

OUR FUTURE TOGETHER II – TOURISM STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report introduces Our Future Together II for discussion by the Panel.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The District Council originally adopted its tourism strategy, Our Future Together, in 1997. For the first time, its publication brought all the organisations and agencies together to deliver a comprehensive approach to tourism development for the first time. The strategy used the following two key guiding principles:

- (a) Continuing to develop a sustainable approach to tourism; and
- (b) Management through partnership.

- 2.2 Our Future Together II (OFT II) similarly follows these two themes with adjustments for time and what has been learn since. The broad content and policies of OFT II are also the same. The key organisational difference is that in the meantime part of the district has been designated a National Park.
- 2.3 Through a written agreement with the National Park Authority (NPA), New Forest District Council (NFDC) is the accepted lead on tourism management and development activities with the NPA supporting. This Strategy document will therefore be published by the District Council and the National Park Authority jointly, with the additional support of all other agencies and organisations as before.

3. MAIN AIM AND KEY POLICIES

- 3.1 As outlined above, the main aim and key policies of OFT II almost exactly replicate those of the previous Strategy. The first question for the Panel will therefore be whether members are satisfied with this and that there are no new issues requiring a policy framework.
- 3.2 The main premise of both OFT I and OFT II is the “VICE model” of sustainable tourism development. This suggests that all tourism management should be based on an equitable partnership between the competing needs and demands of visitors, industry, community and environment. Members are requested to ratify the replication of this broad principle which runs throughout the document.

4. EDUCATION, JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

- 4.1 Whilst the original key principles and policies remain, the most significant concern in this time of difficult trading conditions is the need to maximize the economic and job creation potential of tourism for the whole of the local economy within the VICE context. There is, therefore, a greater emphasis on how tourism can better support local retail centres in our settlements, the need to promote local tourism job opportunities through schools and

colleges, along with the need to further develop vocational training for existing staff to continue to improve the quality of visitor offer.

- 4.2 It is important to note that close links will be made between OFT II, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the work of the LSP, Core Strategies, the National Park Plan and Hampshire's Rural Plan. In the spirit of partnership working, links will also be made to many other appropriate local plans and strategic documents.

5. CONSULTATION AND TIMETABLE FOR ADOPTION

- 5.1 The draft OFT II has already been the subject of consultation with partners, most especially the National Park Authority, New Forest Tourism Association, Forestry Commission and the Tourism Community Action Network (which represents many local interest groups, Town and Parish Councils and the New Forest Business Partnership). It is this process that has shaped and agreed the current document. Key policies and a number of other questions will also be the subject of a Citizens' Panel this summer. These mirror the content of a similar Citizens' Panel undertaken in 2003/4. It is hoped that 2009 Citizens' Panel will provide us with effective trend data as well as community support for the OFT II.

- 5.2 Following this Panel's discussion and approval, it is proposed that a detailed action plan is negotiated with all partners to identify who does what and by when over a five year delivery cycle. It is hoped that both the final draft strategy and its action plan will be adopted by Cabinet before the New Year. Formal adoption by the NPA and other partners would hopefully be similarly achieved within this time period, allowing for the publication and distribution of Our Future Together II during early 2010.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Whilst tourism has a significant effect on both the quality of life and the environment of the District, there are no direct environmental implications arising from this report. A critical feature of the VICE approach is to ensure that the local environment is supported and if possible enhanced by future tourism activities.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no specific financial implications for the Council in this report. Developments in the service would be part of the Portfolio Planning Process. Tourism is a significant component of the local economy, employment and livelihood of the District and OFT II contains many policies and actions that will make a positive contribution to these.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 The Panel are asked to consider the questions above and to comment on any appropriate issues either contained or omitted in the draft document as it stands. Further additions will then be added to the draft document following the Panel meeting.

8.2 That following comments received by Members of the Panel that the draft document Our Future Together II is agreed as being the basis for negotiations with partners to create an effective Action Plan.

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Draft Our Future Together II – Tourism
Strategy

OUR FUTURE TOGETHER 2

[FOREWORD – Leader/Portfolio Holder?]

POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES

1 Introduction

“Our aim is for the New Forest to become a tourism destination where the visitor, tourism industry, local community and environment are in complete balance, and thus make a significant contribution to improving the quality of all life.”

This document summarises the themes, policies and actions that New Forest District Council (NFDC), the New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) and their many partners will adopt to manage the development of tourism in the New Forest over the next five years. Based on the principles originally established by ‘Our Future Together I’, this new plan seeks to build on the lessons learned and establish an enduring framework for the wise growth of tourism in our special area. Our broad aim is to provide a plan to ensure that all tourism and visitor activity becomes environmentally sustainable, economically viable and ethically and socially fair for all (on a long-term basis).

The two main themes of the strategy are:

- 1 continuing to develop a sustainable approach to tourism; and
- 2 management through partnership.

The strategy seeks to maximise local income and employment from tourism in the medium and long term by providing a warm welcome and a high quality of planned facility and service for visitors. In exchange we want visitors to understand and adopt a sense of stewardship for the unique landscapes and the special way of life of the destination area and its host communities.

A well-planned and prosperous tourism industry, we believe, is the only viable catalyst for revitalising the amenity of the whole District and National Park, making it a better place in which to live and visit. In seeking to achieve all this, we will always apply “Forest First”; that is to put the needs of the special qualities and local distinctiveness of the area before all tourism activity, after all it is that on which all local tourism relies.

