

Leisure & Tourism Information



User Groups visiting Moors Valley

Family Groups - Generally with children up to 13 years, but with the introduction of Go Ape in 2003 this upper age for children has increased. Primarily visit on weekends and holidays to use play equipment, railway, picnic area etc. Can be split further into local families and tourists.

Walkers - Retired/Older couples, use paths throughout Park and Forest, primarily in non-holiday periods.

Dog Walkers - Regulars, often visiting once or twice per day, everyday. Usually retired. Use paths throughout Park and Forest. Many walk in from Potterne Park or car parks on the Ringwood-Verwood road.

Cyclists - Usually family groups at weekends and holidays, retired or active adults on mid-week days. Use paths throughout Park and Forest,

Golfers - Adults all ages, throughout the year. Retired at mid-week, others at weekends.

Orienteers - To use permanent orienteering course. Family groups at weekends, enthusiasts when part of a competition. Schools and groups during term times.

Anglers - Mixture adults and youngsters. Weekends and holidays June to March.

Visiting Groups - School, Play Schemes, Youth, Church, Special Needs etc. All times though peak is June/July often visit by coach or minibus.

Railway/Steam enthusiasts - Use railway only. Often volunteer on railway, especially when they have special events on.

Bird/wildlife-watchers - Usually to look at birdlife on lakes. Limited numbers, usually at off-peak times.

User Conflicts

Conflicts between user groups are, thankfully, fairly few probably due to segregation either on a geographical or time basis, and a good standard of facilities and information available. However here are some examples of conflicts which have arisen in the past...

Cyclists V Walkers / Family Groups

Cyclists going too fast past people walking. Information says they must slow down when passing walkers. Kept out of the busy play trail area and cycling has been stopped around the Moors Lake to reduce risk of accidents. Not a major problem at present though cycling is on the increase.

Dog Walkers V Family / Greenkeepers

Most regular Dog Walkers are not a problem. Dogs are not allowed in the play areas, this rule is rarely infringed. Some regular walkers persist in walking on the golf course. Minority of people on busy days allowing dogs to run free or foul areas where children play. Dogs off leads and bothering/scaring people. Dogs not perceived as a major problem at present, potentially the Play Trail could become a dog free area in the future. Dog mess not cleared.

Fishermen V Wildlife

Problems with some youngsters trying to fish on non-designated areas, disturbing wildlife. Problems with discarded line and hooks for wildfowl. Damaged fish from careless anglers. Rubbish left on banks. Majority of fishermen cause no problems. Maximum of 15 at any time in a limited area means unlikely to ever become a major problem.

Golfers V General Users

Main conflicts with golf access road and golfers car park. Driving too fast, not slowing for pedestrians. In some areas there is a risk of being hit by a golf ball if golfers are not aware/do not stop for walkers.

Visiting Groups V Families

Sometimes large groups can cause problems on the play equipment just by sheer numbers. Occasionally groups of older children can upset parents of younger children as they seem to be boisterous in their play.

General Users/Dogs V Wildlife

Some owners allow dogs to chase deer or wildfowl- this problem seems to be on the increase with several deer killed in the past year due to being chased/brought down by dogs. Very hard to monitor as usually happens well into the Forest. Visitors are kept away from many sensitive areas through restricted access, e.g. footpaths around wooded areas rather than through, footpaths along one side of a lake rather than all the way around. Problems with overfeeding of ducks causing pollution of water.

Impact Analysis

Attempts have been made to spread the visitor pressure around the whole area of the park. Initially there was very little development in the Forest area and so the vast majority of visitors were concentrated around the Visitor Centre, Play area and picnic area. By introducing the Play Trail and Tree Top Trail visitors were taken further out into the Forest and their numbers were spread, thus increasing the capacity of the park. Additional measures such as waymarked walks, cycle routes and the family trail have been created to take visitors even further afield.

Erosion

We have tried to minimise erosion on footpaths by careful placement of footpaths to avoid people using desire lines i.e. so footpaths are in a direct line so people do not cut corners or have planting either side so corners cannot be cut.

In the early years of Moors Valley some of the footpaths were mown grass, it was soon realised that this could not cope with the visitor pressure and so in many areas these were replaced with compacted gravel paths. These are fairly hard wearing but have a tendency to form dips where puddles could form and are not always an ideal surface for wheelchairs or push chairs.

Many of the main paths have now been replaced with tarmac, although maybe not the most appropriate surface for a countryside environment it is hard wearing and a good surface for wheelchairs and for people who have difficulty walking, the disadvantage of tarmac is that it is very expensive to put down compared to gravel. Most areas in the Forest remain compacted gravel; this area is naturally much more free draining and so the paths are less likely to puddle.

Impacts on Wildlife

Overall since Moors Valley was created the value of the land for wildlife has improved; previously the land was used for farming and forestry. Since then new habitats have been created e.g. lakes, ponds and hedges and management work has been carried out specifically for wildlife e.g. woodland management work. Visitors are kept away from the most sensitive areas mostly by taking footpaths around such areas or in the case of some marshy areas by building boardwalks over the top of these areas so that people can still enjoy them but do not cause them any harm. Obviously by having so many visitors in an area there is some disturbance but many of our larger mammals are unlikely to be seen during the main visitor hours anyway e.g. roe deer and badger. Many animals actually benefit from visitors e.g. squirrels in particular are notorious at clearing any food rubbish left by visitors; these does not appear to be detrimental to their health.

