

Petition to Oxfordshire County Council to restore scratchcards for visitor parking in CPZs

In November 2024 the County Council discontinued the issue of paper scratchcards to residents to put in visitors' dashboards, and replaced it with an online system of virtual permits.

While the Council claims this will "better serve residents" in circulated information letters, this change introduces unnecessary complications, excludes vulnerable groups, and creates challenges for enforcement and residents alike. I have yet to personally meet anyone who thinks it is a good idea. It is worse for residents and visitors than scratchcards because:

- Putting scratchcards on a visitor's dashboard is simple and straightforward. Juggling your phone or computer for every visitor is extra hassle, inefficient and risks errors.
- With no physical permit you can't check at a glance if someone is legally parked.
- Visitors may feel vulnerable as there is no physical evidence that they are legally parked, nor accessible online if there is a subsequent query or dispute.
- Residents must remember to track time limits online, extra stress if visitors stay more than 24 hours.
- There is a serious privacy issue - the computer will record all your visitors, personal, professional and commercial - what guarantee is there that this won't be hacked or misused ?
- Elderly and vulnerable people, often those most in need of visitors, will be least able to work the new system - it is discriminatory.
- Parking wardens will need to spend extra time checking cars via their gadgets, slowing down the process. This issue already exists with the removal of visible resident stickers.
- There is an increased risk of visitors being wrongly fined due to inadvertent input errors.
- What happens if the system goes down at arrival time, no permit can be entered, but it later recovers and the visitor is issued a fine. How can one prove it was the system's fault ?

There was no public consultation; only statutory bodies were consulted - several of whom did not respond, and of those that did more were against than in favour. This was only revealed in the recent 'equality assessment', only done last year, not when the policy was first voted without publicity in 2022. This assessment led to a minimal token concession, that effectively only those with **no internet, no phone and no friends** would be still qualify for scratchcards, circumstances almost impossible to fulfil !

With high unhappiness among residents with this change, a petition was set up on Change.org asking the council to think again, with the following wording following a preamble similar to that which I have just outlined:

"We, residents of Oxford, ask Oxfordshire County Council to think again about abolishing the scratch-cards used as visitor permits. Replacing these with online digital permits does not 'better serve residents' but will cause inconvenience, discrimination and frustration. The scratch-card system is not broken, don't 'fix' it with a much worse alternative !"

By Friday evening 2088 people had signed the petition, of which 1332 were Oxford or Oxfordshire residents. Within the city 531 came from OX4, 237 from OX3, 252 from OX2 and 106 from OX1, with 67 from OX5 (Kidlington), 50 from OX13 & 14 (Abingdon and around) with the remaining 77 from the rest of the county (including RG postcodes around Henley). 12 others from Oxford gave no postcode.

I am therefore here to present this petition and ask the council to rethink this decision which is clearly both inconvenient, unpopular and not in residents and visitors best interest. **It would be acceptable to offer residents the choice of scratchcards or virtual permits.** However arbitrarily stopping issuing scratchcards without consulting those directly affected looks like a dereliction of the duty to look after the interests of taxpayers and voters which is surely the purpose of local councils.