

Sherwood Forest Destination Management Plan

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1 What is a Destination Management Plan?

As defined by Visit England, destination management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience, taking account of the needs of visitors, local residents, businesses and the environment.

A Destination Management Plan (DMP) is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take and where appropriate the apportionment of resources. Since this plan covers only the geographical area that sits within Newark & Sherwood District, its actions are focused on those where the Council can have maximum influence and impact.

2 Visitor Economy of Newark & Sherwood District

Whilst Newark & Sherwood District has a strong visitor economy, it undoubtedly has the potential to grow further. According to the Scarborough Tourism Economic Assessment model (STEAM data), the visitor economy of the District was estimated to be worth around £260m in 2016 with a growth of 2.7% on the previous year. The District also saw a 3% year on year improvement in visitor numbers in 2016 overall to 4.351m of which just under 90% were day visitors. However, overnight visitors spend, on average, over seven times more than day visitors (compared with around five times more for the wider County). Consequently, Destination Plans are critical to help determine those key actions which will not only increase visitor numbers but also extend the dwell time of the offer in the District, encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more to deliver the concomitant increase in economic impact.

3 Current Position of visitor economy activity in Sherwood Forest

Since this plan covers a tight geographical area, its actions are focused on those issues and activities where Newark & Sherwood District Council can have maximum influence and impact. For example, the Sherwood Arts & Crafts Centre and associated buildings. It will also highlight those organisations with which effective partnership working will deliver maximum impact.

Sherwood Forest is the area within Newark & Sherwood District that has the most economic potential for the District as a whole. However, it is the least mature of the three areas in destination management terms. It should be playing a key role in terms of attract and disperse for the District. For example, if just 2% of the approximate 400,000 visitors per year currently visiting the Sherwood Forest Visitor

Centre / Sherwood Pines could be encouraged to visit the National Civil War Centre, it would increase its admissions by around 50%.

Promotion across the three core brand areas, Newark, Southwell and Sherwood Forest has not been especially well coordinated but the recent appointment of the Tourism Marketing Manager is now beginning to show significant benefits in this regard. For example, a significant project is currently underway to improve the online presence in a way which is most beneficial for the potential visitors segmented by brand and key audiences.

The primary tourism/visitor economy brand for Newark & Sherwood District is Sherwood Forest, albeit that it goes beyond the geographical boundaries of the District. Current focus of this plan is purely around the geographical area that sits within NSDC. However, if required at any point, the DMP could be expanded to cover the full area of the forest although previous attempts to do this have encountered significant challenges due to the plethora of stakeholders that need to be involved and engaged in a meaningful way.

Whilst actual bed numbers across the District are good, the accommodation models are at times limiting in the economic impact they have on the visitor economy. In the 'self-catering sector' these form the high-profile national brands of Center Parcs and Forest Holidays. At Center Parcs, guests are very much encouraged to stay on site for the duration of their stay, whereas at the smaller Forest Holidays engagement with the locality is proactively encouraged. However, both are significant local employers and make their economic impact in that regards. At the moment there is the YHA hostel on the Sherwood Forest site, but it might be timely to review how best this is serving the area and whether it is indeed the best use of these premises.

In the hotel sector the model adopted by Warner Hotels at Thorseby is an 'all inclusive' one so that, whilst guests will be out and about during the day, their evenings are spent on site. A wider 'conventional' offer in all sectors would be beneficial.

Promotion of the area's offer has been largely uncoordinated in the last couple of years but, with both the arrival of RSPB at the new Visitor Centre and the appointment of a Tourism Marketing Manager by NSDC, this will be addressed going forwards.

4 Aims of the Destination Management Plan for Sherwood Forest

- The overarching aim of the plan is to increase the economic impact of the visitor economy sector in the Sherwood Forest area.

This will be achieved by:

- Creating a plan behind which all key stakeholders across Sherwood Forest area can align.
- Strategically aligning the development of Newark & Sherwood District Council assets to support the Destination Management Plan including
 - Sherwood Arts & Crafts centre and Vicar Country Park working closely with the RSPB team at the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre.
 - Vicar Water Country Park, Clipstone
- Engaging key players across the sector to make significant improvements to both the attractiveness and promotion of the District's offer to encourage more visitors to visit.
- To help the sector with its plans to increase visitor dwell time, thereby keeping them in the area for longer and so spending more on accommodation, restaurants etc.
- Developing a clear 'attract & disperse' action plan for the District to move visitors around the area to deliver a greater economic impact.
- Working closely with partners to identify areas needing improvement and developing action plans to deliver these.

5 Key Visitor Economy messages/stories

- Robin Hood – Sherwood Forest is at the heart of the legend of Robin and his outlaws, home to the Major Oak and a plethora of ancient trees around which Robin and his gang will have roamed. Closely linked to Edwinstowe and the Grade 1 listed church which stands on the site where according to legend Robin & Marion were married in an earlier church. (NB there is now a period of opportunity for the two years whilst Nottingham Castle is closed to clearly establish the areas place in this legendary story)
- Sherwood Forest Open Green spaces with great places to stay in the depths of the woods e.g. Forest Holidays, Sherwood Hideaway etc while enjoying local sites and the great outdoors. A large portion of the remaining Forest just north of Edwinstowe is designated as a site of Scientific Special Interest (SSSI) and is therefore protected by Natural England.
- Sense of history and place epitomised by King John's Palace and the unique medieval open field farming system at Laxton as well as the areas all important mining heritage.
- Wildlife in the Forest and family friendly attractions to engage with animals such as White Post Farm and Wheelgate

- Outdoor activities with a sense of adventure from Go Ape! at Sherwood Pines through to cycling / walking around the forest trails
- Golf – although niche, the proximity of renowned golf courses such as Hollinwell and Worksop, as well as those courses within the Newark and Sherwood area, make this an opportunity for visiting enthusiasts.

