



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.
2. *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.
3. *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.
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)

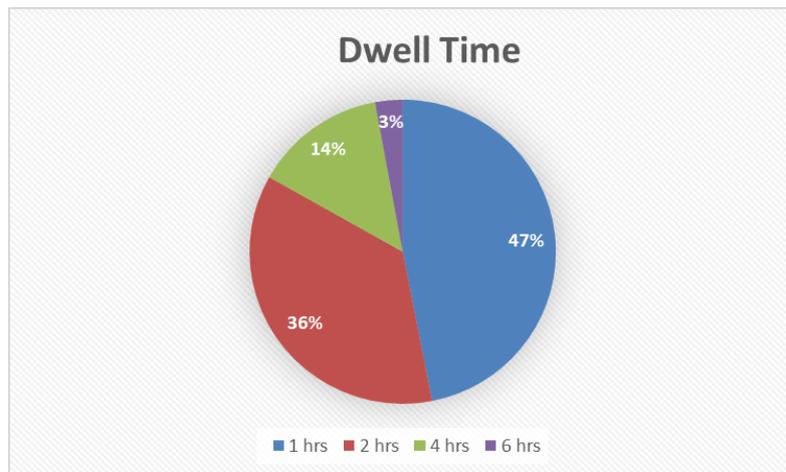


Chart 1

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

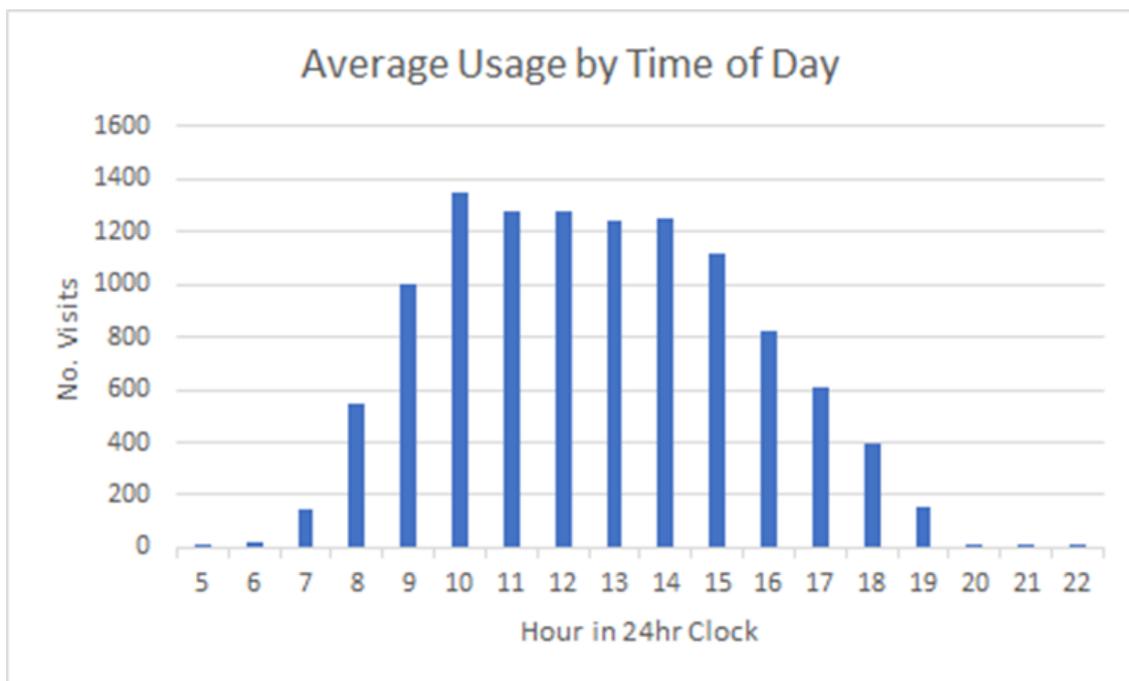


Chart 2

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.

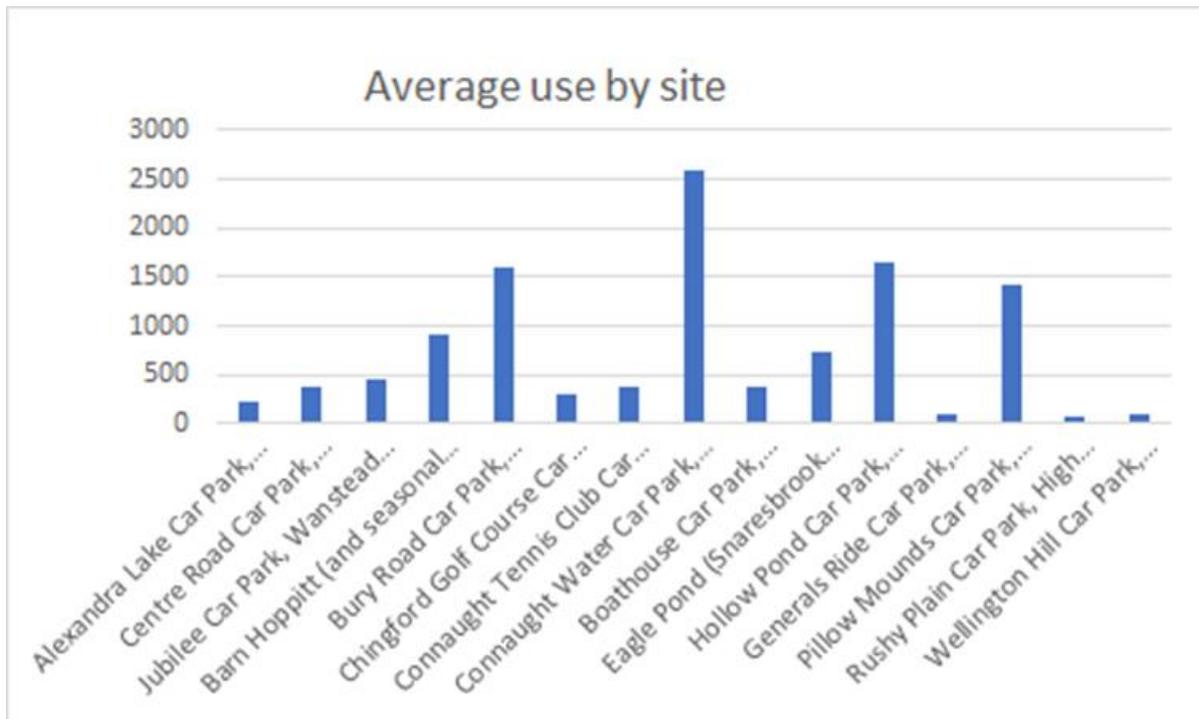


Chart 3

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