

Q&A

Ashridge car park project

V1. 12 October 2017

Q: Why are you doing this?

A: Over the years Ashridge has seen an increase in visitors, many of whom arrive by car. The current parking arrangement on Monument Drive enables visitors to park on the verges of the drive as well as in two surfaced car parks. Unmanaged parking on the drive has caused serious damage to the verges; tree roots are being crushed and soil is being compacted. The important historic view between the house and the Monument is being degraded with views of cars and the archaeological features are being eroded. Members complain that we're not looking after the historic landscape here properly and that people who are not contributing to the care of the place through membership should be asked to contribute via a parking charge.

The current parking is also impacting our visitors' experience. Visitors complain that they get muddy getting in and out of their cars and during the winter many people get their cars stuck in the mud and churn up the verges even more. When the drive is busy, people are reversing out in an ad-hoc manner while others are trying to use the drive for horse-riding, cycling and walking. At busy times, the drive gets clogged up with people manoeuvring which can cause traffic to back up onto the B road which causes inconvenience and nuisance to our neighbours and residents in nearby villages. We're also concerned about anti-social behaviour on the drive and the verges after dark.

This is a conservation project first, a visitor experience improvement project second and thirdly, a means of generating a sustainable new income stream to enable us to care for the whole estate better and re-build our visitor infrastructure to cope with the number of visitors now using Ashridge.

Q: How many people currently visit Ashridge?

We have no way of accurately tracking the number of visitors to Ashridge, but we estimate the number of visitors to be over half a million per year. We've undertaken several car counts over the summer and the average number of cars on site at any one time on nice weekend days is around 400.

Q: What public transport options are there to get to Ashridge?

There is currently a bus service that stops on the B4506 and runs three times a day on week days. A few fit people arrive by train into Tring and Berkhamsted and walk up to the estate. We'll be working with local transport providers to see if we can get better green transport links as part of this project.

Q: How much will it cost to build the car park?

A: We don't yet have costed designs. We anticipate that the overall cost will be around £1million.

Q: Where is this money coming from?

A: The estate has significant reserves that have come from donations, legacies and other fundraising activities.

Q: How many spaces will there be?

A: We're looking to build around 450 surfaced spaces with fair weather overflow parking for perhaps another 500 so that we can cope with peaks like Easter.

Q: Are you going to build one big car park or several more smaller ones?

A: We're at the very early stages of planning, so we're investigating all the options available to us.

Q: Will you be building car parking in the meadow?

A: We're investigating all the options available to us. It is possible that some parking provision may be made in the meadow, but it's too early to either include or exclude it.

Q: Will you be closing the existing car parks?

A: No, but we may block off informal pull-ins that have developed over the years.

Q: Will we still be able to park on Monument Drive and have our picnic?

A: We're very keen to ensure that people are still able to enjoy Ashridge much as they do now. So, we are looking to make sure that at least some spaces have direct access to grassed areas so that families can put up chairs, picnic tables and windbreaks, much as they do now.

Q: Why don't you just leave it as it is and spend the money you've got on conservation and improving the visitor facilities?

A: Because the verges either side of Monument Drive are suffering hugely from being used as informal parking areas. Tree roots are being crushed, soil is being compacted, archaeological features are being eroded. And, we need to develop new, sustainable sources of income to meet the demands of today's visitors, to help us look after the important habitats we already care for and enable us to restore habitats that have been degraded over time.

Q: Is this about encouraging even more people to visit Ashridge?

A: No, it's about looking after Monument Drive properly and providing an improved standard of parking for our current visitors.

Q: Why are you introducing car parking charges where you didn't previously have them?

A: Increasing visitor numbers mean that the money we spend on path maintenance, litter clearance, car park repairs, visitor facilities, dog bins etc. is continually rising. We also need to raise additional funds to improve our management of the countryside we care for.

Q: Is the National Trust trying to introduce car park charging everywhere?

A: It is national policy to introduce charges where there's a strong case to do so. This might be to regulate parking or to earn additional income for conservation work and visitor infrastructure. Pay and display machines have been installed at around 170 locations to date (as of summer 2017). In total we look after over 750 car parks across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Q: How does the Trust fund car park maintenance currently and why can't it continue to fund it in this manner?

A: Through membership subscription, donations and our enterprises. With such pressure on property budgets, car park maintenance may not get prioritised due to competing pressures. We recognise that in some places they aren't at the standard they should be and that we need to do more to provide a better standard.

Q: How will you determine the amount to charge non-members for car parking?

A: We will look at car parking charges in similar locations and set the Pay & Display fees at similar levels.

Q: Will blue badge holders have to pay?

A: No. Blue badge holders, like National Trust members, will be able to park free provided they are displaying a valid form of ID.

Q: I volunteer for the Trust, do I have to pay?

A: Parking is free for volunteers actively volunteering at the time of parking or volunteers who have a volunteer card.

Q: What about horse boxes, school coaches, mini buses and motorbikes?

A: We're hoping to provide designated parking for all of these users. Pre-booked coaches who are bringing children for a paid education visit and annual riding permit holders won't have to pay to park, but other visitors who are not contributing in any other way will probably be asked to pay. We currently cater for hundreds of Duke of Edinburgh groups who use the car parks, the toilets, the water fountain and pay nothing at all.

