
Coastal Car Parks Design Guide

**draft for consultation
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why do we need design guidelines for Coastal Car Parks?

1.1.1. As part of the Dorset and East Devon Coastal Corridor Plan, Halcrow Limited was commissioned by the Dorset AONB partnership on behalf of the Coastal Corridor Plan Steering Group to undertake an access and walks study for the Dorset and East Devon section of the South West Coast Path (SWCP) National Trail. The aim of the Coastal Corridor Plan is to bring together and co-ordinate delivery for the South West Coast Path National Trail and the corridor through which it passes, which includes the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, the Dorset and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and three Heritage Coasts. The document was published in May 2007 and focused on four main elements:

- Accessing the Coast Path;
- Accessing facilities;
- Auditing car parks and suggesting improvements; and
- Circular walks for health and heritage. .

1.1.2. The report highlighted the need for improvements in some of the coastal car parks throughout Dorset and East Devon. The common problems were identified in the following extract from the Halcrow report:

“Of these (car parks), the vast majority are owned by the relevant district or county councils. Whilst nowhere is perfect, many of the car parks (often the smaller or more rurally located ones) do not appear to be overly cluttered. Conversely there are selected examples which appear very visually cluttered”” Problems common to many car parks include:

- *Too many signs/ repetition of message;*
- *Signage placed inappropriately (eg prominent on cliff)/ the wrong place (not obvious to visitors);*
- *Text too large or too small;*
- *Unsympathetic materials used;*
- *Faded interpretation boards;*
- *Poor typefaces chosen (Transport Heavy, meant for road signs);*
and
- *Insufficient detail /lack of precise location of local amenities and public transport.*

Whilst some of the newer interpretation panels are a marked improvement, fading and insufficient detail of maps are still problems”.

1.1.3. Dorset County Council (DCC) has adopted a Rural Roads initiative adopted as the DCC New Roads Policy¹. The guidelines address common problems of signage clutter, white lines, etc following a project to look at roads in the landscape. The guidelines are also relevant to car park design.

1.2. What is covered in the guidelines?

1.2.1 These guidelines have been prepared in response to the Halcrow report and the identified need to improve the visitor experience in some of the coastal car parks in

¹ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=381462>

the committee area. The aim is that the protocol can then be followed where work is planned by public and private managers of coastal car parks that provide a point of access to the South West coastal path.

1.2.2 The protocol will set out practical guidance on the design of new, and the improvement of existing, car parks in terms of:

- Location
- Layout
- Surfacing
- Definition of parking bays
- Soft Landscaping
- Boundary treatments
- Litter

- Signage

1.2.3 Set out practical guidance with regard to:

- minimum legal requirements (for cars and pedestrians)
- the type of information needed
- location of signage
- materials

2 DESIGN GUIDELINES

2.1 Location

2.1.1 The importance and sensitivity of the coastline means that new development is very carefully considered and these guidelines are not intended to encourage the construction of new car parks. However, there may be opportunities to relocate existing car parks, for example where they are visually prominent or those at risk from coastal erosion. Careful consideration must also be given to any plans to refurbish or extend existing car parks. The following section covers includes guidance with regard to the local topography, landscape features and suitable road access.

2.1.2 When looking for a site to locate a new car park the following should be taken into consideration:

- The influence of planning designations should be taken into account such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (see above) and coastal designations.
- Highway access. The existing highway network will need to be adequate to accommodate additional vehicle movements. Consultation with the Local Highway Authority at an early stage would be worthwhile before more detailed plans are prepared.
- With reference to sites on or very close to the beach or cliffs, consideration should be given for the land stability and extent of the high water mark. The impact of climate change and in particular rising sea levels and increased coastal erosion will also need to be considered. The Shoreline Management Plan² will be an essential reference point in this respect.
- The location of the site should be in keeping with the local landscape character. Consideration should be given for the visual impact of the site and whether or not it will be

² Shoreline Management Plan (SMP)MP <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=400>

possible to soften the visual impact by planting. Such 'mitigation measures' should also in keeping with landscape character in terms of form and species choice. The relevant local authority landscape character assessments and 'Conserving Character' Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidance for the Dorset AONB offer guidance for development in respect of landscape character.

