



Epping Forest & Commons Committee

Date: MONDAY, 17 JANUARY 2022
Time: 11.00 am
Venue: VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING (ACCESSIBLE REMOTELY)

- 18a) Epping Forest Car Park Charging Review (SEF 08/22) (Pages 233 - 248)
Report of the Executive Director, Environment
For Information

Item received too late for circulation in conjunction with the Agenda.

John Barradell
Town Clerk and Chief Executive

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Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons - for information Epping Forest Consultative – for information	Dated: 17/01/2022 09/02/2022
Subject: Epping Forest Car Park Charging Review (SEF 08/22)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	Y/N
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director, Environment	For Information
Report author: Jacqueline Eggleston, Epping Forest	

Summary

In March 2021, your Committee agreed to implement charging for car parking in Epping Forest. The implementation began with Phase 1 in May 2021 and was followed up by Phase 2 in November 2021.

This report provides a review of the car park charging since it began.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. At your Committees of 16 November 2020, 18 January and 8 March 2021 your Committee agreed to a series of proposals for the introduction of car park charging in Epping Forest.
2. A public consultation was held between the January and March 2021 meetings with a summary report presented at the March meeting.
3. Phase 1 commenced on 10 May 2021 with charging introduced in an initial 16 car parks. Phase 2 saw a further 20 of the remaining Epping Forest car parks have charging introduced as of the 8 November 2021. A list of car park locations can be read at Appendix 1.

Current Position

4. The charges have been in place for 6 months at the time of reporting. The 'Car Park Charging Scheme 6 Month Review' (Appendix 2) outlines the progress made to date.
5. This report offers the opportunity to present to your Committee a summary of the main successes and challenges of the introduction of the scheme.

Successes

6. Objectives of the car park charging are being realised;
 - a. *Reduce overuse by residents and commuters to allow sufficient space in car parks for Forest users* - Car parks such as Bury Road and Centre Road that had significant issues with commuter parking have reduced numbers of cars particularly on weekdays meaning that Forest users are now able to find space to park. The maximum stay period is the main factor in reducing commuter car parking and the average dwell time for car park users is now 50% of visits under one hour in duration, and over 75% are under two hours in duration.
 - b. *Reduce overuse in honeypot locations where capacity is regularly exceeded* - There has been a reduction in cars in the High Beach area which has helped with managing the previous over capacity issues as well as reducing car use through the Forest. The introduction of the temporary traffic order during the pandemic with red lines around the village has significantly reduced the dangerous and damaging verge parking and the gating of Pillow Mounds has almost eradicated the previously nightly anti-social behaviour in the area. Therefore, these three interventions will have had a combined effect on usage in the area and a longer monitoring period will be needed to fully assess the impact.
 - c. *Encourage sustainable travel to the Forest, discouraging car usage in environmentally sensitive areas* – the earlier monitoring showed that there was a limited amount of displacement from charged sites to non-charged sites during the first 6 months of operation. Displacement was most evident in the data between July and August, when car numbers dropped off in the charged sites but continued to either show a small increase or a relatively smaller decrease in the non-charged locations. Both charged and non-charged sites followed the same seasonal variations in usage, indicating that the fall off in numbers during the height of summer was generally not a result of charging but was a factor of external issues such as the reopening of other activities post restrictions. In this case the charged-for, mainly 'honeypot' sites would be more susceptible to these changes in visitor pattern than the smaller non-charged sites which are more routinely used by, for example, dog walkers.
 - d. *Generate substantial income to be reinvested into car park improvements and Forest management* – as of 31 October 2021 a surplus to local risk of £170,739 has been generated which will be used to reinvest in the management of the Forest.
7. The season ticket take up has been 60% higher than initially predicted.

8. External partners were engaged, one to administer payments and another to manage enforcement.
9. Forest Keepers continue to manage the opening and closing of the car parks day-to-day as per their normal operating procedures.