It is clear there is now an acceptance that what is good for tourism can also be good for the local quality of life and vice-versa. The two are inextricably linked and how we choose to manage this complex relationship will be a test of courage, foresight and cooperation. It is “Our Future Together”.

**For the purposes of this document the term “New Forest” refers to the area contained within the New Forest District Council boundary and New Forest National Park boundary*

The New Forest and Tourism - Context

New Forest District, including the Avon Valley and coast, is one of England's most popular tourism and leisure destinations. Much of the area is also of international importance for nature conservation. Its recent designation as a National Park acknowledges the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area; but also the importance of promoting opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park.

There are around 843,000 visitors coming to stay in the area as a whole. This amounts to around 3.75 million visitor nights in total. It is estimated that around 13.5 million visits are made to the National Park each year, the great majority are day visits by local people living in New Forest District.

Recent research (Visitor Survey by Tourism South East, 2004/5) has highlighted the broad appeal of the New Forest which attracts one of the widest audiences found in any destination in the region. The research found that in general the types of people who visited the New Forest could be characterised as 'people who know what they like and are happy to enjoy it time and again'. These people value a relaxed pace of life and like to get good value for money from their holiday. The New Forest clearly appealed, with opportunities for gentle walks and relaxing sightseeing. On the other hand people who like a more active holiday, for instance making use of the major yachting centre at Lymington or enjoying arts and culture, also stayed in the New Forest, often taking day trips to nearby cities such as Winchester and Portsmouth.

Whatever the interests and needs of visitors tourism needs to be effectively managed in order to be sustainable. New Forest District Council, working with a wide range of local interests, has led the way nationally in developing a sustainable approach to tourism management, for example, improved management and use of access and travel arrangements for all visitors. The overriding priority being to integrate Visitor, Industry, Community and Environmental matters. In doing so, a range of interests need to be involved so that the actions that are carried out are effective and provide long term solutions.

New Forest District Council (NFDC), New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) and Tourism – Approach

NFDC has a long and successful track record of operating visitor information services, providing sustainable tourism management and effective and appropriate marketing for the New Forest, working closely with New Forest Tourism Association (NFTA), Tourism South East (TSE), Hampshire County Council (HCC), Forestry Commission (FC) and a range of other partners. The Council's brief is District wide, but its work recognises the close associations with Dorset, South Wiltshire and the rest of Hampshire, to facilitate management. It is a member of the Dorset New Forest Tourism Partnership and the Hampshire Tourism Partnership

The New Forest was formally designated in 2005 as a National Park. The NPA covers the whole of the New Forest National Park which includes small areas beyond New Forest District. Although tourism is not a specific purpose or duty for the Authority, clearly there are important links and connections to the National Park's two purposes and its duty to foster the socio-economic well being of local communities. The NPA is required to prepare a National Park Management Plan which will develop and bring together policy relating to the conservation and enhancement of the

National Park, and the promotion of understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities. It will seek to influence recreation, tourism and visitor management by working with and through existing providers to support and enhance the provision of information and interpretation about the New Forest. So that although the NPA does not have a remit for tourism or marketing, it enthusiastically supports the development of sustainable tourism in the New Forest.

The Need for a Sustainable Tourism Strategy

Tourism presents a range of challenges and opportunities. The New Forest is a well established destination for visitors, and is the most densely populated National Park in the UK. Tourism is central to the area's economy; however more can be done to strengthen the viability of tourism in the area and its ability to deliver year round benefits to the economy and society as a whole. In addition, it is the quality of local culture and landscape that underlies the reason for its popularity, yet inappropriate tourism activity has the potential to damage the very assets on which the industry depends.

A Strategy is therefore needed to provide an agreed framework and action plan within which all interests in the New Forest can work together for the successful and sustainable development and management of all local tourism activity.

2 What is Sustainable Tourism?

A logical starting point for this strategy is to clarify the meaning and importance of a sustainable approach to tourism. As a concept, sustainable tourism's underlying principles are about managing visitor impacts on the local destination's economy, communities and environment in a way which benefits everyone both in the present and the future. The principles of sustainable tourism apply to all tourism destinations, wherever they are, and to all forms of tourism, whether niche or mainstream. Indeed, as outlined in the introduction sustainability is necessary for the successful future of tourism itself.

This approach was first formally adopted in the 1997 strategy *Our Future Together I*. In 1999, the Government published *Tomorrow's Tourism*, which formally identified the pursuit of sustainable tourism as a priority. This was followed by the English Tourism Council's *Time for Action Strategy*, which identified three objectives for sustainable tourism:

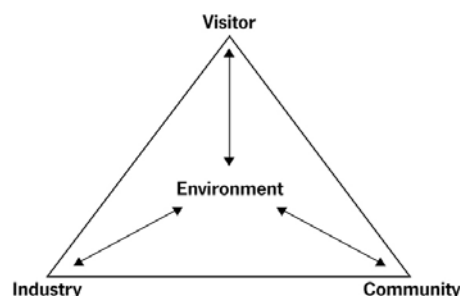
- to benefit the economy of tourism destinations
- to support local communities and culture
- to protect and enhance the built and natural environment

Subsequent Government documents have continued to support this approach to destination management. It is agreed that such an approach will lead to an improved visitor experience, a higher quality tourism product and benefits for the local community in terms of an enhanced local economy, employment, amenity and environment. The value of this approach is further illustrated by the research findings summarised below, showing that visitors themselves are becoming increasingly aware of sustainability and the benefits it brings by influencing their behaviour.

