.</p> <p>Further communication on the comparable cost of annual passes in monthly or weekly terms.</p>
<b>Amendments to proposed payments system</b>	
<p>Suggested open and closed hours</p> <p>Suggested high and low hour payments</p> <p>Suggested high and low season payments</p> <p>Suggested simplification of hourly charges system</p>	<p>Respondents proposed a number of amendments to the system that was put forward in the consultation. Respondents suggested that ‘off-peak’ hours and days could be considered.</p> <p>These responses appear to have been intended to reduce payments made by the 63% of local users (figure from the 2016 Visitor Survey), especially dog walkers. Suggestions made included making car parks free in the early mornings and late evenings, free or cheaper during the winter months when perceived levels of use are low, and free or cheaper on weekdays.</p> <p>The challenge is that this group make up the majority of visitors using the Forest. As such they are the group who benefit most from the Forest and, albeit not deliberately, have the highest impact on the Forest’s infrastructure.</p> <p>There would be a danger that such arrangements, if accepted, considerably reduce contributions made by regular Forest users and transfer costs to less frequent Forest users. Their visits would still have impacts on the Forest, however, even if they were in ‘off-peak’ periods. The cost to less frequent visitors may then need to be considerably higher to make up the funding.</p> <p>Concerns were expressed by some respondents related to the consequences of fixed time payments. It was felt this may create stress, reduce people’s ability to enjoy their visit and alter relations between the Forest and users.</p> <p>Proposed solutions to this are to simplify charges by offering just a daily rate or half and full day rates. The Business Plan includes an analysis of such a system which, if set at the medium tariff, may be appropriate if implemented in conjunction with annual passes.</p> <p>There was some misunderstanding in the responses that payments would be limited to the five car parks that would host payment machines. This is <u>not</u> the case. All Ashdown Forest car parks under the management of the</p>

	<p>Conservators, and that are used by the general visitor, would require payments.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>Propose a half day and full day ticket set at the medium tariff level as the basis for the tender process for employing a parking management firm.</p> <p>Take a final decision on half and full day tariffs based on revenue projections made by the selected management company.</p> <p>Consider, as part of the tender process and alongside administration costs, availability of shorter passes (e.g. monthly) for those Forest users who may wish to use them.</p>
<b>Other areas of concern</b>	
<p><i>Restricted access</i></p> <p>28% of all comments expressed concern that parking charges would restrict access</p> <p>59 respondents stated they would not be able to afford the payments and would reduce or stop their visits</p>	<p>Concern was expressed by respondents that low-income households may be restricted from using the Forest by introducing payments for parking. It was suggested that this would create the perception that Ashdown Forest was reserved or designed for the enjoyment of the better off.</p> <p>A range of practical suggestions were made for addressing this suggested problem including creating means by which such households could apply for support from Ashdown Forest to continue to visit the Forest.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>Officers have looked to other managers of open spaces to consider how this issue is managed. The overwhelming majority do not offer reduced payments in such circumstances. This does <u>not</u> mean that Ashdown Forest must follow that example. It is recommended that the Board support a proposal to consider a concession for those who may struggle to pay. The detail of this will require further work in terms of administration which can be delivered by officers.</p> <p>The Board may wish, in the future, to consider taking an amount of the income from a payment scheme to support other groups of visitors.</p>
<b>Concerns over displacement parking</b>	
<p>15% of all comments, 32% of written statements, expressed concerns over displacement parking</p>	<p>Many respondents expressed concerns that Forest users will avoid paying for parking through a range of behaviours including parking on verges, parking on highways, parking on Forest roads and tracks and parking in local villages. A range of negative outcomes were put forward from these practices including damage to wildlife, unsightly damage to verges, dangerous driving conditions and road obstructions, annoyance and inconvenience for residents and local communities.</p> <p>These issues have been experienced at other sites that have introduced payments. Those same sites have reported that initial numbers of those seeking not to contribute to the management of the place that they have</p>