Challenges

10. Public opinion remains largely in opposition to having charges applied. From implementation in May until October 2021, the City of London Corporation Epping Forest received 75 written complaints. On social media 130 of 150 comments were negative and at phase 2 implementation more aggressive protest occurred with meters and signage being vandalised.
11. Visitor expectation when charged for parking is that car parks are maintained in a higher quality state of repair. Surplus income generated from car park charging will be reinvested in the management of the Forest including improvements to car parks, such as surfacing. However, such works can only be undertaken gradually due to resource availability and appropriate seasonal weather conditions. During the interim period some car parks may not meet visitor expectation.
12. Similarly, visitors paying to park have a greater feeling of entitlement to park during daylight hours. Opening and closing of the car parks is undertaken by Forest Keepers as part of their normal operating procedures. Consistent dawn/dusk opening and closing times cannot be guaranteed due to issues such as unforeseen staff absence.
13. The season ticket price point (£150) is seen as a barrier for many people.
14. The maximum stay of 6 hours has been cited as too short for a whole day visit to the Forest. Longer stays could be facilitated at car parks where the principle of the maximum stay is not undermined.
15. Some special arrangements have been made with tenants to allow a transitional period for their business to adjust to car park charging. A review will be required to ensure parity across these organisations and any others affected by phase 3.
16. The emergency traffic regulation orders in the High Beach area impacted on the implementation of the car park charging scheme. For example, the gating order at Pillow Mounds became particularly problematic as the closing times altered in September/October to much earlier than dusk.

Proposals

17. Phase 3, expected from May 2022, will address whether the remaining car parks (14) have charging introduced or alternative arrangements made. Many of these will require bespoke solutions to address wayleave, tenancy and other historic issues.

18. Work is ongoing to navigate the other challenges outlined in paragraphs 11-17 in this report and a further paper for decision will be presented at your May committee outlining suitable options.
19. The conclusion on the 3 consultations (results pending from Essex County Council) of the traffic regulation orders around the High Beach area will also need to be considered within the May report.

Key Data

20. Data gathered from the initial 6 months of charging is contained in the appended review report including financial information, duration of stay, most used car parks, most popular time of day and number of PCNs issued.

Corporate & Strategic Implications –

21. **Strategic implications** - Car Park charging supports the Open Spaces Departmental Business Plan objective to provide safe, secure and accessible Open Spaces and services for the benefit of London. It also supports several of the Epping Forest Management Strategy 2020-2030 priority objectives and outcomes.
22. **Financial implications** - The car park charging scheme has generated enough income to cover the installation costs of both phase 1 and phase 2 along with a surplus. In future years when the installation/ maintenance costs are more minimal this surplus is predicted to be considerably higher.
23. **Resource implications** - The operation and enforcement have been successfully outsourced to contractors for an initial period. Ongoing in-house resource commitments are limited to contract management and customer service.
24. **Legal implications** - Section 8(2) of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1977 gives the Conservators the power to provide parking spaces on Forest Land in order to improve opportunities for the enjoyment of the Forest by the public. There is also a power to make reasonable charges for the use of parking spaces under section 8(4) of the 1977 Act.
25. **Risk implications** - There is an increased risk of vandalism to the new infrastructure, particularly in more remote car parks (phase 2 & 3) with a resulting cost of repair and replacement.
26. **Equalities implications** – An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of implementing car parking was undertaken by the City Corporation. It is considered that there are no negative impacts on the protected equality groups. Blue badge users receive free parking with more disabled only bays available. Epping Forest is well served by public transport and is accessible by foot from many urban centres, charging is not therefore considered as unduly detrimental to those on lower income

27. **Charity implications** - Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity.
28. **Climate implications** - The implementation of the car park charging may play a role in promoting modal shift to other forms of transport reducing reliance on cars to access the Forest, which in turn should have a positive impact on carbon emissions and air quality.
29. **Security implications** – The charging scheme allows greater monitoring of the Forest car parks which facilitates greater vigilance of any criminal activity.

Conclusion

30. Charging for car parks was agreed as a necessity in Epping Forest to manage capacity, deter non-Forest users such as commuters, encourages more sustainable visits to the Forest and raise revenue that can be reinvested into protecting the Forest for public recreation and enjoyment, as well as its internationally significant natural heritage.
31. The initial 6 months of the scheme have been largely successful with a good surplus generated.
32. There are some outstanding challenges which require further resolution in advance of the final implementation phase 3.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Car Park list
- Appendix 2 – Car Park Charging Scheme - 6 Month Review

Background Papers

- Feb 2014, URS Car Park Study
- October 2020, EFCC, Epping Forest Car Parking –Introduction of Parking Charges (SEF 28/20)
- November 2020, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Introduction of Parking Charges (28/20b)
- January 2021, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Tariff Options for introduced charges (SEF 04/21)
- March 2021, EF&CC, Epping Forest Car Parking – Additional tariff options and consultation feedback (SEF 12/21)

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Appendix 1 – Car park phasing