Q: What about visitors who are attending paid for events such as the Easter Egg Hunt and guided walks, will they all have to pay to park?

A: Lots of our visitors to events are members so they won't need to pay for car parking, anyone else will need to pay for parking.

Q: Will people have to pay to park if they only want to visit the shop or café?

A: Yes. We hope that these people will understand that providing and maintaining car parks and other facilities has a cost. We are asking them to make this small contribution towards the upkeep of the property and our wider conservation costs. Many of those people are already members and the parking fee will therefore not apply.

Q: Won't car park charges reduce the number of people using the cafe and impact on your income?

A: The café at Ashridge is operated by an independent company. It is not our intention to undermine the profitability of their business. We hope that the improved parking will in fact support their business and allow people to enjoy the estate better, even when it's wet and muddy. They may see a small, short-term drop in customers while people adjust to the changes.

Q: What about those people who live close by and visit the site regularly, e.g. dog walkers?

A: We want people to continue to come and enjoy this special place. We hope regular visitors will join us as members and benefit from free parking. Membership is currently priced at £64.80 per year which works out at just £1.25 per week – you can even pay by monthly direct debit. There are also over 20 other designated parking places at Ashridge. We'll be providing a free map of these so that anyone who doesn't want to pay can use the free car parks instead.

Q: What about people who walk, cycle or use public transport?

A: We will not be charging for access so those arriving by bicycle, on foot or by public transport will not pay a parking charge. It's also an important part of this project to see if we can improve public

transport links.

Q: Will there be discounts for anyone else?

A: No. National Trust membership costs just £1.25 per week and allows you free parking at all our hundreds of car parks across the country, as well as free entry to all our properties.

Q: How will you enforce car parking charges?

A: The Trust is currently trialling different solutions to see what works best. We are an access organisation and hope to achieve reasonable levels of enforcement without resorting to clamping or fines.

Q: What will the charging period be?

A: As part of the project, we're looking at the practicalities of enforcing the existing Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on Monument Drive that permits us to prevent access between 10pm and 7am. If we're able to do this, we would probably apply charges during all opening times.

Q: Will NT staff or volunteers staff the car parks/act as car park attendants?

A: We hope to have a higher staff presence to welcome visitors and check parking tickets. We may also use volunteers to carry out patrols and help people understand the changes and the new system.

Q: Will the rate vary depending on the time of day and the number of hours parked?

A: We anticipate having a 'short stay' and an 'all day' rate.

Q: Will people be able to pay by credit card and mobile phone?

A: At present, because there is such poor mobile phone signal at Ashridge we may only be able to have cash only machines. But obviously, if we can include card and phone payments we will.

Q: Will people be able to park overnight with campervans?

A: Probably not.

Q: What happens if valuables are stolen from my vehicle here?

A: As with all car parks, it's the owner's responsibility to take care of valuables. So it's best to take them with you, or lock them up out of sight. All criminal acts should be reported to the police.

Q: When will the charge come in?

A: Parking charges will be introduced when the surfaced car parking has been built and the pay and display machines installed. There is a huge amount of work to be done in design and planning. We hope that the scheme may go live in 2019.

Q. Will you be introducing car parking charges in the other car parks at Ashridge?

A: We have no plans to make a charge at any of our other car parks. In time, we may consider it for the Beacon car park, but the other small, outlying car parks are very unlikely to be considered appropriate or viable for car park charging.

Q: I thought the National Trust was encouraging people to get outdoors?

A: We are keen to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors. However we also have a responsibility to protect what we look after and we need to ensure we have the funds available to do so.

Q: Won't this charge put pressure on the other car parks?

A: We expect at least a short term increase in use of the other car parks. Those who don't want to pay the charge may opt to use one of the other many free car parks we have at Ashridge, but most visitors want to park close to our facilities and will be willing to either become members or pay a parking charge. We will be introducing measures to prevent an increase in unwanted parking on verges and unsuitable locations – this is a key part of the project design process.

Q: Family budgets are already stretched. Isn't this a bad time to introduce car parking charges to one of the few remaining places you can visit and not pay to park?

A: We will carefully consider how much to charge for parking so that we do not deter families. There will still be over 20 free car parks at Ashridge. And again, you only need an individual National Trust membership to park free of charge.

Q: Will you be painting yellow lines on all the surrounding roads?

A: No. We hope this won't be necessary. Most people will be happy to pay the charge, join the National Trust, or will choose to use one of the other free car parks. However, we will maintain the close links with the Highways Authority during the design process and on implementation to make sure that on-road parking doesn't become an issue.

Q: How do I take out membership?

A: You can join the National Trust at Ashridge. Just pop into the visitor centre and ask any member of staff. It's open from 10am – 4pm daily in the winter months and to 5pm in summer. If you join at Ashridge, your first year's membership fee stays at Ashridge so it's a great way to support your local property.

Q: How do I make my views known?

A: Please send your comments to our project manager: jennifer.smith2@nationaltrust.org.uk