

Reduced access to woodland near Hughenden due to new parking policy V2

The woodland areas surrounding Hughenden manor have been freely accessible to the public for as long as anyone can remember. There have historically been 3 car parks: 1 by the church some 0.5 KM from the woodland up a steep hill, one in the woodland itself and an overflow car park in a nearby field. The woodland has historically been one of the most popular natural environments in the immediate vicinity of High Wycombe.

A recent approved planning application (14/06897/FUL) detailed what most understood to be an extension of parking facilities for the manor and surrounding woodlands. There are still 3 car parks - one by the church and one where the overflow car park used to be and a new Summer overflow car-park. The previous woodland car parking areas (approx 4 areas) were covered with top-soil and planted with trees. A hut at the entrance to the car park was built and manned by National Trust staff demanding a fee of £4.75 per non National Trust member for the use of the car park. Jim Hoy of the National Trust claims that they were forced to revert the existing car-parks to woodland by the Planning Dept. He claims that they were "forced" to charge in order to restrict demand having been unable to accommodate all visitors during popular events.

The net effect is reduced avenues to exercise and even fewer opportunities in High Wycombe to access natural environments. (The only other viable option very near Wycombe is the woodland near West Wycombe, which has downsized a few years ago by about 20% of the area being felling for firewood and the land converted to a field).

The lower car park near the church remains free but has limited spaces. There are no spaces available during services etc and at weekends there are also few spaces available. Also, the woodland is approx 0.5 KM away up a steep hill and that precludes access for many, especially those with health or disability issues.

It seems somewhat incongruous to be surrounded by countryside and for there to be so few opportunities for the public to access these spaces. It seems perverse that when faced with an obesity crisis, institutions such as the National Trust choose to reduce the opportunities for the general public to exercise!

The Planning Dept do not view this as being their problem given that the physical access route remains intact. However, surely they could have done more to protect free public access to important rights of way and public amenities? The decisions made by the National Trust seem to be deliberate attempts to extort money the local population and to restrict access to public amenities. They could have chosen to only charge for access during those high demand events and that would have been a more socially responsible way of managing the situation. Interestingly access is free between 8.30 AM and 9.30 AM to dog owners and Jim Hoy (Hughenden's manager) is a dog owner!

Please do make this a matter of public debate. Please do complain to your MP, your local councillors and with the National Trust.

Contacts:

Complaints, Wycombe District Council, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1BB

National Trust Complaints dept enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

MP Steve Baker via t.sansom@parliament.uk

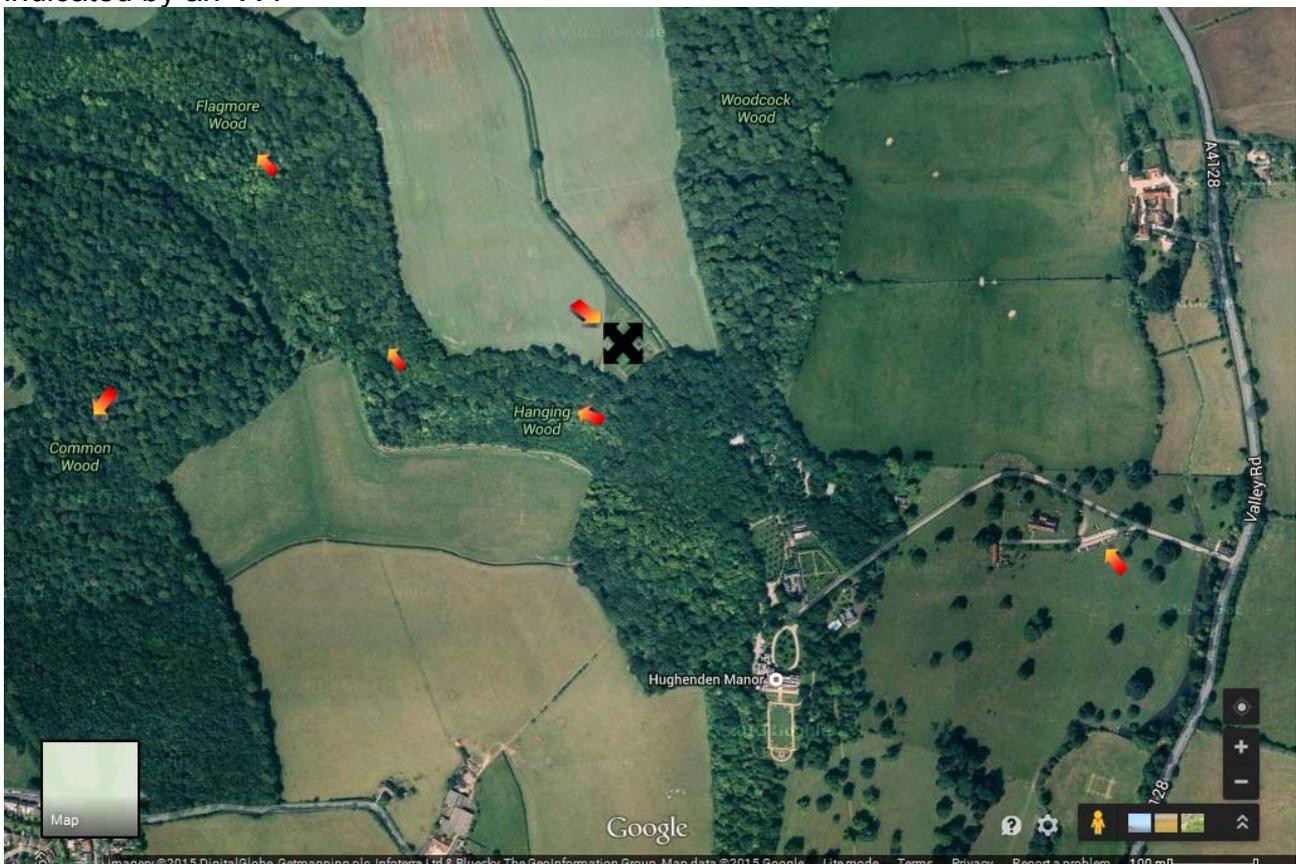
National Trust Complaints: National Trust, PO Box 574, Manvers, Rotherham, S63 3FH

Planning dept complaints: planning@wycombe.gov.uk

Top level view showing the new car-park (old overflow carpark - left), the start of the woodland walks (middle) and the church carpark (right).



Top-level view showing the woodland in relation to the lower car park and the new car park indicated by an "X".



Detailed view showing the distance between the church carpark and the start of the woodland walks:



Distance from the church carpark to the start of the main woodland walks in blocks of 50 M (500 M, 600+ M if the hill effect is factored in). The main walking areas ie Flagmore and Hanging Woods are still some distance away. The new car park is another 100M away.