	<p>come to visit, drop off over time. There are a number of measures available for reducing this activity more quickly.</p> <p>It is also important to note that there were significant amounts of displacement parking during the pandemic lockdowns in 2020/21. Whilst these practices caused a degree of disturbance, they did not result in all of the outcomes reported in the consultation.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>Prepare a suite of responses to implement before and during the early days and weeks after payment for parking is launched. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carefully designed messages to encourage use of car parks to support the Forest and to discourage displacement parking in advance of the introduction of payments for parking.</li> <li>• Providing cars parked outside car parks with messages crafted to reduce the behaviour. It should be an aim to notify every car parked on the Forest where it should not.</li> <li>• Work closely with Sussex Police, who have responsibility for the enforcement of parking in Wealden District, to have a high presence on the Forest on the days before and immediately after payment for parking is launched.</li> <li>• Identify how to make parking on high-risk verges less easy</li> <li>• Prioritising improvements to car parks to demonstrate practical positive outcomes of payments for parking and therefore how those who are contributing are making a difference.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alternative ways to raise funds</b></p>	

<p>15% of all comments addressed fund raising as an alternative to payments for parking</p> <p>A broad range of suggestions were put forward by respondents</p>	<p>Some respondents felt that there was no need to introduce payments for parking as there were numerous alternative ways to raise the funds needed by Ashdown Forest. Many respondents put forward suggestions for how revenues could be raised.</p> <p>The interest of Forest users in seeing the area well-resourced is recognised and supports the 70% who agreed that increased funding is required for the Forest.</p> <p>However, immediate assessment of the proposals listed in Annex 1 of the consultation report show that the suggestions are not able to make up the funding shortfalls that the Forest faces within the coming years. There are considerable restrictions on what commercial or fundraising activity can take place on the Forest. This is due to the Ashdown Forest Act itself, the internationally protected nature of the habitats, associated planning law and the requirements of the Countryside Stewardship agreement.</p> <p>A number of the suggestions would require considerable initial investment that is not presently available, entail hiring additional staff or take an extended period and effort before significant income could be expected.</p> <p>A number of the suggestions proposed may also be strongly resisted by other Forest users.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>These and other suggestions are welcomed and have not been dismissed. However, they cannot solve the immediate situation that the Forest is in. The suggestions should be considered alongside the implementation of payments to diversify income streams. An amount of the income from car park payments may be used to develop proposals.</p>
<b>Concessions</b>	
<p>10% of statements proposed concessions for local households</p> <p>61% of comments on concessions suggested local concessions but a wide range of other suggests for concessions were also made.</p>	<p>Suggested concessions include those for locals, residents, commoners, horse riders, pensioners, volunteers, youth groups, organised groups, youth workers and many others.</p> <p>Concessions were proposed for households already making payment to Ashdown Forest as commoners, residents or horse riders.</p> <p>The proposed concession for motor bikes was challenged.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>The communication around annual passes needs to be increased. This is an established system elsewhere that represents a significant concession for regular visitors. For the 63% of regular users of the Forest the pass could reduce their parking payments to between £0.22 and £0.50 per</p>

	<p>visit (Calculated by dividing £80 by 365 days or by 156 days (3 visits per week). These levels of visits are what define the 63% of 'regular visitors').</p> <p>There are a large number of commoners, residents and horse riders. The payments that these groups make are around other interests that they enjoy on the Forest. These include administering the commoners' rights, vehicle access to households and riding on the Forest. They are not connected to use of Forest car parks. It is the car parks that require the most significant improvement and therefore a further concession, beyond the annual pass, is not recommended.</p> <p>Parking payment waivers would be made for organised educational visits, for Forest volunteers and for other individuals or groups on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Annual passes for households with more than one vehicle would be considered with the parking management firm. On other sites two vehicles may be registered under one permit.</p> <p>The concession for motorcycles that was suggested in the Business Plan is not recommended. The ticketless system proposed does not prevent motorcycles being charged.</p>
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