(Add new survey)

Visitors, Industry, Community, Environment

Over the last twenty years in the New Forest we have continued developing our own particular approach to sustainable destination management. The New Forest Model identifies sustainable destination tourism as managing the interaction between Visitors, the Industry that serves them, the Community that hosts them and their collective impact on, and response to the Environment where it all takes place:



It is our job to create and maintain a collective and integrated destination management plan which:

- welcomes, involves & satisfies Visitors
- achieves a profitable & prosperous Industry
- engages and benefits host Communities
- protects and enhances the local Environment

The VICE equation can also be applied as a simple check against the future viability (sustainability) of any tourism decision. How will this issue/decision affect the visitor? What are the implications for industry? What is the impact on the community and what is the environmental effect? If we cannot find a positive answer to all four questions, the proposition is likely to be unsustainable.

In Section 4. you will find the policies and objectives we believe will help us develop a sustainable tourism destination. In Section 5 you will find a summary of the means by which we plan to engage our many partners and stakeholders in delivering the action plan outlined in Section 6.

3 Tourism in the New Forest

New Forest Visitor Volumes and Economic Impact

	Year	Trips	Nights	Spend
Domestic Staying Visitors	1998	553,000	1,974,500	£54,318,000
	2000	759,300	2,041,000	£78,617,800
	2004	777,300	2,460,000	£118,345,000
	2006	823,000	2,519,000	£127,109,000
Overseas Staying Visitors	1998	84,000	422,500	£16,944,000
	2000	86,300	563,600	£25,182,700
	2004	66,000	665,000	£25,897,000
	2006	69,581	662,000	£26,887,000
Day Visitors	1998	4,076,500		£86,300,000
	2000	4,400,000		£104,000,000
	2004	6,612,000		£193,960,000
	2006	6,975,000		£271,231,000
All Visitors	1998	4,713,500		£157,662,000
	2000	5,241,600		£208,700,000
	2004	7,455,300		£338,202,000
	2006	7,867,581		£425,227,000
Local Impact				
Total Business Turnover	1998			£147,550,000
	2000			£194,400,000
	2004			£395,449,000
	2006			£440,018,000
Employment Actual Jobs		Direct	Indirect	Total
	1998	3,602	757	4,360
	2000	4,739	2,082	6,821
	2004	Staying	Day	
		3,803	4,175	7,978

Source: *Tourism South East Nov 2007*

4 Policies & Objectives

National & Regional Tourism Policies

Policy

* To lobby Central Government and all national and regional tourism related organisations, including Regional Development Agencies, to ensure local tourism needs are reflected in their policies and actions.

National Policies

One of the historic problems for tourism in this country has been the lack of any national vision or strategy for its wider management and development. The industry has therefore grown in a haphazard and piecemeal way with no real vision or structure. Although individual documents have been published before, a comprehensive planning structure is badly needed, bringing all aspects of tourism together enabling the industry and especially local government to plan local development, deliver services and create partnerships within a national context.

In delivering English tourism there are broadly four main partners: the Government, VisitBritain Regional Development Agencies, Local Authorities as destination managers and the Industry. At present there is duplication and confusion over who does what, and a number of gaps in product and service provision and co-ordination. The recent review of VisitBritain and creation of Visit England may clear up some of these issues but until a collective agreement between all the main partners is achieved (a full review of the Tourism Development Act) it is unlikely these fundamental problems will remain.

Partnerships

Policies

** To work in partnership with all relevant agencies, organisations and individuals to promote the interests of local tourism and reinforce VICE as the basis of all action.*

** To encourage all partners to communicate a sense of stewardship in all visitors, welcome them and help fulfil their expectations.*

Managing tourism through partnership is at the core of our approach. To make tourism work for the whole of the district, to a greater or lesser extent everybody has a part to play, everyone is involved. Perhaps the Council's most important partnership is with New Forest Tourism Association (NFTA), the District's tourism trade organisation which the Authority was instrumental in establishing in 1988. The Association represents all sectors of the local industry with a current membership of nearly 300 tourism and visitor businesses.

New Forest Tourism Association

Membership currently stands at nearly 300 and represents business from the following groups:

Hotels, Guest Houses and Inns
Bed & Breakfast and Farmhouses
Self Catering Houses, Cottages and Flats
Holiday Parks
Camping and Caravan Sites
Pubs, Restaurants, Coffee and Tea Shops
Visitor Attractions
Ferry, Bus and Transport Operators
Retailers and Service Providers

The value of our partnership with NFTA cannot be overestimated. The relationship enables the Council and trade to act quickly, effectively and collectively in dealing with such issues as planning, transportation, marketing, training and quality standards etc as and when they arise.

Without the support of the local industry no strategy for tourism can be successful. It is the best way to provide a consistent quality of service and experience for the visitor, and a sense of purpose and co-ordination to the industry. Other important partnerships are with the Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, Tourism South East, Town and Parish Councils and Chambers of Trade.

Objectives

- 1 To publish an agreement with Tourism South East, identifying the roles, actions and responsibilities of all partners by December 2010.
- 2 To publish an agreement with the Dorset New Forest Tourism Partnership identifying the roles, actions and responsibilities of all partners by December 2010.
- 3 To publish an agreement with the Forestry Commission, identifying the roles, actions and responsibilities of all partners by December 2010.
- 4 To publish similar agreements with other appropriate partnerships as they are identified.

Visitors

Policy

** Welcome all visitors and work with all partners to provide them with a high quality experience and a better understanding of the needs of local communities and the environment.*

All visitors are guests. As such they have the right to experience and enjoy the District. For visitors, local tourism should be an interesting, good value, satisfying and high quality experience. Host and visitor should be on equal terms. Through successful tourism, visitors gain an in-depth understanding and knowledge of the area, its special way of life and unique landscapes. Welcomed visitors are more likely to become involved and through their enjoyment, develop a sense of personal responsibility and stewardship for the Destination.