Phase 1		
1. Alexandra Lake 2. Barn Hoppit & Summer overflow 3. Chingford Plain (Bury Road & Overflow) 4. Chingford Golf Course 5. Centre Road 6. Connaught Water	7. High Beach - Pillow Mounds 8. High Beach Visitor Centre & Field Studies Centre* 9. Leyton Flats (Hollow ponds) 10. Hollow Pond Boat House 11. Jubilee Pond	12. Rushey Plain 13. Rushey Plain Turnaround 14. Snaresbrook (Eagle Pond) 15. Clay Pit Hill 16. Wellington Hill 17. Warren Pond
Phase 2		
18. Broadstrood 19. Buckhurst Hill Cricket Ground (Powells Forest) 20. Capel Road 21. Earl's Path (North) 22. Strawberry Hill (Earl's Path South) 23. Forest Side (Ivy Chimneys)	24. Genesis Slade (Coppice Row) 25. Hill Wood 26. Harrow Road 27. Jack's Hill (South) 28. Knighton Wood 29. Long Running (Jack's Hill North) 30. Lincolns Lane 31. Lodge Road	32. Mount Pleasant 33. Piercing Hill 34. The Stubbles 35. Wake Valley 36. (Wanstead Park) Warren Road 37. The Woodyard (Lower Forest)
Phase 3		
(Car Park Strategy to address)		
38. Aldersbrook Road 39. Bell Common Cricket Ground 40. Crown Hill pull in 41. Epping Long Green 42. Fernhall Lane	43. Fishers Green Lane 44. Gilbert's Slade 45. Holy Innocents Church High Beach pull in 46. St John's Pond 47. The Green Theydon	48. Theydon Bois (Golf Club) 49. Upshire Pick Hill 50. Upshire Crown Hill 51. Woodford (Golf course)

*Restricted use parking

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Epping Forest

Registered Charity

6 MONTH REVIEW OF CAR PARK CHARGING SCHEME

INTRODUCTION

Charging for the parking of vehicles (excluding motorbikes) was introduced for the first time in Epping Forest car parks on 10 May 2021.

This review outlines how Phases 1 & 2 (including the introduction of the scheme) has been received, its financial return and reports on temporary special arrangements that have been made.

BACKGROUND

Following approval from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, charging visitors to park their vehicles (not motorbikes) in Forest car parks was implemented in May 2021.

The main objectives for introducing the charges were to:

1. Reduce overuse by residents and commuters to allow sufficient space in car parks for Forest users.
2. Reduce overuse in honeypot locations where capacity is regularly exceeded.
3. Encourage sustainable travel to the Forest, discouraging car usage in environmentally sensitive areas.
4. Generate substantial income to be reinvested into car park improvements and Forest management.

16 of the 51 car parks in Epping Forest were selected for Phase 1 charging which commenced on 10 May 2021. These sites were selected because they were the most relevant to the objectives; that they suffered excess commuter or residential usage, were in 'honeypot' locations and not meeting demand and/ or were in particularly environmentally sensitive locations.

A Habitat Risk Assessment (HRA) was a legal requirement from Natural England when introducing car park charging in and adjacent to, the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This was undertaken and required monitoring surveys to assess any displacement of parking away from the 'charged-for' car parks to elsewhere in the SAC.

Phase 2 charging was introduced at the majority of the remaining car parks on 8 November 2021. Although some of the smaller car parks and more remote sites are not necessarily viable, in their own right it, has been a requirement of the HRA that charging is made in all car parks to prevent displacement parking in the SAC.

Some infrastructure was required to facilitate the charging scheme. In Phase 1, this was mostly limited to signage (entrance notices, tariff boards and reminder signage) due to the selection of 'pay by telephone/online app' approach but the lack of phone reception and internet signal at High Beach did require 7 card machines to be installed. These were purchased second hand (refurbished) to reduce the initial cost of installation. A further 8 refurbished card machines and 1 coin machine (where connectivity is an issue for preferred card machines) were purchased for Phase 2.

On the launch of the new charging scheme enforcement action was delayed by two weeks to create a 'grace period'. During this time reminder notices were issued instead of parking charge notices (PCNs) providing a soft launch and learning period for any visitors who remained unaware of the charging scheme.

At phase 2 roll out, there was immediate protest against the charges in some of the car parks in the High Beach/ Theydon Bois areas with meters and signage being vandalised. This presents a significant cost for replacement of the machines and signs which is not yet reflected in the financial breakdown due to ongoing police investigation and pending insurance claims. In the meantime, the car parks remain open – without facility to pay – so as not to penalise or inconvenience other visitors.