Impact on Facilities

The high visitor numbers do mean that facilities suffer high levels of wear and tear. There is an ongoing renewals programme of replacing play equipment as it becomes worn out, replacing fencing, benches etc.

Wider Environmental Impacts

In much of the work we do we try to minimise our environmental impact e.g. trying to minimise our use of paper and always using recycled, chlorine free paper, buying timber from sustainable sources, minimal use of disposable items in the restaurant etc. But there is still a huge impact from our visitors; the majority of visitors come by car which obviously involves carbon emissions, we do try and encourage alternative forms of transport by making it entirely free to visit if you walk or cycle to the park, but at present only about 1% of our visitors leave their cars at home. Unfortunately public transport to Moors Valley is almost non-existent.

Economic Impacts

Moors Valley Country Park at present covers its running costs, therefore it does not cost any money for East Dorset District Council and Forestry Commission to run the park each year. This is dependent on income from car park revenue, the golf course, restaurant and other attractions on the site; obviously all this money is generated by visitors to the park.

The park employs well over 50 people from the local area, both full and part time; generating extra income into the area and subsequent secondary spending. The park employs various local firms e.g. cleaners, builders etc and buys many of its supplies locally thus again putting money into the local economy.



Customer Service

Customer service is extremely important at Moors Valley. 'The visitors are why we are here, they are not an interruption!'

A high standard of the facilities as well as of the service provided is essential. Recommendation and repeat visits help us to know that the facilities and service provided are good, it also saves a lot of money on promotion and advertising.

Why personal presentation is important

First impressions count. Many visitors may not even speak with you and others you may only be with you a short time. The impression you give reflects on yourself and the whole park.

- All Wardens wear uniform and name badges so they are easily identified.
 - Generally try to employ staff that have a naturally friendly, cheerful personality
 - Attitude, all staff are encouraged to be friendly and helpful to visitors
- e.g. to acknowledge visitors they see in the park
e.g. to make the first approach - 'can I help' rather than waiting to be asked
e.g. to go that bit further - rather than just handing out a park leaflet, take a little time to explain some of the features

Helping different types of visitors

Often it is too easy to cater for the majority and ignore the minority, often through lack of time or money. But it can give good job satisfaction to cater for someone with a special need and with the disability discrimination act there is an obligation to do so.

- **Disabled visitors** - parking spaces, toilet facilities, wheelchairs and battri-cars, ramps, smooth footpaths, large print leaflets etc
- **Young children** - baby change facilities, high chairs, specialised play equipment
- **Foreign visitors** - translations of leaflet
- **Groups** - group information sheets,

Dealing with customers

Friendly, helpful and efficient. You have the ability to make or break a visitors day with how you have communicated with them. If you have a positive experience you will feel good and be more satisfied with your work.

- **Face to face** - make the first approach, offer help rather than wait to be asked. Set the scene if someone is coming in to complain you can often diffuse the situation immediately by being friendly and helpful. Tempting, as it is to reply to confrontation with more confrontation it is a lot more skilful to respond with help and support and win the customer over.
- **On the telephone** - answer ASAP, within three rings. Not always possible answer machine cuts in after 8 rings. Again friendly, helpful and efficient. Return calls ASAP. Just under 20,000 calls per year received.
- **In writing** - all letters and e-mails should be replied to with 7 working days.

Selling Moors Valley

Much of this at Moors Valley is in the hands of the private concessionaires on site. Warden service responsible for events programme.

- Over 300 events organised each year. A high percentage of these (70%+) will be fully subscribed. Many with repeat customers.

Customer service situations

Good provision of information and of dealing with problems is essential. Problems should be seen as an opportunity to impress the customer with good service.

- Information and advice should be accurate, concise and presented in a way to reflect the standards of the park. See leaflets
- Messages, often where things can go wrong. Full details not taken, messages not passed, not responded to in a suitable time. Can impress if calls are replied to quickly.
- Records of customers season ticket holders, regular event goers so they don't have to repeat full details
- Assistance, always make yourself available to help even if it is just opening doors for someone it makes a difference.
- Dealing with problems lost children, first aid, lost items, broken down cars etc. For all problems people may become stressful or emotional so extra thought and care is needed. The need to be seen to be doing something quickly and positively is essential. If problems are dealt with well they will reflect positively rather than negatively on the park and the staff.

Complaints

We are lucky in that we have fairly few serious complaints. All are recorded and dealt with as soon as possible.

- Complaints received usually work their way to the appropriate level for action to be taken. The more serious the complaint the higher the level it will be dealt at. We don't work on the policy the 'customer is always right' but we do try to ensure that the customers are always dealt with in a polite respectful way. Complaints are always seen through to their conclusion even if it is a stalemate e.g. a car parking charge that cannot be altered.
- Customers with complaints can often be aggressive which can cause upset and stress amongst staff. These are usually passed straight away to a senior member of staff.

Feedback at Moors Valley

We like to try and give many opportunities for feedback. Visitor surveys, event/visit feedback questionnaires, feedback group, letters and suggestion box are the main opportunities for visitors to voice their opinions. An information point is always manned so it is easy to contact a member of staff.

- Suggestion box action taken, replies sent on request, responses posted on suggestions board.