The three general groups of visitor to the District are:

- **the day visitor**, who travels from outside the District from home or from a holiday elsewhere, returning the same day;
- **the local visitor**, who lives within the District but visits another part for leisure and recreation;
- **the staying visitor**, who stays in the District for one night or more.

Objective

1 Maintain the “New Forest Friends” Visitor Stewardship Programme by publishing a bedroom leaflet, interpretive materials and key messages in all published media and review annually in September.

Industry

Policies

** To encourage the tourism and visitor industry to work together in providing excellent services and facilities for visitors which respect the needs of the community and environment both now and in the future.*

** To retain a viable and prosperous tourism industry throughout the year.*

NFDC’s Economic Strategy suggests a prosperous local economy should not be incompatible with high environmental standards and quality of life and seeks to ensure that adequate job opportunities exist for local people. In this context it is essential that we make the best use of tourism, which we estimate earns the District around £500 million every year. Research has also shown that it is not just the obvious businesses that can create new jobs from increased visitor spending.

The main issue for the industry is how to improve its performance while protecting the environmental quality of the District on which the industry depends. The majority of existing businesses have had to struggle to stay viable in recent years, because they need the right economies of scale, infrastructure and market conditions in which to operate successfully in a highly competitive world.

Large scale development would be inappropriate in such an environmentally sensitive setting, our strategy is therefore directed at getting much more effective use made of what facilities we have already, particularly in the serviced accommodation sector. One of the destination's great advantages is that virtually all tourism businesses are locally owned, employing predominantly local people. This ensures the Industry is much more focused on local needs than might otherwise be the case.

It's also important to recognise that many local people regularly use our attractions, restaurants, pubs and village centres. We should continue to find better more effective ways to channel all visitors to the various towns and villages of the forest and coast. It's also important to understand the critical relationship between seasonal expenditure and the winter months, in some cases 80% of income is achieved in the three summer months.

Number of Bedspaces	
Hotels & Inns	2,706
Bed & Breakfast	1,417
Self Catering Cottages/Houses/Flats	661
Holiday Parks	5,500
Campsites	16,030
Total	26,314

Source: NFDC Accommodation Survey 2008

Through our partnership with NFTA we have achieved a growing understanding of critical issues for the industry such as planning and transportation matters. We believe a visit to our District should be synonymous with quality. We want to get the quality and operation of the industry to work in harmony with its setting and use this to drive all tourism.

We have been working for some time with NFTA to promote environmental awareness through the Green Leaf programme to stimulate improvements in the industry's environmental performance, promote the use of local produce, promote good practice in planning development and create industry support for conservation activities that also help visitors develop a sense of stewardship for the District. (see Quality page -)

Objective

1 To publish an agreement with NFTA identifying the roles, actions and responsibilities of all partners by December 2010.

Community

Policy

** Empower the local community, especially young people and create ownership through involvement in tourism matters.*

The special character of the District is inextricably linked to the traditions and activities of the people who live and work here. Visitors who are given a warm welcome by the host community rarely create problems and are more likely to develop a respect for the place and its people.

Without the spending and jobs brought by tourism, the community would lose many of its services and small businesses. Visitor spending is crucial in maintaining diverse and viable retail centres in settlements. When visitors trade with local businesses they purchase supplies and services. Local business in turn purchase the supplies and services they need to operate and through successive rounds of purchases the initial direct spend of a visitor multiplies throughout the local and regional economy. In many cases visitor spending is what keeps these businesses going.

Tourism also has a major part to play in supporting the skills and economic activities that are traditional to the District. The Green Leaf scheme helps the industry find ways of increasing this support by using employees, produce and services from the locality. Tourism also benefits the community by providing improved infrastructure, recreation and cultural facilities, increased local authority revenues and greater local awareness, all helping to foster a general sense of community pride in the District's natural and cultural heritage.

The Resident

The interaction between local residents and visitors is very important. Visitors are guests in the local community but as surveys have shown, residents themselves make the vast majority of all visits to the District at any one time. Our research also shows that a large proportion of local residents have friends and relatives staying with them throughout the year.

The Business Community

Most businesses in the District directly or indirectly derive some benefit from visitor expenditure. Many people in this group already recognise the value of visitors and are generally supportive of their needs. We want to continue developing this wider business support for tourism through Community Tourism Groups, New Forest Business Partnership and the Tourism Community Action Network (CAN).

The Political Community

Getting the needs of tourism incorporated into all relevant political decisions is crucial to the success of this strategy. We will continue to promote those needs to all executive agencies and elected representatives at every opportunity. This is especially crucial in the services of District and County organisations that are not overtly seen as tourism related, such as transport, planning and other supporting services.

The Commoning Community

In the New Forest the small number of practising commoners, are an essential component in maintaining its ancient traditions of free roaming animals. As a unique way of life, commoning is under threat. This simple fact has drastic implications for

the future life cycle of the New Forest itself. Some commoners are turning to tourism to provide the essential extra income needed to keep the practice going. The communing community can also provide valuable resources for developing interpretative work. We will continue to develop ideas on how tourism's support of commoning can be improved, especially for younger members of commoning families. Accommodation provision, support services such as guiding/interpretation and New Forest Marque produce are key areas.