VISITOR COMMUNICATIONS

Consultation response

A public consultation period ran from 27 Jan – 15 Feb 2021 and received a total of 2600 responses, of which 1780 gave detailed individual feedback under the comments section.

72% were opposed to the introduction of charges.

Objections can be summarised as follows;

- Proposed tariffs too expensive or opposed to any charges at all
- Proposed annual pass tariff too expensive
- Desire to park for longer than the proposed maximum stay of 6 hours
- Detrimental effect to businesses or organisations regularly using the Forest or relying on car parks in the Forest for their activities
- Displacement parking impacting on local residents
- Operational concerns, such as perceived lack of phone reception and paying in advance for a walk of unknown duration
- Desire for local resident discount
- Unfair impact on those with low income, young families, mobility issues or the elderly
- Lack of alternative access to the Forest, particularly the High Beach area
- Timing of the implementation intended to capitalise on the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic

Full details and responses can be found [here](#).

Advance notice communication

Signs were displayed in car parks from 26 April 2021 giving two weeks' notice of the intended launch date to warn motorists that charging would shortly commence. Prior notice about the intention to charge for vehicle parking was also posted on the Epping Forest webpage and all Epping Forest social media channels.

Visitor response following implementation

From implementation in May until October 2021, CoL EF received 75 written complaints, of which 75% referred to the physical operation of the phone / meter payment systems and appeals on fines. These 'roll out phase' complaints tailed off by July.

During July to October most correspondence has focussed on PCN appeals which are handled by our enforcement partners so are referred for processing.

General lack of awareness and insufficient signage was a further source of complaint. The signage installed in May & November met the required specification for enforcement, but some additional signs have been added where Officers decided it may be helpful.

Feedback on social media totalled 150 comments of which 130 were negative.

Several parking meters and signs have been vandalised.

In response to the initial complaints a comprehensive '[Frequently asked questions](#)' page was added to the Epping Forest webpage to make public the responses to most common complaints.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Several temporary agreements were also entered in to from the outset of charging. These agreements were to reduce immediate impact on CoL EF tenants allowing them time to adjust their business arrangements and accommodate charges in the future as preferred.

PARTNERS

Epping Forest Heritage Trust and Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers who work in the Forest on behalf of CoL EF have been issued with passes for volunteers' cars for use whilst undertaking volunteer tasks.

The Field Studies Centre car park has been designated 'staff and coach parking' only to allow the centre to continue to host school parties without a charging implication.

The car park adjacent to the High Beach Visitor Centre was designated as 'disabled parking and loading' only. This addresses the consultation feedback regarding lack of disabled parking in the High Beach 'honeypot' area and responds to the lack of connectivity which prevents either phone payment or card payment machine.

VOLUNTEER LED ACTIVITY

Several organisations have requested free parking for their volunteers because they run activities in the Forest that rely on volunteers to operate them. However, this has been refused.

Most of these groups run altruistic health and wellbeing activities– such as health walks managed by the local authority. Those organisations who have requested free activity parking amount to between 20 and 50 free passes per week. Apart from lost income, the logistical cost of administering this would be around ½ to 1 day per week staff time, placing a cost upon CoL EF for volunteer services using the Forest.

Should CoL EF offer this dispensation, it would set a precedent to allow all voluntary/charity groups using the Forest (already in the main at no cost to them) free parking. Epping Forest

Charity has a legal duty to use its resources in the best interest of its own charitable purposes and therefore offering free parking for other charities/ not for profit organisations would be contrary to this duty.

IMPACT

The four objectives of introducing charging are being met;

1. *Reduce overuse by residents and commuters to allow sufficient space in car parks for Forest users* - Car parks such as Bury Road and Centre Road that had significant issues with commuter parking have reduced numbers of cars particularly on weekdays meaning that Forest users are now able to find space to park. The maximum stay period is the main factor in reducing commuter car parking and the average dwell time for car park users is now 50% of visits under one hour in duration, and over 75% are under two hours in duration.
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4. *Generate substantial income to be reinvested into car park improvements and Forest management* – as of 31 October 2021 a surplus to local risk of £170,739 has been generated which will be used to reinvest in the management of the forest, including car park maintenance.

