

Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



POSITION STATEMENT

NUMBER 7

AFFORDABLE PARKING AT TRANSPORT NODES

Background: What the AONB Management Plan Says

The AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019 identifies a key transport issue;

‘effective and frequent public transport for an extensive area with a low population is prohibitively expensive so buses are few and private vehicle ownership is high. There is a shortage of affordable parking at transport nodes to facilitate greater use of public transport. A lack of stopping points on the railways through the AONB means that they are an under-utilised resource’.

The Management Plan goes on to consider that there is little incentive to use public transport. There are infrequent bus services and just one railway station in the AONB, with limited parking which is costly. The use of public transport could increase if there were better and affordable parking facilities near public transport routes.

Objective PT D of the Management Plan states

‘Transportation planning and management takes full account of the AONB designation, protects the tranquillity and special qualities of the landscape and reduces transport impacts on the environment and communities of the AONB’.

The four policies, PT 19 to PT 22 elaborate on this, focussing on

- conserving the character of the landscape of the highway corridor,
- promoting an integrated and attractive highway system,
- sustaining the tranquillity of the AONB and
- promoting the provision of affordable parking at public transport nodes along with similar initiatives aimed at reducing reliance on private cars.

Existing Public Transport by Road

As identified in the key issues of the Management Plan it is unrealistic to expect the standard of public transport in rural area, with a low and widely dispersed population, to be anywhere near that which would be found in and around a market town or larger city. Nevertheless, the quality of rural life and the contribution that tourism could make to the rural economy could be enhanced by facilitating the greater use of public transport that does exist. It is noticeable that there are a small number of major routes through the AONB and a few 'B' class routes that link the larger villages.

Currently there are no public transport arrangements specifically focussed on visitors and enabling them to move around the AONB and visit attractions without their own personal transport.

In a similar vein, those that live in the AONB and work outside rely considerably on personal transport to get them to work. There are some specialist coaches to enable pupils to get to schools; however in a significant number of cases this involves parents driving them to a pick up point.

The AONB is conspicuously short of parking at key points where the rural road network meets the main, and more important, road routes. There is, therefore, absolutely no incentive for residents or visitors to leave their personal transport and join public services.

Village Hubs

The concept of village hubs has been debated for a few years. In some communities steps have been taken, sometimes directly and in other cases less overtly, towards achieving that concept by the provision of community shops with a combination of community services linked, possibly, with the village hall. Such hubs can operate car share systems, and although the bus services to such communities may be infrequent, they can be based at places where parking is available, such as the local pub, the village hall, or even a farmyard. Indeed, with the move towards increasing arable production and away from livestock there are farmyards associated with villages or close to main routes where users of public transport could park their cars.

Perceived Costs

The first step in the facilitation of use of public transport in this sort of situation is the provision of parking facilities and the second is ensuring that they are affordable. It has been particularly noticeable in recent years when local authorities have been under increasing financial pressures, owing to the restrictions imposed on them by central Government, that there has been a focus on income raising. In many cases this has seen previously nominal charges for parking being increased substantially so that the cost of parking becomes a significant disincentive. The perceived problem is that the combined cost of public transport, and the parking cost, militate against the use

of public transport. Obviously this leads to a downward spiral in public transport use, which is counter-productive to the principles of providing a service for those that cannot afford their own personal transport, and to the concepts of sustainability and the reduction in the use of fossil fuels when considered from a community scale.

Railways

Two railways pass through the AONB. The route between Salisbury and Warminster provides absolutely no value to the AONB whatsoever as it does not stop. Currently there is a suggestion to re-open the station at Wilton, outside this AONB. The AONB Partnership has the aspiration to re-open stations and halts along that route so that the railway does provide a service to the AONB, its residents, and visitors, Clearly to facilitate such an extension of use of this local railway there would be a need for parking at the stations/halts and that would need to be affordable so that it did not act as a disincentive.

The other railway line through the AONB is part of the main line network and that runs from Salisbury, via Wilton, through the AONB to Gillingham and on to Yeovil. There is a single station at Tisbury. There is a small amount of parking provided at the station and the evidence of the road side, road verge and gateway parking shows that this is a well used facility. The scale of the 'irregular' parking is good evidence that not only is this a facility that could be better used, but that the lack of proper parking facilities is serving as a disincentive to even greater use. It could, therefore, be counter-productive at the present time to promote greater visitor use of the railway and the station, as potential users from within the AONB would have nowhere to park. Congestion would not facilitate an extension of bus services [or smaller electric units] nor the overt creation of a transport hub with potential vehicle hire opportunities. The provision of additional parking within the station area is, therefore, identified as a key issue not just for the local community but also for enhancing the visitor economy.

The re-opening of other halts / stations on the route could not only assist residents in their use of the railway (and in doing so relieve some of the pressure on the parking at Tisbury) but also provide opportunities for 'hop on, hop off' type tourism activities. The AONB is also acutely aware that the limited parking facilities at Wilton and Gillingham also militate against the use of those stations by AONB residents and visitors.

Affordability

The second issue, affordability, is also crucial to enhancing the sustainability of transport around the AONB. If the perceived cost of parking and the travel ticket is anywhere near the perceived cost of using personal transport, then it is highly likely that people will chose the option of staying with their own personal transport. Furthermore that gives them additional flexibility, as well as the cost advantage.

The AONB Position

The AONB Partnership does, therefore, encourage the provision of parking that does not have adverse impacts on the local landscape character and sense of place of the locality. It has already advised the Neighbourhood Planning Group at Tisbury on these matters. The Partnership will continue to encourage the provision of parking on bus routes and will, where appropriate, support proposals and applications for financial aid to establish and maintain such facilities.

The Partnership aspires to see the operation of additional halts / stations on both railways within and near the AONB, with associated affordable parking, to serve not just residents but also sustainable tourism.

The AONB Partnership urges its constituent organisations and associated interests to:

- Encourage and facilitate affordable parking at public transport nodes in and around the AONB
- Promote the greater use of public transport
- Promote, encourage, and facilitate extra stopping points on both railways within the AONB
- Ensure the cost of parking is not a disincentive to the use of public transport
- Ensure parking at Tisbury Station is sufficient to avoid the clutter, confusion and character erosion of roadside and verge parking, as well as being affordable.

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