Community Tourism Groups

Perhaps the most effective way than any member of the community can have an input to local tourism will be through Community Tourism Groups. Working with our partners, especially New Forest Business Partnership, Town and Parish Councils and Chambers of Trade/Commerce, we are establishing groups in all settlement areas.

Objective

- 1 To maintain a Tourism Community Action Network to include representations from Community Tourism Groups in each appropriate settlement area of the New Forest District to meet twice a year.
- 2 To identify and develop a Community Planning tool for tourism that can be incorporated into all Community Planning projects and activities.

Environment

Policies

** Promote a better understanding of the environment and manage all tourism development in a way that where possible, it has a positive effect on its surroundings and local resources.*

** To work with all interests to improve the environmental performance of all sectors of the tourism and visitor industry through the adoption of agreed standards and methods.*

Without the unique quality of the New Forest, it's Coastline and the Avon Valley there would be little to attract visitors. The need for sustainability is well documented; existing plans stress the landscape, cultural and nature conservation importance of the District and contain policies which aim to protect it.

There are many agencies involved in caring for the local environment, most notably the NPA, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, the District Council and Parish Councils. There are also many land owners such as the National Trust and private estates. It is important that all these organisations and individuals work together to make a more positive environmental contribution to managing land that is used by visitors.

As Crown land managers, the Forestry Commission have produced a "Framework for Recreation" which picks up many of the themes contained in this tourism and visitor management strategy and the NPA and District core strategies. It is hoped that all other local landowners will follow the lead taken by the Forestry Commission and produce their own recreation plans which also link into the aims, policies and objectives of all other appropriate management strategies.

Carrying capacity is fundamental to good environmental management and sustainable development in visitor destinations. Establishing the level of carrying capacities can be difficult, but they are essential in effective planning for tourism and recreation that is environmentally sustainable.

Carrying Capacities

The environmental carrying capacity is the level of visiting beyond which unacceptable environmental impacts and physical wear and tear will occur.

The visitor carrying capacity is the level of visiting beyond which visitor satisfaction drops unacceptably.

The community carrying capacity is the level of visiting beyond which the local quality of life drops unacceptably.

Carrying capacities can vary over time and be affected by factors such as visitor behaviour patterns, facility design and management, the character of the environment, access and transportation arrangements as well as the changing attitudes of the host community. As previously emphasised, if the environmental component of tourism product declines in quality and value, this will result in a decline in the local tourism and visitor economy and its associated community benefits.

Remote Areas

Some areas of the District are valued for being wild and remote and should remain so. If the New Forest is to retain its integrity its needs must come first, before all visitor considerations. Areas of the forest have been identified as having particular integrity. We would like to see a "Forest First" zoning principle applied to manage these areas.

We believe these areas should remain free of all visitor infrastructures and, adjacent car parks and vehicular access should be removed.

The zones surrounding the "Forest First" areas would, where appropriate, provide for walking, cycling, riding and access for people with disabilities, all other forms of traffic being removed where possible.

The areas outside of these two levels of zone would be subject to the appropriate provision of car parks and vehicular access.

The New Forest NPA is currently developing policies and action to implement this approach in its National Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy. In managing tourism in the Park and District we will assess the opportunities and capacity of each site/area to absorb visitors. By further focusing on towns and villages and their communities, it will be possible to build up a detailed idea of where tourism development can take place throughout the District (see Planning page - _____)

Objective

1 Re-establish the Green Leaf Tourism Group to include representatives from all appropriate interest groups by [date].

Information

Policies

** To provide consistent, well-communicated information services for the benefit of visitors and local people throughout the year that convey the special nature of the District/National Park and contribute to effective visitor management.*

** To provide a strategic network of staffed Visitor Information Centres as the main points of contact with visitors and local people.*

** To provide and manage a network of Local Information Points, located in communities not served by Visitor Information Centres.*

** To provide in partnership with other agencies, unmanned Visitor Information Points at agreed locations throughout the District to provide 24-hour information and support the main provision of staffed Visitor Information Centres.*

** To work with partners to ensure the messages in all interpretative and educational activities are consistent and reflect the NFDC/NPA partnership's policies.*

** To utilise developments in Information Communications Technology (ICT) to improve the delivery of all aspects of tourism management in the New Forest.*

An effective network of visitor information provision is an essential part of tourism and visitor management. The Council operates three all year staffed Visitor Information Centres (VICs), supported by Visitor Information Points (VIPs) in the larger settlements of the District. The NPA funds three local Information Points in villages without VICs. The aim of the service is to provide 24 hour information to local people and visitors enabling them to enjoy a high quality experience during their visit or excursion.

The service also seeks to gain everybody's understanding and support for the conservation of the Destination and its heritage. The staffed information service gives us the opportunity to get our messages across personally and provide a warm welcome at the same time.

We constantly strive to improve the high quality and effectiveness of the New Forest visitor information network. We have recently renewed and increased the number of our VIPs and the quality of the information they provide 24 hours a day. We have also updated the services' computer network, to utilise the latest advances in electronic information management. This will allow us to provide an even more effective booking service for accommodation and excursions.

All our staffed centres are used by local and staying visitors to buy bus and coach, day and season tickets, this gives us the ability to promote year round take up of public transport to visitors and local people, especially senior citizens.

Having recently reviewed our visitor information centre network we are concerned that the temporary VIC building at Ringwood is nearing the end of its life, and we therefore want to find a replacement, permanent building within the town centre area.