- If designing a new car park that might be subject to seasonal fluctuations in the level of use, it might be worth considering how the space can be used flexibly in terms of providing for if it would be appropriate.
- Constraints such as Ancient Monuments, Nature Conservation sites such as Coastal SACs, SSSIs etc Cons Area Tree Preservation Orders. – Better to avoid these when selecting a suitable site.

2.2 Site Survey and Analysis

2.2.1 Once a suitable site has been identified on a preliminary basis a more detailed site survey will need to be carried out. The following list of what the site survey should cover is not exhaustive but gives some guidance on the main topic areas that should be considered:

- Topography;
- Geology, soils and drainage;
- Services and easements such as electricity lines and cables, gas and water mains, sewers etc;
- Existing vegetation, trees should be surveyed and identified for retention or removal in accordance with the British Standard 5837:2005 Trees in Relation to Construction;
- Ecological survey to check for protected wildlife;
- Important views, consideration should be given to views from the sea as well as the wider views along the coast or from further in land;
- Existing public rights of way, both linking into and crossing the site;
- Site boundaries; identify neighbouring ownerships that could have an influence on future expansion.

2.3 Layout

2.3.1 The car park layout should be designed to use the space available as efficiently as possible and facilitate the safe movement of vehicles and pedestrians – although this may not be applicable to all car parks. The need to maximise efficiency, usually by marking out parking bays, and to provide clear pedestrian routes; will tend to be limited to the larger, more popular and most heavily used car parks³.

2.3.2 Where necessary, the layout should include parking provision and manoeuvring space for larger vehicles such as coaches and minibuses, but only if such vehicles will be encouraged to use the site and where the highway network will allow access. Details of standard parking bay sizes and circulation space requirements are available from the local highways authority⁴

³ See Halcrow report for details of usage.

⁴ Parking space dimensions and layout, plus information relating to cycle facilities can be found within the Dorset County Council Parking Guidelines 2007.

http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/pdf/7/i/Parking_Design_Guide_January_1997 .

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- 2.3.3 The layout, subdivision and landscape design can all be used to naturally direct drivers along a preferred route. The orientation of the car parking spaces should make it clear which direction vehicles should move – usually clockwise. This has the benefit of reducing the need for signage – such as large ‘One Way’ and ‘No ‘Entry’ signs.
- 2.3.4 The marking out of parking bays can be achieved in a number of different ways, and does not necessarily require a fixed surface and white lines. More natural and less intrusive options include:
- Low level timber fencing
 - Timber lengths at the head of the bay (photo or illustration RSPB car park Arne)
 - Lengths of timber between the bays (photo or illustration NT car park Studland)
 - Logs on end set into the ground (photo or illustration)
 - Stone set into the ground (photo or illustration)
- 2.3.5 As mentioned previously, pedestrian footpaths routes (and where applicable cycle paths) should be incorporated into the layout of larger, more heavily used car parks. A designated pedestrian route that follows obvious desire lines will help to avoid conflict between vehicles and people and to provide safe routes across the car park. Footpaths should therefore be clearly defined with safe pedestrian priority crossing points. These routes should lead pedestrians to the pay point (if applicable), information points and pedestrian exit points.
- 2.3.6 Motorcycle and bicycle stands should be provided and, to deter thieves, should ideally be located so that they benefit from being overlooked by passing traffic or walkers. For convenience they should also be positioned at a point close to the pedestrian exit from the car park. .
- 2.3.7 Overspill areas may occasionally be necessary to accommodate peaks in parking demand due to seasonal trends and special events. These areas do not need to be engineered to the same level as permanent parking areas and can normally be left as grass. However access and exit points will tend to be subject to the most wear and tear and can be reinforced without disturbing the appearance of grass (see details below on Surfacing).

