

Car Parking and Movies@Malmesbury

The Concern

A gentleman has contacted the Town Clerk at the Town Hall about problems faced by patrons of M@M's events and the two hour parking limit imposed by Wiltshire County Council on the Cross Hayes car park.

Lovely as your facilities are, and with such friendly people, few of the events you invite us to last under 2 hours. Yet the nearby car park threatens a fine if one stays longer than 2 hours. The forthcoming Siegfried lasts nearly 6 hours!

The alternative offered of long stay parking is too long a walk away for me - I am 75.

Suggestion - at ticket purchase offer an option to pay extra for parking beyond 2 hours. The customer pays for 2 hours on the parking machine and then collects the voucher to display in their car showing they are in Movies for Malmesbury so they do not get fined.

The Evidence

Statistics for February to April more than support the gentleman's comments.

Of the 21 2pm (or afternoon) events that M@M promotes during the February to April period, 19 are longer than 2 hours while only 2 are under 2 hours ("Turner and Constable" at 91 mins).

The Background

We understand that it may be difficult, possibly impossible, to encourage Wiltshire C C to change their car parking policy with regard to the Cross Hayes but we believe we owe it to ourselves, our patrons and our supporters, who are predominantly elderly and reluctant to venture out at night, to at least make the Council aware of our concerns.

The 2 hour limit is, we suppose, to encourage as many people to use the limited spaces in the Town Centre as possible. For nearly all of the visitors to the centre of town, 2 hours is probably sufficient for some shopping, a library visit, a trip to the Abbey and a coffee in a cafe. But M@M does provide a vital service to the people of the area, especially the elderly and, in some cases, the vulnerable. We ought to remember that when we went "cap in hand" to local charities and organisations to raise money for the purchase of the new projector, we emphasised that in the post COVID era, many people in the community felt reluctant to venture out of their homes for social interactions and that the cinema could play an important role in re-establishing pre pandemic norms. We were given £5,000 by the Malmesbury League of Friends precisely because they recognised the importance of a social amenity like the cinema to the people of the area.

It has always been our policy to present at least two screenings of every event that we promote at M@M with a 2pm and an 8pm screening. Overwhelmingly, we have found that the elderly and vulnerable prefer the 2pm slots. And yet, the policy of WCC is to impose a 2 hour parking time, thus making it very difficult for people like our correspondent to attend afternoon screenings. The Long Stay car park is not a solution for the elderly or infirm and often the Cross Hayes car park is full in the evenings, making it even more difficult for a substantial number of our patrons to attend our events.

We understand that our concerns and possible solutions may be dismissed out of hand by WCC but that should not prevent us from at least trying; surely, we owe that to the residents of the area and those who came to our aid when we needed financial support.

The Alternatives

a). The Long Stay Car Park.

This offers 24 hours maximum stay but Wiltshire County Council's own website describes the Long Stay Car Park thus:

Surface car park ideal for longer stays. Access to the town is via steep steps and therefore is not suitable for wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties who wish to visit the town centre.

b). Bus to and from the Cross Hayes.

A search of bus routes and timetables reveals that there is a huge "dead zone" between 1.42 and 5pm on fixed routes. The only Route that we could find was Route 41 which stops at the Cross Hayes at 1.42pm and thereon no buses until 4.30pm.

c). Wiltshire Connect.

Wiltshire Connect is Wiltshire Council's flexible public-transport service that combines on-demand minibuses with a small number of traditional timetabled bus routes. It operates across rural areas—including the Royal Wootton Bassett & Malmesbury zone—giving people a way to travel without fixed bus schedules. The Scheme works a bit like a shared taxi, but at bus fares.

You book a ride via the Wiltshire Connect app or by phone. The system groups passengers travelling in the same direction. You can travel between any designated pick-up and drop-off points in your zone. Home pick-ups are available for people with mobility issues or who live in isolated spots.

d). Blue Badge.

People qualify for a Blue Badge when their mobility is seriously limited, but the exact criteria depend on whether they meet automatic eligibility or need to be assessed.

e). Risk getting a car parking fine in the Cross Hayes.

Other than the 2 screenings of the "Turner & Constable" documentary, the shortest film is 6 minutes over the 2 hour slot. With time taken to get to the cinema, watch the film and then exit at the end, this draws out to around 2 hours and 20 minutes.

f). Don't go to the cinema.