From white on brown road signs, visitor information centres, visitor information points, publications and marketing to the internet, multi screen, smarter working and hand held information technology, the co-ordination of all efforts to communicate information consistently and effectively to all visitors however they travel is one of the strategy's most important tasks. More importantly, if key messages can be communicated at source before visitors leave home we can also seek to influence a shift towards alternative travel arrangements to cars. The provision of the alternative modes of visitor travel is one of the principal aims of the New Forest Transportation Strategy (see Transportation page)

Visitor Information Points currently exist in Lyndhurst (2), Burley, Ringwood, Fordingbridge, Hythe, New Milton, Lymington, Barton and Beaulieu. VIPs are also sited at all Forest Holidays campsites. We will continue to review provision and seek to find further locations for siting VIPs in other appropriate commercial and public locations.

Objectives

- 1 To improve the quality and range of information services provided by the Council's Visitor Information Service and NPA and review annually.
- 2 To maintain and improve the Council's network of Visitor Information Points by establishing partnership agreements with appropriate service suppliers and review annually.
- 3 To secure the provision of a replacement and permanent VIC in Ringwood, within the scope of any town centre development by
- 4 Maintain and continue development of www.thenewforest.co.uk improving online services for visitor information, sales and accommodation booking and link with all other partner websites and review annually.
- 5 Develop a "smarter working" information strategy to improve multi-screen, hand held and new media technology use by 2010.

Quality

Policies

** To support the efforts of all national and local agencies for the compulsory registration, classification and quality grading for of all sectors of tourism.*

** To work with all interests to improve Quality Standards in all sectors of the New Forest tourism industry.*

Creating customer confidence is one of the most important elements of tourism. In a special place such as the New Forest, customer expectations are quite rightly high.

We have persuaded the majority of the local industry that taking a green approach to their business will not only save money, improve efficiency and support the environment – it will also give them a key selling point to potential customers, especially those that are targeted by our joint marketing activities.

Under the umbrella of the Green Leaf scheme we have initiated a number of different interservice projects that build into a practical toolkit to provide opportunities for the industry to improve its social, economic and environmental performance. By building on the framework established by the national Green Audit Kit we have produced a New Forest version which focuses on the special needs of visitors, local businesses and their operational environment.

The New Forest Green Leaf scheme suggests practical solutions on energy conservation, health promotion, local produce, environmental standards, and ideas on how businesses can create their own green areas on site. Programmes for recycling and composting waste materials will be developed along with ideas on how packaging for local produce could become reusable. There will also be a section on alternative transport to the car for visitor activities and ideas on developing interpretation projects and environmental training throughout the local visitor industry.

Objective

1 To continue the development of the Green Leaf Scheme for accommodation businesses in partnership with NFTA and NPA and also assist in encouraging its members to sign up to the scheme and review annually.

2 To devise and assist all partners in the delivery of an extended Green Leaf Scheme for non-accommodation based tourism related businesses and review annually.

Training - Education

Policy

** To work with all interests to establish excellent levels of training in all sectors of the tourism industry in order to support the drive towards a high quality destination.*

By working with NFTA and NFBP we will seek to create a much greater access to and take up of staff training for all tourism businesses by developing relationships with our local colleges and other organisations. We will also continue our work on visitor related training development with Brockenhurst and Totton Colleges providing greater opportunities for members of local communities, especially young people, to enter the industry. There is also a role for NFTA in raising the local profile of careers in the tourism and visitor industry and creating more availability of in house training programmes for existing staff.

Objective

1 To work with TSE, Brockenhurst & Totton Colleges, NFTA, NFBP and the Regional Skills Agencies to agree a locally focused tourism industry training & business development programme by [date].

2 To work with HCC and all partners to include tourism in local school curriculums and syllabus' [date].

Marketing

Policies

** That all marketing activities convey the special nature of the District and National Park and contribute to effective management by regulating and attracting target audiences in appropriate numbers to the right place at the right time all year round.*

** To develop an all year destination, especially for serviced accommodation, involve non tourism businesses, increase length of stay and spend per capita, thereby increasing employment and consistency of income.*

** To secure additional resources and support for the NFDC/NFTA Partnership's marketing activities through new partnerships, sponsorship and other forms of appropriate revenue raising.*

** To develop and improve the range and quality of all the NFDC/NFTA Partnership's published tourism material, recognising that local visitors are also important target markets*

We recognise that, appealing as a visit to the New Forest is, gone are the days when it sold itself. If we are to sustain a viable and prosperous tourism industry in the increasingly competitive world of tourism, we must have an effective marketing programme. The New Forest is a destination which has an unchanging value rather than one driven by fashionable themes in the market place. We must therefore endeavour to control the market place rather than let it control us. The industry must market to stay in business, but do it in a way that is best for the long term interests of all and not the short term economic gains of a few.

Marketing is an essential aspect of good management as it helps to regulate and attract the right type and number of visitors to the right place at the right time especially during the Spring, Autumn and Winter, and influence them to behave in an appropriate manner during their visit before they leave home. By targeting those people we know are interested in the area and who will spend the most within the District, we can also increase the economic benefits per visit. The promotion of appropriate towns and villages will help reduce pressure on sensitive areas, bringing people to places where they can spend money at the same time. The properly planned operation of commercial attractions can have a similar function in diverting visitor pressure in economically beneficial ways.

Why people travel – to visit friends and relatives, for relaxation, recreation, business or special interests – is only part of the picture. How visitors make travel decisions is also important. The various sources of information and advice – guide books, brochures, friends and relatives, organisations and special interest groups and especially stories in the media, all affect visitor perception and choice of destination. NFDC/NPA and its partners have done much to present a special and unique quality branding to all its tourism actions. The New Forest graphic device the Green Leaf and NFTA's acorn and oak leaf symbol are becoming synonymous with quality along with the key messages included in all joint marketing activity.