6 Maximising the potential of stories via wider partnerships

- Taking advantage of the cross-District opportunities that having a Tourism Marketing Manager will bring forward.
- Working closely with Tourism attractions beyond the immediate borders of NSDC especially the Dukery estates of Clumber and Welbeck and Nottingham Castle in connection with Robin Hood.
- Integrating activity with national Visit England campaigns either directly or via Marketing NG / Visit Notts to capitalise all opportunities as they arise.
- Making careful note of opportunities that might arise from the emerging Nottinghamshire County Council Tourism Strategy
- Discover England project The Explorer's Road (formerly East of England Touring Route) is being designed to identify and promote bookable product within easy reach of the A1 aimed at the German Market. NSDC is now working closely with this project and the opportunities it offers (see Newark DMP for details). Thoresby Park is one of the six attractions across the District to have signed up to the project.

7 Key visitor economy stakeholders' challenges and opportunities for Sherwood over the next two to three years

Challenges

- Connectivity – ways to access the area via public transport are limited and so creating what should be a natural flow of visitors from Nottingham to Sherwood Forest or indeed across the District from Newark is not straightforward.
- Mining Heritage – this area more than either of the other two areas within NSDC has a strong mining heritage which is both a challenge and has the potential to

be an asset if appropriate visitor facilities existed. Working in partnership with the land owners such as Thoresby & Harworth Estates will be essential.

- Accommodation – see section 3
- Need for focussed and targeted marketing messages

Visitor Economy Assets	Visitor Numbers/year
Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre/RSPB	370,000
Sherwood Forest Arts & Crafts Centre (NSDC)	
Thoresby Courtyard & Estate	80,000
Rufford Country Abbey (Parkwood Leisure on behalf of NCC)	300,000
Rufford Abbey Ruins (English Heritage)	
White Post Farm – commercial local attraction with good visitor numbers	
Sherwood Pines/Forestry Commission & incl. Go Ape	370,000
National Holocaust Centre – strong national reputation and thought leader in issues related to the history of and need to prevent future genocide around the world.	
Laxton Heritage Centre currently owned by The Crown Estate but possibly being sold	
Bilsthorpe Mining Museum – small heritage trust with limited opening hours	
King John’s Palace Grade 2 listed scheduled monument – privately owned by the Bradley family since 1945. Access is available with prior appointment and there is a once a year open day.	
Wheelgate Park – commercial popular local attraction	
Vicar Water Country Park – lake and walks around an area reclaimed from its mining history.	

8 Recommendations

These are over and above those identified in the earlier piece of work for Newark

- Strategically planned development of Sherwood Arts & Crafts Centre to complement the new RSPB visitor centre and expand the offer to the visitor.
- Review the role of the adjacent YHA site and how best that might serve the area.

- Establish A strategic management group for the area under aegis of NSDC involving all key stakeholders – to include at least NSDC, RSPB, representative from the Edwinstowe business community, Edwinstowe Parish Council and an Ollerton representative, retail rep from Arts & Crafts Centre, Forest Holidays and White Post Farm but most importantly championed by local Parish/District councillor advocate.
- Developing a strong narrative for the legend of Robin Hood and its home in Sherwood Forest, especially important in the interregnum while Nottingham Castle is closed.
- Ensure that development and promotional activity is closely aligned to wider vision work currently being undertaken by RSPB, Thoresby and Harworth Estates for the area including both leisure and visitors.
- Have an action plan to draw visitors from the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre into the surrounding villages to benefit the local pubs, cafes and other small businesses. For example, in Edwinstowe ensuring a strong connection to the Robin Hood story via the Church where according to legend Robin and Marion were married
- Accommodation – as with both other NSDC Destination Management Plans, this is a critical issue if there is to be any significant increase in visitors staying overnight in the District.
- Refine a set of core messages, in consultation with key stakeholders, that can be used to effectively promote the area.
- Develop a detailed attract and disperse strategy to encourage visitors to explore other areas of the District during their stay in Sherwood Forest.

Appendix 1: Consultees

Forest Holidays / Sherwood Pines

Laxton Heritage Group

Newark & Sherwood District Council,

Steven Sydall, Business Manager Asset Management

District Cllrs Peacock, Staples, (Tift) & Brookes

RSPB, Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre, Michael Copleston & team

Sherwood Forest Arts & Crafts Centre, various stall owners

Sherwood Forest Trust, Patrick Candler & Linda Hardy

Thoresby Courtyard & Estate

White Post Farm



Appendix 2: 2016 STEAM data for Newark & Sherwood District

Appendix 3: Accommodation

Forest Holidays

Center Parcs

Thoresby Hall Hotel

Sherwood Hideaway

Forest Lodge Hotel

Clumber Park Hotel & Spa

YHA Hostel

Range of High Quality B&Bs inc Browns, Sunnyside View, & Marion's Manor