Given that our audiences are predominantly elderly, the potential inflexibility of parking limits in the Town Centre, makes it virtually impossible for the elderly and / or infirm to travel in to the centre of town and enjoy the entertainment on offer.

Why is this important?

In Movies@Malmesbury's submission for funds to purchase the projector we wrote:

The communal aspect of the local cinema experience has never been more important. As we recover from the long-term effects of the pandemic, communal events, such as those offered on a regular basis by organisations such as "Movies@Malmesbury", help to bring people together again. The "cost of living" crisis is also a major concern. At a time when involvement with the arts is under threat, Movies@Malmesbury, and organisations like it, are bringing high quality music, dance and art to rural communities at a fraction of the cost of going to the theatre and concert hall. Our audience is predominantly an elderly one and a number, who were regulars before Covid, are now seldom seen. The new tiered seating, installed in late May 2023 and purchased by Malmesbury Town

Council, which will provide comfort and unrestricted viewing, will, we believe, tempt more people to the cinema, to enjoy the arts at an affordable cost in the heart of their community. We appreciate that in our times, aspects of life, such as the Arts are often the first to be sacrificed but we also acknowledge that the Arts, and access to the arts, is vital for the well-being of our communities.

Phrases such as the one above enabled us to persuade organisation such as the Malmesbury League of Friends and the Malmesbury Area Community Trust to support us to the tune of £10,000 (£5k each). Yet we are faced with a situation, beyond our immediate control, where we cannot fulfil some aspects of those statements because car parking in the Cross Hayes and around the Town centre is limited to 2 hours by Wiltshire County Council.

The Realities of the situation.

We understand that our concerns and possible solutions may be dismissed out of hand by WCC but that should not prevent us from at least trying; surely we owe that to the residents of the area and those who came to our aid when we needed financial support.

Cross Hayes and finances.

Cross Hayes has roughly 90–100 spaces. Short-stay car parks in Wiltshire typically generate:

- £1.70–£2.00 per 2-hour stay
- High turnover: 3–5 cars per space per day is normal for a central short-stay site
- Chargeable days: ~300 days per year (after removing free days and bank holidays)

Using conservative assumptions:

Low estimate: 90 spaces × 2 cars/day × £1.70 × 300 days ≈ £91,800 per year

Mid estimate: 90 spaces × 3 cars/day × £1.70 × 300 days ≈ £137,700 per year

High estimate: 100 spaces × 4 cars/day × £2.00 × 300 days ≈ £240,000 per year

Malmesbury Town Council pays Wiltshire County Council approximately £1800 per year (source: Town Council budget papers) to suspend car park charges on Bank holidays.

The Cross Hayes is clearly a very lucrative asset for the County Council and also provides a valuable revenue stream for businesses in the town itself through its 2 hour stay limit policy.

The way forward.

a). Accept the status quo.

We appreciate that the County Council is unlikely to accede to any submission from a small interest / community group, such as Movies@Malmesbury, or even from a town Council such as Malmesbury Town Council, but that does not mean that we shouldn't try. Surely, we owe that to the elderly and infirm in our community.

b). An extended car parking notice.

A customer purchases a ticket from the Town Hall for an event at Movies@Malmesbury. They pay for their cinema ticket(s) plus a charge (to be determined / negotiated) for an extended stay parking notice. On the day of the event, they pay for their 2 hour parking stay as normal and then collect the "extended car parking notice" from the Town Hall desk. This notice contains the date and time of the

event (so it can only be used once on the day in question) together with an ending time (say 20 minutes after the published ending of the film) and is displayed clearly in the window of the car. To prevent unauthorised copying of these notices, they will be printed professionally (at a cost perhaps born from the profits that M@M makes each year) and filled in at the desk.

A log of how many notices are issued and the dates and times are kept in the Town Hall and then a financial settlement is arranged on those numbers on a quarterly basis, the sum coming from money generated from “Movies@Malmesbury” or through sponsorship / contributions.

We understand that there may be other options available and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them with members of the Town Council.

At present it is hard not to accept that the elderly and infirm are being discriminated against by the 2 hour car parking limit imposed by Wiltshire County Council on the Cross Hayes car park preventing them from accessing the arts and other activities organised in and around the centre of town, and in our case, by Movies@Malmesbury in Malmesbury Town Hall.

Graham Cooke and Ian Atkinson

Members of the M@M steering group.

February 2026