Emphasis is placed on selling the forest's unique environmental and cultural qualities. By stressing this special nature in all our activities, we try to create a feeling of respect and stewardship before visitors arrive. We are selective in our external marketing partnerships and only work with this media, tour operators, travel companies and neighbouring local authorities who understand our position and are sympathetic to our goals. The strength of our relationship with NFTA enables us to act in a united and cohesive manner to protect and develop this approach.

For the last fifteen years we have successfully operated the joint "Little Acorns" Marketing Programme in partnership with New Forest Tourism Association. As a result, attendance and occupancy levels have been maintained and in some cases improved. Nevertheless, there is spare capacity before full efficiency is achieved. In the short term, our aim is to increase bed occupancy, which is crucial for serviced accommodation where it is low- particularly mid week.

The "Little Acorns" marketing programme therefore also supports the important role of business tourism in improving serviced accommodation occupancy, especially midweek and generating return holiday visits from delegates. Whilst we have been extremely successfully in improving occupancy and attendance from our domestic markets, limited economics of scale and resources have made it virtually impossible to break into the huge potential of overseas visitors. In recognising this and the undoubted circulation of visitors (especially overseas) between the New Forest and

East Dorset, the Council has joined with all Dorset's destinations to market the "Dorset and New Forest" holiday brand overseas.

Throughout our work we place a major emphasis on producing our own high quality printed material. We publish over a million pieces of print a year in a wide range of leaflets, brochures, maps and guide books to support our marketing efforts, all with the same consistency of quality and message and contributing to overall visitor management aims and actions.

Objectives

- 1 To manage the "Little Acorns" destination marketing programme in partnership with NFTA and review annually.
- 2 To secure additional resources to fund destination marketing activities and review annually.
 - a) Develop an appropriate range of destination merchandise.
 - b) Develop 'e' sales and income programmes for the destination website.
 - c) Identify appropriate sources of sponsorship for all forms of the Council's electronic and printed tourism media.
- 3 Develop key elements of all the above to target local audiences by December 2009.
- 4 Develop a comprehensive Web 2, new media and social networking programme to link to all the above by December 2009.

Planning

Policies

- * To guide all tourism development within the policies of the core strategies of NFDC and NPA and to work within the framework of the National Park Management Plan.*
- * To recognise the needs of all tourism businesses to adapt to change within the constraints of the District and National Park.*
- * To resist the loss of existing serviced accommodation, especially Hotels.*
- * To discourage proposals for new time-share and self-catering accommodation, except for small-scale proposals which relate to the diversification of existing businesses and the re-use of redundant buildings.*
- * To promote tourism's role in the regeneration of local settlements, especially Totton, Ringwood, Fordingbridge, Hythe and New Milton.*
- * To promote good practice in the best use of existing and redundant buildings for tourism and visitor purposes.*
- * To work with partners, especially Town and Parish Councils and Town Partnerships, to improve the quality of the visitor environment in settlements.*

Tourism activities and development should always respect the scale, nature and character of the place in which they are sited. Proposals for development should be tempered by the suitability and capacity of the site and the surrounding area to absorb visitors. In our towns and countryside, tourism can assist conservation by bringing sympathetic new uses to existing and redundant buildings.

The NPA and NFDC Core Strategies provide the policies that guide all local tourism development. Protecting existing Hotel bedstock is an important feature of these. The policy recognises the pivotal role of the serviced accommodation sector as income generator and job provider, and accordingly gives this sector the greatest flexibility. There is a continued need to create a far more detailed idea of where tourism development can take place, directing pressures away from particularly sensitive areas to those more able to absorb growth without damage. By integrating this with local transportation strategies, an infrastructure and planning framework will emerge which can guide all future tourism development in detail.

The main towns and villages in the New Forest are already visitor honeypots but could benefit from improvement to their visitor environment. However, in the rest of the District, particularly Ringwood, Fordingbridge, Totton and Hythe visitor numbers are particularly low. We are already working with partners, especially through the Community Tourism groups to define exactly what can be done to improve numbers in such locations. Visitors need to have a reason to visit, each place needs a special selling point. This means not only quality or unique retailing and services but visitor attractions, commercial and amenity. We will actively seek local stakeholders to develop these ideas.

The main problem in achieving appropriate tourism development has tended to be the gap between planning applicants' aspirations and NPA and NFDC planning policies. In recent years the gulf between the Industry and the Local Planning

Authorities has closed considerably through the existence of our partnership with NFTA. We will continue to develop our liaison role in tourism related planning matters to improve mutual understanding between the Industry and The Planning Authority and thus reduce the cost of wasted applications by the Industry and the fighting of appeals by the Authority. We will also continue to advise and assist the Local Planning Authorities to produce a detailed locational planning framework throughout the Destination in the future.

Objectives

1 To provide research and advice to help the District Council and National Park Planning Authorities to produce a spatial planning framework to guide all tourism development in the district through the LDF by [date].

2 To establish a close liaison between both the District Council and National Park Planning Authorities and the tourism & visitor industry, especially NFTA, on all tourism related planning applications and create and publish an agreed system by [date].

