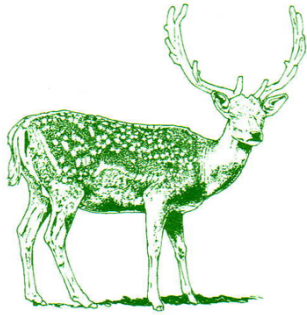


THE CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST



PAID PARKING: A report on the first calendar year of the paid parking scheme

March 2024

Introduction

The Conservators of Ashdown Forest (CoAF) approved the implementation of a paid parking scheme in the Ashdown Forest Car Parks at an Extraordinary Board Meeting 31 January 2022.

This decision followed a process of design and discussion including a six-week public consultation. This was a difficult decision and not taken lightly. It was felt, however, to be the only feasible way for Ashdown Forest to meet its annual financial deficit and its obligations to protect the Forest and keep it open and safe.

After the Board's approval we partnered with Horizon Parking to manage implementation of the scheme. The three-year contract with Horizon is on a revenue share basis avoiding financial risk to Ashdown Forest. Under the contract Horizon paid for all installation and equipment costs and covers all operational costs including salaries of the parking attendants. Repairs to signs because of vandalism are covered 50/50.

Paid parking commenced in Ashdown Forest's car parks on the 21 November 2022. This report looks at the first full calendar year of paid parking operation.

Financial outcomes

For this report, we have treated the first year as ending on 31 October 2023 to enable consistency of ongoing reporting. We looked at revenue in terms of cashflows and recognisable revenues to Ashdown Forest.

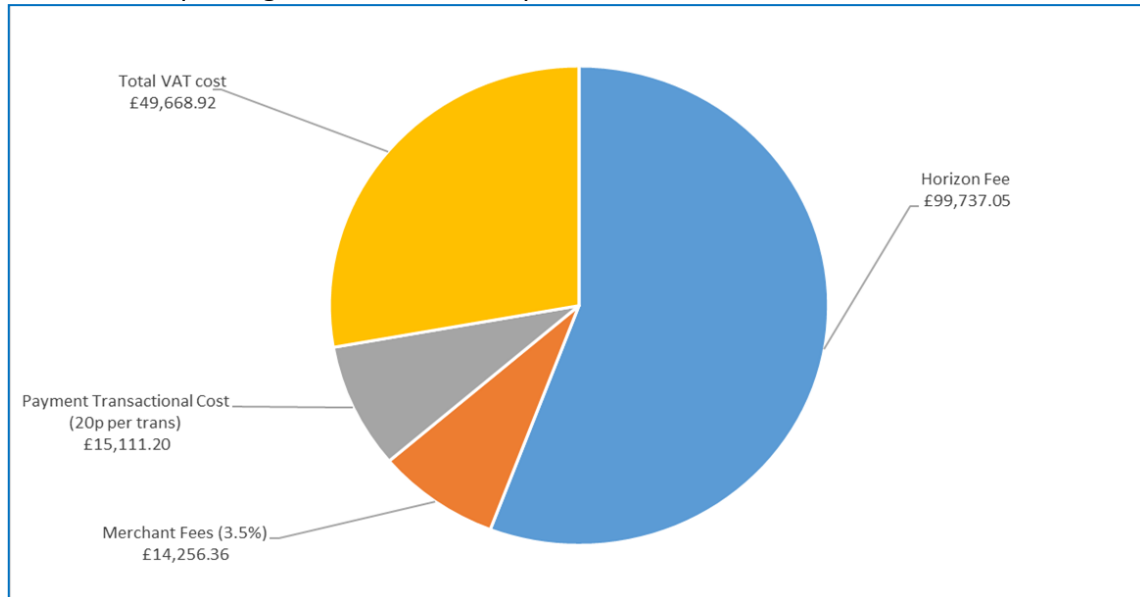
Revenues and expenses

Over the reporting period receipts totalled £428,315.57 with an additional £886.72 received from Parking Charge Notices issued by Horizon, giving a cash flow of £429,202.29.

For the same period expenditures or expenses totalled £178,773.53 giving a net positive cashflow to Ashdown Forest of £250,428.76. Deducting the deferred liability for car parking of £17,668.60 means our recognisable revenue for the first year of operations is £232,760.16.

Expenses of the paid parking scheme are broken down in Table 1. Ashdown Forest’s expenses are the fee paid to Horizon Parking, the VAT payment and the transaction costs of the parking app payment system.

Table 1. Paid parking scheme related expenses



Payment methods

The most used method of paying for parking was the purchase of annual passes through the Horizon Parking online system. These payments accounted for nearly half the cash value of purchases (47.2%).

Closely following this was payments made using one of the scheme’s five parking payment apps (Ringo, Pay-by-Phone, Just Park, Your Parking Space and Horizon Spaces). In total these accounted for 45% of the cash value of purchases.

