

VISITOR MANAGEMENT FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Colin Rayner (Chairman), Gerry Clark, Jesse Grey and Nicola Pryer.

Also in attendance: Amanda Bryett (Windsor Tourist Guides Ltd), Chris French (French Brothers), Steve Harris (Fringilla), Peter Langthorne (Windsor Town Horse Drawn Carriages), Svetlana Langthorne (Windsor Town Horse Drawn Carriages), Graham Lumly (Duck Tours Ltd), Rebecca Seear (Windsor Carriages), Craig Staddon (Ascot Racecourse), Anne Tayler (Windsor & Eton Society) and Don Yates (French Brothers).

Officers: Tanya Leftwich and Julia White.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was announced by the Chairman that the meeting would be recorded and posted to the web.

The Chairman welcomed everyone and thanked Ascot Racecourse for kindly hosting the meeting.

Apologies were received from Nick Day (The Crowne Estate), Sunil Kalia (Kalia Consulting), Alan Mellins (Sterling Travel), Claire Pearce (Moor Hall), Jo Peck (Horse Power Ltd), Richard Poad (Maidenhead Heritage Centre), Marnix Teeken (Sir Christopher Wren Hotel) and Sally Worman (Norden Farm).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

HMQ90

The Visitor Manager, Julia White, explained that due to unforeseen circumstances Jo Peck from Horse Power Ltd had been unable to attend the meeting but that she would cover the item in Jo's absence.

The Visitor Manager informed everybody present that Her Majesty's 90th Birthday Party on the 12-15 May 2016 would be a celebration of The Queen's life, her love of horses, her dedication to the Commonwealth and international affairs and her deep involvement with the Navy, Army and Air Force. It was noted that over 90 minutes, 900 horses and more than 1,500 participants from around the United Kingdom and the World would create a joyful event for The Queen. Members were informed that the 90-year journey would take people from the excitement of the birth, through to World War Two, her marriage, the coronation and a reign of more than 60 years. It was noted that the Celebration would use horses, actors, bands and dancers to tell the story. The Visitor Manager went on to explain that the celebration would be created by the team that organised the successful Diamond Jubilee Pageant in Windsor in 2012 and that this time, technology would play an important part in the celebration. It was

noted that the 90-minute experience would be a fusion of the latest video projection, LED effects and theatrical lighting and the finale would be a kaleidoscope of memories and achievements.

Members were informed that the Sunday performance would be broadcast live on ITV without adverts which would be a first. It was noted that there was discussion about the possibility of having a live site on the Long Walk on the Sunday evening and that tickets would be available to via a ballot. The Visitor Manager explained that there had also been a discussion about bringing some of the artists from the performances up on a red carpet to the big screen which would in turn give more people an opportunity to be involved. It was suggested that Maidenhead might also like to have a big screen, possibly located in Kidwells Park, in order for its residents to be able to see the show.

The Visitor Manager informed everybody present that the royal windsor information centre's Box Office had worked with local hotels to promote hotel packages. Tickets for the event had gone on sale at the end of November and the huge demand had caused the systems to crash.. It was noted that the Visitor Information Centre team had handled the situation brilliantly but that a lot of people had been unfortunately disappointed as the tickets had sold out on the first day.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- Anne Taylor (Eton & Windsor Society) explained that unfortunately the tickets had not gone on sale at 9am as advertised and that it had only been when someone had knocked on the Information Centres door that the people queuing had been told that the systems had crashed. It was suggested that in future communication between the Visitor Information Centre and customers could be improved.
- That a ballot to gain tickets would be held in January and would be handled by the Visitor Information Centre.
- That Horse Power had been very keen to bring the event into the town in order to get local people / businesses involved. It was noted that discussions had taken place about the possibility of bringing people from the show to the bandstand during the day.
- That the ambassadors would be involved.
- That bunting and flags would be put up in the town.
- The possibility of a pop-up shop in Windsor to sell HMQ90 merchandise .
- That the Council was working with local hotels regarding themed menus being made available.
- About the possibility of having a Windsor Wednesday when approximately 20,000 local residents could be given free access to the horse show on the Wednesday. It was noted that if agreed a Windsor Wednesday would be advertised on the Horse Power website and on the RBWM website. It was noted that last year the Visitor Information Centre had based someone in the Daniels Department Store to help assist local residents.
- That the Horse Show would have 4* jumping which was up another grade from past years.
- That the Visitor Manager and her team were looking at how the participants / performers could see the sights whilst in the Royal Borough by being given information packs. It was noted that further discussions would take place in the New Year.

