



**National
Trust**

ASHRIDGE ESTATE MONUMENT DRIVE CAR PARKING PROJECT

Monument Drive, at the heart of Ashridge, continues to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, most of whom arrive by car.

The informal, ad-hoc parking arrangements on the soft verges either side of the drive give rise to a number of serious issues. The most obvious is the damage to the verges themselves – people stuck in ruts, wheels churning in the mud, is a common sight in wet weather. People park under trees, causing soil compaction and damage to roots. There are archaeological features both sides of the drive that are subject to constant low-level damage by cars and the all-important view from the House to the Monument is obscured by randomly parked cars on both sides.

At peak times, chaos ensues as people reverse out across the path of children, dogs, cyclists, riders and each other. People queue to take a space that is shortly to be vacated and, inevitably, that causes a tailback – sometimes right back on to the B4506.

We've done what we can to minimise this by moving away from large events that the property infrastructure just can't cope with to much smaller events linked to the outdoors and our conservation work. We've also put in various forms of root protection – 'dead hedges' made of brash to deter access and influence pedestrian routes, large logs to prevent vehicles parking under the most threatened veteran trees and a deep woodchip mulch to encourage worm activity and so enable more water, air and nutrients to reach the roots of the worst affected trees. Although these are undoubtedly small triumphs, we're not winning the war.

The Trust's long-held aspiration is to provide some kind of sympathetic, appropriate surfaced car parking scheme to cater for all our visitors needs and give them a better experience. We also intend to introduce a parking charge. Looking after countryside sites is a very costly business and we feel it's right to ask people arriving by car to make a contribution. We've not decided on what the charge should be yet, but we'll look at similar sites and pick something that's in line with these. National Trust members will, of course, be able to park free of charge. An individual membership currently costs £64.80 per year which you can pay by direct debit at £5.40 each month. So, if you're a regular visitor, you can still enjoy Ashridge as often as you like for just £1.35 a week. Visitors who really don't want to contribute can avoid the parking charge altogether by walking or cycling in or by using one

of the outlying car parks, which will remain free. We'll also be looking to see if we can improve public transport links.

We've had a car counter installed on Monument Drive and in just the three months from August to October an astonishing 60,000 cars have driven onto site. As you would expect, this includes the cars that come onto the drive after dark. I'm talking now about young people in small hatchbacks who spin round and round degrading the small area of surfaced parking we do have, chuck litter out of the window and then zoom out again at break-neck speed. As part of this project, we're looking at the possibility of installing electric gates on the drive so that the drive can be closed between 10pm and 7am each day, in accordance with an already existing but not enforced Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). There will, of course, need to be processes in place for the families who live up Monument Drive so that they can continue to come and go as they please and so that emergency vehicles can get in should they need to.

The project is just in its earliest stages. We have a dedicated project manager, Jenny Smith, who works with us 3 days a week and we've just appointed landscape architects, Colvin & Moggridge, to draw up concept designs. So, there'll be lots of research, surveys, ground investigations etc. going on through the winter months and then, in the Spring, we're hoping to have a design proposal to share with all our local communities. We've been really clear in our brief that we need a solution that sits comfortably within the historic environment, that better protects the ecology we're famed for and that still enables people to enjoy Ashridge with friends and family, much as they do now.

There's a 'frequently asked questions' sheet about the project. You can download it from our website.