The remaining sales were made through Ashdown Forest’s office and shop with visitors purchasing both annual passes and hourly parking (4.9%) and through credit card payments made over the automated Horizon Parking phone line (2.6%).

The breakdown of payment methods is shown in Table 2.

Types of parking purchased

Just under 52% of revenue generated was from the sale of full annual pass. A further 1.4% of revenue came from the sale of 6-month winter passes. This compares with the purchase of hourly, two-hourly, half day and full day parking permits, which together generated 46.3% of revenues. Just 0.4% was generated by the sale of £5 concessionary annual passes.

The split in revenues between annual passes and hourly or day ticket sales is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Paid parking revenues by payment methods

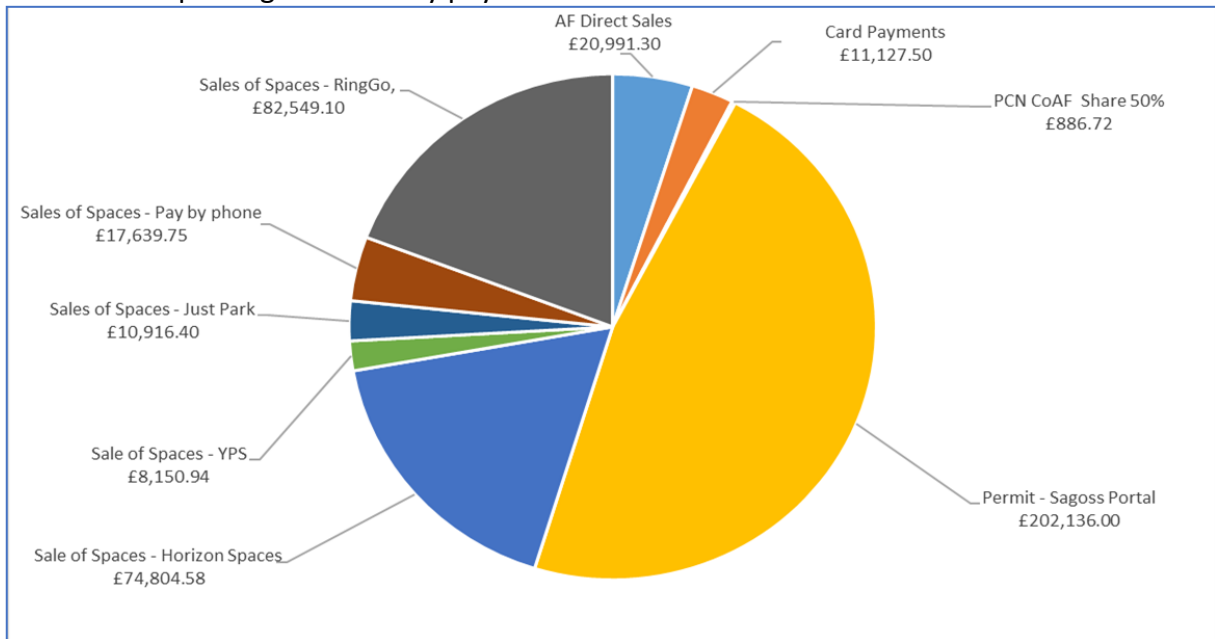
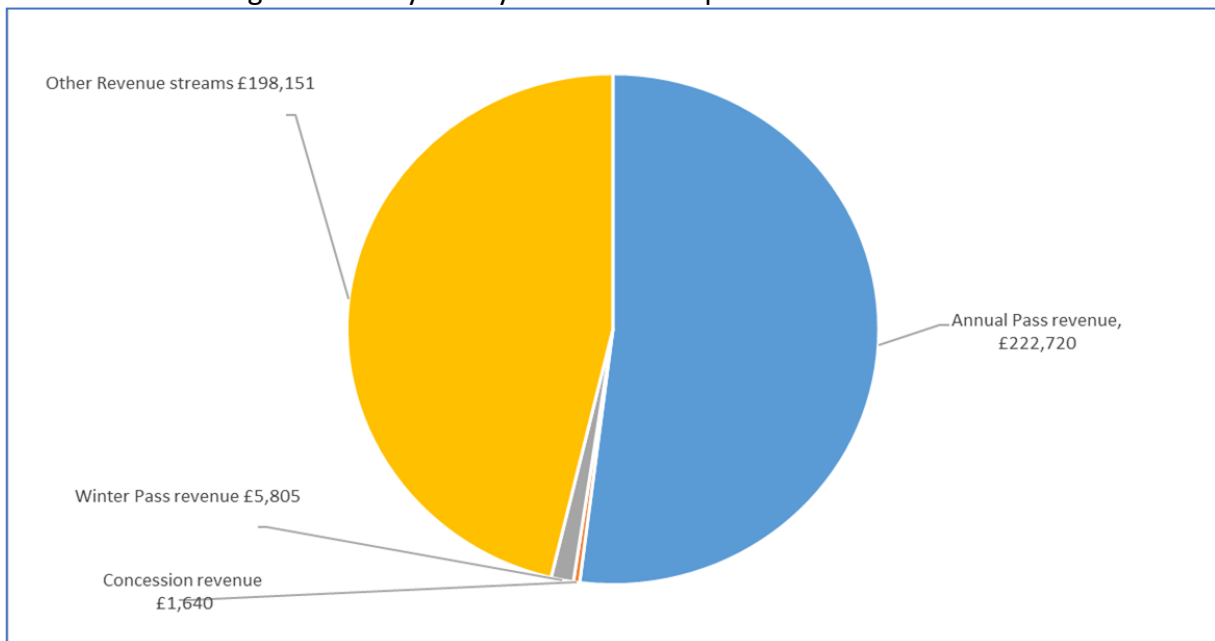