2.4 Soft Landscape

- 2.4.1 Opportunities for planting within car parks should be encouraged. Planting not only looks attractive, but can perform the following functions:
- Provide screening to reduce the visual impact of parked vehicles.
 - Assimilate the site with its wider landscape context.
 - Improve the micro climate, providing shade and shelter from the elements to users and vehicles.
 - Help to define areas of parking and emphasise the main pedestrian and vehicular routes.
 - Enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for habitat creation.
- 2.4.2 Planting should reflect the local landscape character and use appropriate native species that are found in the locality. Ornamental species may be appropriate in more urban settings. Species should also be selected to suit the growing conditions of the

site, and be robust enough to withstand the harsh coastal climate and damage from visitors.

- 2.4.3 Planting should ideally be low maintenance or appropriate to the proposed management regime and skills available.⁵
- 2.4.4 It is usually advisable to obtain appropriate professional landscape advice as consideration should be given for the function of any planting and the suitability of its form and habit. As mentioned previously the local landscape character is vital in determining the approach taken in terms of assimilating or breaking up the view of the parked vehicles in the wider landscape. This may also need to be balanced with other concerns such as maintaining visibility and a sense of security across the car park.

2.5 Surfacing

- 2.5.1 The most appropriate type of surfacing material to be used will vary between car park sites. A sensitive approach to specifying surfacing materials should aim to lessen the visual and landscape impacts of the finished car park whilst providing a practical and useable car park.
- 2.5.2 Surfacing material should be selected with regard to location, environmental conditions, appearance, level of usage (including seasonal fluctuations), costs, maintenance, permeability, drainage and ease of repair. The use of sustainable materials is also important and consideration should always be given to using locally sourced or recycled materials where these are suitable.
- 2.5.3 Consideration should be given to using a hierarchy of different materials to lessen the overall impact of car parks. For example harder wearing but less attractive materials may be used for heavily trafficked entrance points and the most convenient/popular parking spaces with a graduation to softer treatments for less used/seasonal areas. The refurbishment of an existing car park may provide an opportunity to reduce the overall visual impact by introducing such a hierarchy of materials where one does not currently exist.
- 2.5.4 Appendix 2 lists the types of surfacing that are available to use, along with their respective qualities and potential suitable locations.



*Above left: Loose crushed rock surfacing used at the National Trust car park at Golden Cap
Above right: A less sympathetic approach – black asphalt at West Bexington. (Photos Halcrow)*

⁵ Further information can be found in the Horticultural Trades association's National Plant Specification which provides details for a wide range of plants that can be used in landscape schemes.

2.6 Boundary Treatment

- 2.6.1 Suitable boundary treatments will vary between sites and different landscape character areas. It is important that this treatment respects the local landscape whilst effectively helping to integrate the car park into its surroundings.
- 2.6.2 As a general approach reference should be made to adjacent field, road and property boundaries to establish the characteristic methods of enclosure for that area. If small woodlands or copses are a distinctive local landscape feature this could be usefully reflected in the choice of boundary treatment.
- 2.6.3 Careful design of boundaries should help to lessen the visual and landscape impacts of car parks. However, it must be ensured that new landscape features aimed at screening parked cars do not themselves appear incongruous.
- 2.6.4 Appropriate boundary treatments could include native hedges, dry stone walls (using local stone), areas or belts of deciduous woodlands, timber post and rail fencing, post and wire stock fencing and, in some cases, small scale land modelling/banking. At urban sites and formal estates ornamental planting, brick walls and fencing/railings may also be suitable.
- 2.6.5 Pedestrian desire lines to and from the car park should be identified and appropriate gaps incorporated into the new boundary design. The location of car park access points can also be a mechanism for 'steering' people away from certain undesirable routes, for example away from particularly sensitive habitats.
- 2.6.6 Security of users and unattended vehicles is an issue that should be considered. Vandalism can be a problem at some sites, where any new features, such as fencing, must have a very robust design. Timber fencing and furniture is attractive as fuel for beach bonfires and barbeques. The very exposed nature of some coastal car parks, with extremely harsh environmental conditions will be a determining factor on what boundary furniture can be used and which plant species can be successfully established. The choice of plant species will also be affected by ecological considerations.
- 2.6.7 The way in which the car park is used in all seasons needs to be considered. For example in winter months many visitors want to be able to see views from the comfort of their cars. A balance needs to be struck between enabling views out for car park users whilst reducing the visual impact of cars from surrounding views. The view of car parks from the seaward side needs to be considered as well as the wider views along to coast or from further in land.
- 2.6.8 Where car parks are to make use of existing mature trees or woodland to form their boundaries, a suitable buffer must be kept clear of parking to avoid soil compaction and damage to tree roots.



