

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

20 NOVEMBER 2019

DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF THE VISITOR OFFER IN SHERWOOD FOREST

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Members on the implementation of the Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Sherwood Forest.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members approved the Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Sherwood Forest in January 2019. Since then, progress has been made in a number of areas towards both the development and promotion of the Sherwood Forest visitor offer.

2.2 Members are to be aware of the following activities:

- i) The Sherwood Strategic Management Group has been established. The Group has met three times to date and is Chaired by Cllr Mitchell, with Cllr Girling as Vice Chair. It brings together key landowners and partners in the area including Thoresby Estate, RSPB, Sherwood Forest Trust, Nottinghamshire County Council, Forest Holidays, the National Holocaust Centre, Bilsthorpe Heritage Museum and Sherwood Forest Arts and Craft Centre. The Clerk to Edwinstowe Parish Council has also recently accepted an invitation to join the Group to help improve visitor linkages with Edwinstowe Town Centre.
- ii) The narrative has been developed around the visitor offer at Sherwood Forest to emphasise the place's distinctiveness and what makes it special. Linking with Nottinghamshire County Council's 'Green and Active' theme, there is a focus on wellbeing, interacting with the natural environment and active family pursuits. Messages around the legend of Robin Hood, firmly rooted in the place of Sherwood Forest, also feature with their strong regional, national and international resonance.
- iii) In line with the above visitor offer narrative, a new distinct but complementary destination visual identity has been created for 'Visit Sherwood Forest'. It features a Robin Hood-style hat designed to sit alongside the new branding of 'Visit Newark' and 'Visit Southwell' featuring a civil war helmet and bishop's headdress respectively. This replaces the former generic 'Visit Newark and Sherwood' brand which was not widely recognised nor understood.
- iv) A bespoke new visitor website (VisitSherwoodForest.co.uk) and new social media channels have been developed for 'Visit Sherwood Forest', as the presentation this evening has demonstrated. These will enable us to run Sherwood Forest-specific campaigns, targeting key audiences of potential visitors with clear and consistent messages. Importantly, however, they clearly link to complementary sites and social media channels for 'Visit Newark' and 'Visit Southwell', providing opportunities for cross-promotion and visitor dispersal between the three destinations.

- v) Events and activities in Sherwood Forest formed an important part of this year's promotion of tourism campaigns including 'Easter at Sherwood' and 'Festivals 2019'. The two videos that comprised the cornerstone of the 'Easter at Sherwood' campaign had a combined viewing figure of 17,854. Of the 20 events featured in 'Festivals 2019', the 616 Music Festival (at Wellow) and the Robin Hood Festival were the two most popular festival webpage views after Newark Book Festival. The range of events and activities on offer across different attractions in the area also provides a regular source of content for engaging social media posts and blogs.
- vi) One of the first actions of the Sherwood Strategic Management Group was to commission the Sherwood Forest Trust to undertake a stakeholder analysis research project. This included face-to-face interviews and questionnaire responses from a wide range of tourism partners, attractions and businesses across the area. The findings of this analysis were recently presented to the Group and a number of key areas identified for development and promotion of the visitor offer. Strategic recommendations from this have helped to inform the scope of a sub-regional masterplanning project (please see below). Also, some of the tactical recommendations, for example potential promotional opportunities with Stagecoach, are already being explored by members of the Group.
- vii) Gateway Lodge, the first part of the planned refurbishment works at the Sherwood Forest Arts and Craft Centre and additional buildings, is very close to completion and we are now inviting expressions of interest. Whilst there is an income commitment from a previous ED Committee, preference will be given to prospective tenants who can demonstrate plans to complement or enhance the existing visitor experience at Sherwood Forest and consequently increase visitor numbers and dispersal, for example local providence food and drink, experiential activities, or as a gateway/orientation point. There is an expectation that the unit(s) will be open seven days per week all year round with appropriate exceptions.
- viii) We are soon to lead co-ordination of a masterplanning project at Forest Corner that will aim to identify way in which the visitor experience can be enhanced by liaison with the key landowners. The masterplan will look at physical movement and wayfinding for visitors, in addition to identifying possible areas for long-term development of the wider Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest Offer (whilst also being cognisant of the ecology and landscape-scale interventions and aspirations). The Masterplan is likely to be produced by NSDC, albeit other landowners will want to develop their own plans and aspirations, to feed into any strategic development via the Council's leadership.

3.0 Equalities Implications

- 3.1 All promotional activities followed the Council's guidelines for accessible communications. The Gateway Lodge at Sherwood Corner is fully DDA compliant.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 At its meeting on 26 September 2019, Policy and Finance Committee approved a wider review of resources. The masterplanning works at Forest Corner formed part of this resource. There are no other financial implications not already addressed.

5.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

5.1 The objectives of the above activities align with Objective 5 of the Community Plan – Increase visits to Newark and Sherwood.

6.0 Comments of Director

6.1 Due to the hard work of a range of partners progress continues to be made by the Destination Management Group (DMG) towards the implementation of the Sherwood Destination Management Plan (DMP). The work around Sherwood Forest Corner (and links with Edwinstowe Town Centre) will form an important next step in enhancing the tourism and visitor offer. Further work on the outcomes of the stakeholder analysis research project and ways in which to support additional overnight accommodation will be next on the DMG's agenda.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

That recent progress made in a number of significant areas towards both the development and promotion of the Sherwood Forest visitor offer be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

To enable Officers and members of the Sherwood Strategic Management Group to continue with implementation of the Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Sherwood Forest.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information, please contact Richard Huthwaite, Business Manager – Tourism on Ext 5951.

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