Table 3. Revenues generated by hourly versus annual pass sales



Financial analysis

In terms of performance against the medium tariff scenario used as the basis for the Board’s decision to introduce paid parking, the revenues of £429,000 are lower than the £480,000 forecast. However, £250,000 of income was generated which is higher than the £215,000 forecast.

Revenues generated by the sale of annual passes (52% of the total) was significantly higher than the 20% that was originally estimate as likely to be derived from this stream.

Social outcomes

Concerns raised around the introduction of paid parking were concentrated around three main themes: social exclusion due to the cost of parking; social exclusion resulting from the use of smart phone parking apps; and disturbance caused by displacement parking.

Cost of parking

The public consultation recorded concerns that parking fees would cause low income families to be excluded from the Forest. It was agreed to offer individuals on government benefits a £5 annual concessionary pass to mitigate this threat.

That over 230 of these passes have been purchased indicates both their value and that they are accessible to those that need them.

Accessibility of the parking payment scheme

The public consultation recorded concerns that web-based and mobile phone-based payment systems would exclude visitors unable or unwilling to pay for parking use the internet or smart-phone based payment systems. To mitigate this, the parking scheme was designed to allow payments by credit/debit card to be made by ringing an automated phone number from land lines or mobile phones, through parking machines installed at the Forest Centre, and by cash payment during office hours.

The level of payments made through Ashdown Forest for both passes and hourly or daily tickets indicates that this facility was made use of, facilitating parking payments and thus Forest access to those preferring to pay in person.

That just 2.6% of revenue came through the automated phone line system for credit/debit card payments suggests this facility was not greatly needed.

Displacement parking

Ashdown Forest management, residents and the public all expressed concern that large numbers of individuals attempting to avoid the car parks would park on verges and roads across the Forest causing damage and disturbance. Though some level of displacement parking has been observed, this has been much lower than feared.

A survey of cars parked on roads and verges across Ashdown Forest was conducted on two 'average' days in May 2023. The Wednesday assessment found six cars parked in formal or informal laybys. The Sunday assessment, conducted from midday to early afternoon, over a bank holiday weekend with pleasant weather when the car parks were busy recorded 10 cars parked in formal or informal laybys.

Compliance and acceptance

Compliance with the paid parking scheme has been high with less than 50 parking charge notices paid over the year. This indicates that most car park users are paying to park.

Though the introduction of the paid parking scheme was resisted by some Forest users, and these individuals continue to hold and express negative opinions about the scheme, many

visitors to the Forest express positive perspectives towards the scheme and many more are accepting of it as a necessary step to help protect and manage the Forest.

Outcomes for Ashdown Forest

The decision to proceed with the paid parking scheme was based on financial projections that anticipated the scheme would deliver somewhere in the region of £215,000 net revenue per annum. Given annual deficits in the region of £120,000 since grant funding was halted, it was felt that meeting this and providing some surplus was sufficient justification to go ahead with the scheme.

The intention of the scheme was thus entirely related to meeting financial objectives. After assessing a range of means to raise funds, including efforts to increase voluntary contributions from visitors, the paid parking scheme was agreed.

Funds generated by parking payments in excess of the annual deficit will allow us to increase budgets for general maintenance including the car parks. However, the last several years has seen declining budgets leading to reduced levels of repairs, and it will take time to rebuild budgets and standards. There are many calls on our limited revenues and prioritising users works will be as challenging as ever. Parking revenues are just part of our efforts to increase funding for Ashdown Forest.

Conclusions

The decision to introduce paid parking was a difficult one and always likely to split opinion. However, after assessing alternatives it was agreed to be the only viable option available under the Ashdown Forest Act to meet the deficit and create some surplus to invest in the Forest. Despite some opposition the scheme has found broad acceptance.

The first year of operations has demonstrated that the decision to introduce paid parking was sound. The partnership with Horizon Parking has provided income ahead of expectations which will allow increased investment in Ashdown Forest to help meet social amenity and protected area objectives.