Boundary treatments should relate to the local environment
Above left: Simple timber post and rail fencing at National Trust Car Park at Golden Cap (photo Halcrow)
Above right: Local stone used in the National Trust Car Park at Studland (photo Halcrow)

2.7 Litter

- 2.7.1 The provision of litterbins is dependent upon the location of the car park. There is little point in providing litterbins in very remote sites where collections cannot be guaranteed. Also, in exposed locations, litter will be blown out of the bin. The main aim should therefore be to encourage visitors/car park users to be responsible and take their litter home. In more urban locations, it is likely that the regular emptying of litterbins can be arranged. The same principles apply to the provision, and regular emptying, of dog bins.
- 2.7.2 If litterbins are provided, then the design should be appropriate to the location and setting. They should be designed to be durable and non-flammable. A 'Wildlife proof' design is also important to prevent litter and rubbish being pulled out of the bins by birds and other animals looking for food.



Above Left and Middle: Functional but not particularly attractive litter bins at West Bexington
Above Right: Timber litter bin at Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens (Photos WDDC)

2.8 Signage

- 2.8.1 The Halcrow report identified a number of car parks within the study area that are very visually cluttered. The main problem areas were identified as:
- Too many signs/ repetition of message;
 - Signage placed inappropriately e.g. prominent on cliff, not obvious to visitors;

- Text too large or too small and poor typefaces chosen (e.g. Transport Heavy, meant for road signs);
- Unsympathetic materials used;
- Faded interpretation boards;
- Insufficient detail /lack of precise location of local amenities and public transport/distances not shown; and
- Faded, out of date information and maps.

2.8.2 In many cases the visual clutter is a result of the need of several agencies providing signage in one location, potentially including:

- District Council;
- County Council (as highway – including rights of way – authority and promoter of countryside);
- Environment Agency (bathing water quality);
- RNLI (coastal safety messages); and
- Car park owner (if different of above).



Above left: An accumulation of signage at West Bexington
Above right: An individual approach (Photos Halcrow)

2.8.3 Combining the information messages of all the above should be considered. The relatively new Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) beach safety information sign, as installed at a number of beaches in West Dorset, was the result of collaborative working between the Dorset Coast Forum (DCF), West Dorset District Council (WDDC) and the RNLI.

2.8.4 Two key types of information board may be required at a series of car parks, namely those which give:

- Information for arriving motorists; and
- Information on local facilities and walking routes; interpretation panels on points of local interest; and safety information.