Transport

Policies

** To ensure that all tourism activity and development in the District and National Park has regard to the appropriate Highway Authority Transport Strategies.*

** To recognise that within the New Forest there is significant potential for Car Free visitor activity and where appropriate all tourism should utilise alternative modes of transport especially walking and cycling.*

** To work with partners to improve public transport links to the District and National Park from target UK markets and ports of entry.*

** To work with Hampshire County Council and other partners to establish public transport links between all settlements and visitor attractions in the District and National Park.*

National traffic levels are predicted to rise considerably within the next twenty years. This is without doubt the biggest threat to the District as an area of international importance for wildlife, a place to live and as a tourism destination. The way local people and visitors gain access to and get around the District for leisure purposes and their effect on the road network is one of the very basic issues for local tourism management.

The New Forest is a special place. Peace, tranquillity and the slow pace and way of life are its core values. The strategy for transport must therefore be to slow down traffic and eliminate it wherever possible. If this can be done, not only will the community and environment benefit, but the forest will be perceived as more attractive, especially to staying visitors attracted by our marketing.

A lot of work has already been done over the last thirty year by various agencies, especially the Forestry Commission, to physically regulate visitors and access within the Crown Lands. It is now time for these regulations and those of other agencies to

be increased if the integrity of the whole of the District and its value as a unique destination is to survive in the future. The hardening of access measures will have a knock on effect throughout the District and beyond, however it is crucial that these are linked with proposals for zoning recreational activities, visitor routing systems and proposals for integrated visitor transport.

The mode of visitor transport, how visitors get to and around the forest and coast, is therefore a major issue. There are many ideas on options of what could be done. As over 90% of visits are made by private car, park and ride sounds an attractive concept, but within the District it is hard to see how this could work because of the size of car parks needed and the lack of public bus services and connections.

However, with a mainline rail network linking three of the main visitor catchment/generators (Dorset, Hampshire and London/Home Counties) a lot more visitor use must be made of the train and this will be encouraged. We will continue to work with South west Trains, Wilts and Dorset Buses and other local transport operators to improve visitor use of public transport in an attempt to reduce car use by all groups of visitor. Many national and local coach companies operate tours of the District, and we will work to create designated coach routes and parking facilities that only use appropriate roads/destinations and contribute to the aim of the tourism and visitor management strategy.

We are currently working with partners to develop the existing network of cycle routes and long-distance walks to create further alternatives to car use and improve visitor management. NFDC/NPA continue to work with Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset County Councils, and New Forest Tourism Association to ensure that all tourism and visitor activity is properly linked to the appropriate Transportation Strategy.

The New Forest Transport Strategy provides a comprehensive plan to manage through traffic and local transportation activities. There are a wide range of measures available, relying on incentives and disincentives to drivers and other travellers. These include restrictions to vehicle access but improved public and alternative transport opportunities. The locations of existing walks, rides, cycle ways, car parks, campsites and other visitor facilities will be re-planned where possible to minimise traffic within the forest, whilst also providing for increased visitor capacity in other appropriate locations such as the Avon Valley and Coast.

The areas covered by the New Forest Transportation Strategy is the New Forest NPA Area and Avon Valley. The towns of Lymington and New Milton lie outside the designated strategy area and will be subject to a separate Coastal Towns Transportation Strategy. Totton, Hythe and the Waterside lie within the area covered by the Southampton Area Transportation Strategy and there will also be links with Wiltshire and Dorset Council's proposals for our western and northern borders.

The visitor transport needs of all these communities and the transport needs of the New Forest do overlap and impinge upon each other. This wider "area of influence" will need to be considered when evolving strategic tourism and visitor transportation initiatives. Tourism can be the catalyst and incentive to create a far better integration of all transport throughout the District and beyond. Consultation with neighbouring Highway Authorities will play an important role in this.

Objectives

- 1 To work with HCC/NFTA and tour operators to improve the management of local coach and car routing and parking arrangements and establish an integrated visitor routing system for the whole District by [date].
- 2 To work with HCC to provide public transportation information and associated ticketing services through the Council's Visitor Information services by [date].
- 3 To work with HCC, the Forestry Commission and others to investigate the use of car park and other transportation charging mechanisms for visitors and establish an agreed strategy by [date].
- 4 To work with HCC, the Forestry Commission and others to implement the comprehensive District wide on road and off road cycling network by [date].
- 5 Further the development of the New Forest Tour as a means of supporting car free initiatives and connect settlements to the railway network.

Research [move up front?]

Monitoring & Evaluation

Policy

** To maintain an effective and evolving programme of District and National Park research with which to inform all tourism management in the New Forest.*

Recent research has provided a lot of information and data about local tourism which has given us much of the raw material necessary for our strategy. However, there are still many things to understand and it is important that a comprehensive programme of research is developed. It is essential that we work with partners to improve understanding of the economic, physical and social impact of all visitors in the countryside, coast and towns throughout the year. Tourism is an emotive subject and historically misunderstood by many. Research is crucial in helping to inform action that is appropriate and fair for all.

The Council's tourism and visitor research programme provides the baseline facts to inform decision making for development and marketing as well as ongoing management. In order to monitor and manage tourism, it is essential to know how to make the most of opportunities and minimise problems in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

[Add new text – evidence and coordination]

In seeking to achieve a regular collection of data we must be realistic and recognise our resources simply do not allow us to do all the necessary research. We therefore have to rely on surveys undertaken by our partners that often do not use the same fields and structures. We will continue to promote the collection of appropriate information with all our partners, especially the Forestry Commission and the New Forest Tourism Association, to improve the effectiveness of all tourism and visitor research.

Objectives

To devise a comprehensive destination research model to include data collection by all partners by establishing:

- a) An annual visitor research programme by [date].
- b) An annual industry research programme by [date].
- c) An annual community research programme by [date].
- d) An annual environmental research programme by [date].