FINANCIALS

	Expenditure	Income	Surplus
Phase 1 – Design & manufacture of signage, parking meters and other infrastructure/services	£104,371*		
Phase 1 (to 31 October 2021) - Parking charges, including annual passes and penalty charges**		£203,631	
Phase 2 – Further manufacture of signage, parking meters and other infrastructure/services	£32,892		
Phase 2 – (from 1 November to 30 November 2021) Parking charges, including annual passes and penalty charges**		£39,072	
Phase 1 & 2 combined - installation of signs (120 working days)	£33,600		
Total Charging Scheme (includes central funding)	£170,863	£242,703	£71,840
Local Risk	£66,492	£242,703	£176,211

* 'The Charity were successful in their application for this sum from the CoLC central project funding (Priorities Investment Pot), which was spent before end of 2020/21 financial year. This funding stream has now ceased.

** after deduction of partner fees and commission charges

The projected total income by the end of March 2022 is in the region of £329,000, taking account of lower usage in winter months and including income from the more recent phase 2 charges.

Net surplus is expected to be in the region of £296,000 by the end of the 2021/22 financial year, and with expenditure much reduced moving forward this should exceed £350,000 in the next full financial year of charging (from 10 May 2022).

Opening and closing of car parks is an existing duty for Forest Keepers so this is not attributed. This practice has been undertaken for several years since gates were introduced in car parks to combat anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping at night-time, the impact of which place a huge financial burden on the charity.

OTHER KEY DATA

May to October data collected from the charged for car parks shows most people stay for less than one hour (Chart 1)

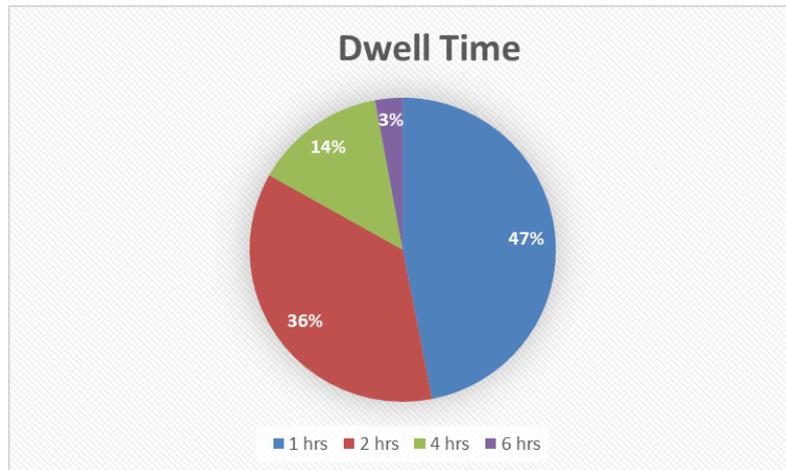


Chart 1

The most popular time to visit is the middle of the day 10am -3pm (Chart 2)