Arriving motorists

2.8.5 Ideally situated at the car park entrance, this should contain limited information that can be easily assimilated by a driver in a moving vehicle. The message should not be so detailed that the motorist is forced to stop in the entrance (and potentially cause a hazard to highway users) to read the notice – or be forced to park the car then return to the entrance on foot to read it in more detail. Therefore, any sign at the entrance to the car park should be kept to a minimum to include:

- Name of car park;

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- Whether it is pay and display
 - Name of owner/manager e.g. West Dorset District Council, National Trust etc
- 2.8.6 The sign will need to be designed to be appropriate to the anticipated speed of traffic approaching the car park.
- 2.8.7 Once the car-borne visitor is off the highway and the vehicle is parked, their next step is to locate any pay-point if it is a pay and display car park. The pay and display point will need to be clearly obvious and easily accessible. It does not necessarily need to be located with the interpretation/visitor information. Positioning needs to be carefully considered so as to avoid visual clutter but also to avoid congestion of the pay and display machine by visitors reading up on local information. Any signage on or at the pay and display point should be limited to the necessary legal information such as:
- Ownership contact details
 - Car park charges
 - Safety messages re car crime etc
- 2.8.8 S35 of the Road Traffic Act provides guidance on what signage is needed in car parks. The Act sets out the minimum required and it is at the discretion of the car park manager what else is provided. For local authority pay and display car parks there is also the requirement to display details of fees and penalties etc.

Facilities information board

- 2.8.9 Once the parking ticket has been displayed and the driver, plus any passengers are out of the car, their next priority is likely to be finding out more about where they are and where they ought to go. This information should ideally be situated where paths leave the car park to help guide the visitor to the points of interest. It is important to make sure that signs are not obscured by other structures with the result that important information cannot be read.
- 2.8.10 Flexibility is also an important consideration in the design and construction of a board. It would be more sustainable if the frame be designed in such a way that parts of the display can be changed when they become out of date, rather than needing to replace the whole installation. Also, it would be useful if the signage should be designed to allow for the display of temporary notices or seasonal information (e.g. for guided walks or temporary access restrictions) – but in an orderly manner.
- 2.8.11 There are other innovative ways that visitor information can be provided that do not necessarily rely on traditional signage to convey the message. For example seating or boundary structures can be designed in such a way that they are functional yet informative. (*photo of example needed*). Where car park refurbishment and/or replacement signs and interpretation boards are being considered, there may be the opportunity to involve an artist, as part of the project group, to help develop a themed concept for the works.⁶
- 2.8.12 This type of board should ideally contain the following:
- The Jurassic Coast and SW Coast path logos, plus that of the car park owner/manager
 - Information on the importance of the Jurassic Coast

⁶ Further advice and information on funding for public art projects is available from District and County Councils and The Arts Council.

- Identify the features that are special to the locality/part of the coast. This can include local geology, wildlife & history etc
- Detailed local area map with:
 - 'You are here'
 - Routes and status of PROW
 - Routes of county highways
 - The use of simple graphics to identify the location of telephone boxes, pubs, cafés, shops, campsites and other accommodation (The Dorset SW Coast Path Ranger Team has compiled a set of graphics for the finger posts along the coast path⁷. photo)
 - Telephone number for Traveline (public transport information)
- Countryside Code / Safety Messages
- An area for fixing temporary notices of local seasonal events, seasonal safety messages etc



Above left: Information boards on an angled stone plinth at West Bexington car park (photo WDDC)

Above right: Timber display board at Durlston Country Park (photo Halcrow).

Materials for signage

2.8.13 Quality, durable materials should be used that are robust enough to deter anyone from using the signs as fuel for a bonfire or a barbeque. Unpainted timber has been successfully used in some existing car parks e.g. National Trust signs (*photo*) and Forestry Commission are good examples. Also the example used in the Halcrow report from Cores Caron Nature Reserve in Ceredigion, Wales.

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APPENDIX 1

Membership of the Coastal car Parks Protocol Working Group

Membership:

Dorset AONB Partnership

Dorset Coast Forum

Dorset Countryside Service / Dorset County Council

East Devon AONB Partnership

East Devon Countryside Service / Devon County Council

Ilchester Estate

National Trust

South West Coast Path Team

West Dorset District Council

Weymouth and Portland Borough Council

World Heritage Team

Smedmore Estate

Lulworth (Weld) Estate

Swanage Town Council

The Crown Estate

APPENDIX 2

Car Park Surfacing materials

Tarmac

Suitable Locations : Heavily used car parks in urban locations

Positive qualities: Smooth surface, hard wearing, suitable for sloping sites, low cost, low maintenance, easy to repair, variety of colours and finishes, easy to mark out parking bays and directions. Provides a good, even surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs. Easy to clean and remove storm debris, leaves etc.