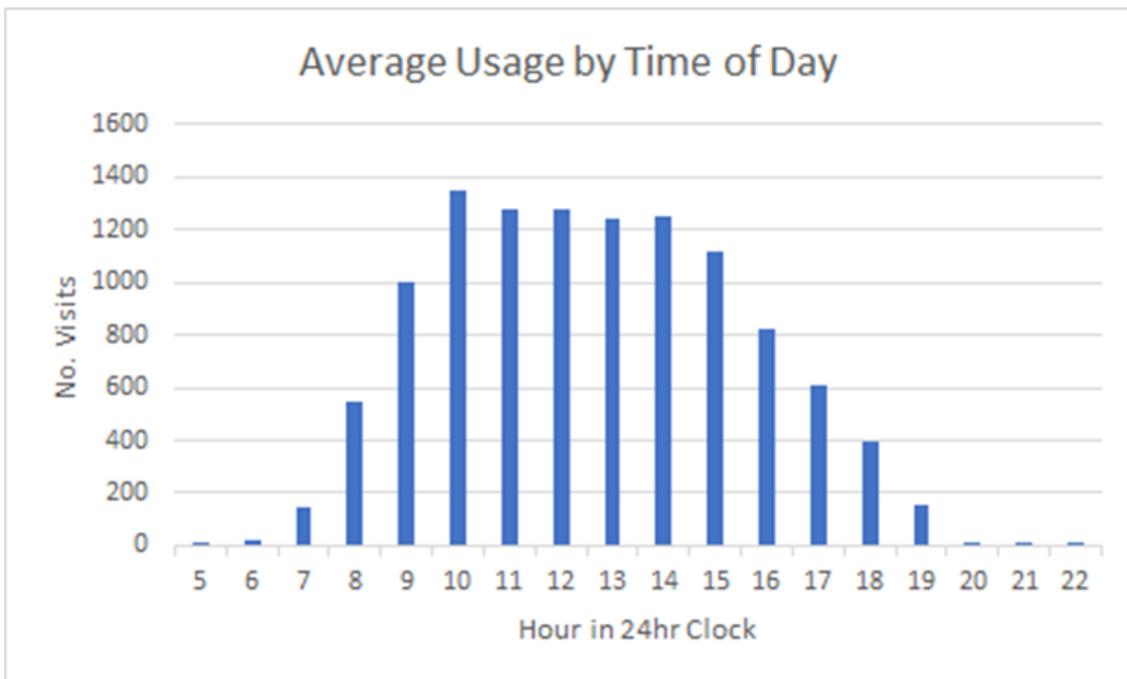


Chart 2

The most used car parks have been, in order, Pillow Mounds, Connaught Water and Hollow Pond (Chart 3). When number of available spaces is taken into consideration, Connaught Waters becomes the most used site by available space.

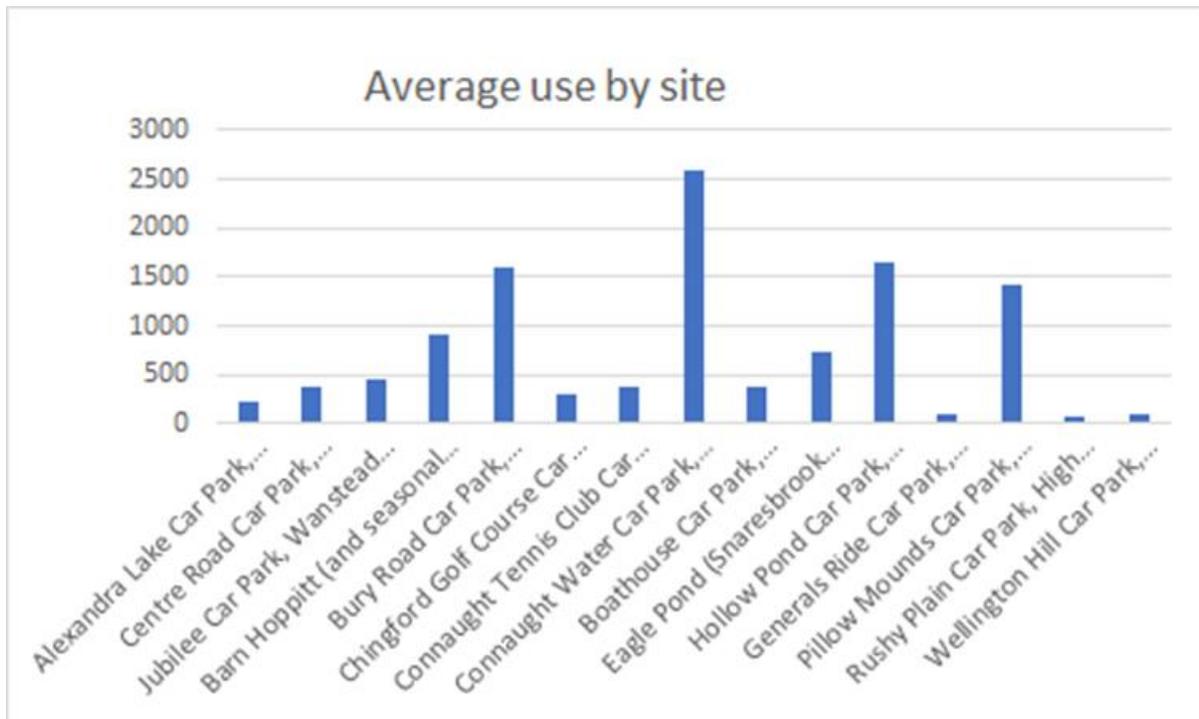


Chart 3

Approximately 360 penalty charge notices are issued across the Forest each month.

The vast majority of these are for overstaying the paid for time, with a large reduction in failure to pay at all (unauthorised parking) since enforcement began. Barn Hoppitt, Connaught Water and Leyton Flats car parks have the most penalty notices, issued by site.

Reason PCN Issued	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Ave
Failure to Pay for Full Duration of Stay	85	391	470	504	407	-	
Unauthorised Parking	73	77	7	10	12	-	
Obstructive Parking	0	1	0	0	1	-	
Total	158	469	477	514	420	377	358

Chart 4

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