Negative qualities : Poor visual appearance and harsh, urban character

Additional points : Permeable varieties of tarmac are available

In-situ concrete

Suitable Locations : Heavily used car parks in urban locations

Positive qualities: Relatively smooth surface although textured, hard wearing, suitable for sloping sites, low cost, low maintenance. Good, even surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs. Easy to clean and remove storm debris, leaves etc.

Negative qualities: Poor visual appearance and harsh, urban character. Impermeable surface.

Additional points : Detailing important in determining quality of finish

Loose gravel/shingle

Suitable Locations : Flat, rural sites, rural estates, occasional urban sites with limited use

Positive qualities : Attractive appearance, permeable surface

Negative qualities: Loose material washed or pushed onto adjoining roads/paths, prone to rutting, difficulty in marking out parking bays. In exposed coastal locations liable to scoured by storm events. Potential for vandalism and damage from loose stones.

Additional points :

Clay bound gravel

Suitable Locations : Rural sites and some urban fringe locations

Positive qualities : Attractive appearance, semi-permeable surface, can be suitable for sloping sites

Negative qualities: Dirt and loose material spread out onto adjoining roads/paths, difficulty in marking out parking bays. Uneven surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs although compacted material does provide a firm surface.

Additional points : Creates an attractive and informal car park edge in rural sites

Loose aggregate, scalpings

Suitable Locations : Rural sites and some urban fringe locations

Positive qualities: Loose, informal appearance can be preferable to blacktop. Permeable

Negative qualities : Can appear industrial or temporary, dust and loose material can spread out onto adjoining roads and paths, prone to rutting, difficulty in marking out parking bays. Difficult surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs

Additional points : Possible scope for using recycled materials

Resin bound gravel

Suitable Locations : Formal parkland or estate sites in rural or urban areas

Positive qualities: Attractive appearance, smooth surface, easy to sweep, no loose material, can be used on sloping sites. Good, even surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs. Range of colours and aggregate sizes available.

Negative qualities : Expensive to apply and maintain, excessive use can dislodge aggregate

Additional points : Only appropriate in formal locations

Grass

Suitable Locations : Over flow car parks, that are likely to be used in dry conditions, for example overflow beach car parks

Positive qualities: Very low or no visual impact when not in use, low cost.

Negative qualities : Quickly degraded in poor conditions

Additional points : Allows other use, such as agriculture, amenity area, for rest of season

Reinforced grass

Suitable Locations : Over flow car parks for infrequent summer use

Positive qualities : Very low visual impact when not in use

Negative qualities : Not suitable for steeply sloping sites

Additional points : Will restrict range of other possible uses for site

Natural stone setts/flag paving

Suitable Locations : Urban sites and formal estates

Positive qualities: Attractive appearance, hard wearing, low maintenance, good surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs and suitable for sloping sites. Smooth and textured surfaces and range of colours available

Negative qualities : Expensive

Additional points: Must use small size units for areas to be used by large vehicles.

Concrete and clay setts/flag paving

Suitable Locations : Urban sites and formal estates

Positive qualities: Attractive appearance, hard wearing, low maintenance, good surface for disabled users, wheelchairs and pushchairs and suitable for sloping sites. Some patterns designed to give an attractive 'natural stone' appearance. Smooth and textured surfaces and range of colours available

Negative qualities: Cheaper ranges not as attractive as natural stone, and can give an urban character. Some coloured concrete products are prone to fading over time.

Additional points: Must use small size units for areas to be used by large vehicles.