The Visitor Manager explained that Jo Peck from Horse Power Ltd hoped to attend the Forum meeting in January to give a further update on the event.

DISCUSSION ITEM - RIVER

The Chairman informed the Panel that he had added this item to the agenda due to his recent visit to Venice as it had raised a question about whether the Royal Borough used the river to its full potential with regard to getting visitors in and out of the area.

Chris French (French Brothers) had been asked by the Chairman to look into this and give some feedback at the meeting.

Chris French explained that for many years French Brothers had been running trips from the promenade on a daily basis at lunchtimes. It was noted that the trips went from Runneymede and Maidenhead and lasted between 3.5 – 4 hours. It was noted that the trips could be booked as single or return trips and lunch could be provided if requested.

Chris French went onto explain that French Brothers had seen a considerable growth in this sector and was considering extending the service to locals for transport to and from the Town Centre (not only on race days). It was felt that by extending the service it would reduce the carbon footprint and help car parks cope with the number of visitors to the Royal Borough.

Chris French informed Members that the river pre-dated Windsor Castle and was the very reason the castle had been sited in its current location. It was noted that the river ran right through Windsor although some signs in the town, particularly by the castle, did not show the direction of the river. It was questioned whether the Royal Borough was doing justice to the river highway. Chris French went onto explain that French Brothers were trying to break the tradition of boat companies closing down during the cold weather. Members were informed that whilst this had been very successful for private functions it had not been so successful for day trips. Chris French explained that he felt this was due to people not being aware that the river existed.

Chris French stated that it took approximately ten minutes to reach Windsor Racecourse from French Brothers. It was noted that French Brothers also offered a trip via the Long Park which lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

The Chairman stated that a Park & Ride or other alternatives would be required in the future to stop people from driving into Windsor. The Chairman added that beach front shops and toilets would also require improvement in the future.

It was noted that the Windsor and Eton Society felt the river to be underutilised and there was unfortunately not much located along the rivers edge for tourists to do.

Councillor Clark suggested that as a consumer he would want to see it laid out in a clear way how long he would be on the boat trip and how it tied in with other attractions.

It was suggested that whilst the Visitor Information Centre was felt to be a lovely old building it was quite restrictive and it might be of benefit to have someone based at an open counter by the coffee shop which was felt to be more visible.

It was noted that there were no shops or cafes from the Windsor & Eton bridge up to the Boatman Pub and that the stretch would benefit from some high end establishments (restaurants, shops, cafes).

The Chairman suggested that an officer from Property Services be invited to the next meeting to address this suggestion. It was also suggested that as part of Phase 2/3 of the Wayfinding scheme was about to commence it was believed that finger signs could be added by the castle. The Visitor Manager explained that their volunteers helped guide people to the river in the summer and at weekends – Chris French stated that he would be happy to contribute towards more help, possibly via a joint advertising mobile vehicle. The Chairman suggested that the Visitor Manager, the Windsor & Eton Town Manager and three boat operators here tonight met with Councillor Claire Stretton and the Development & Property Manager (Mark Shephard) in early January at a separate meeting to discuss the suggestions made tonight in detail.

VISITOR MANAGER'S UPDATE

The Visitor Manager, Julia White, gave Members the highlights since the last meeting on the following:

- Social media.
- Visitor Information Centre refurbishment.
- Looking ahead.

Everyone present was offered a copy of the Official Visitor Guide 2016 which had been completely revamped. Members were informed that the new guides were being distributed by Brochure Connect. The Visitor Manager explained that the new map was currently being produced and would be available soon.

Social media – It was noted that the Christmas campaign on Facebook that had been very popular had just closed. It was noted that the campaign had been targeted at couples. Members were informed that the Christmas campaign had received 3343 competition entries and 2500 customer email opt-ins with it having reached 108,730 people. The Visitor Manager explained that they had increased the customer database by over 10,000 this year. Members were informed that an increase in sales on the website via Facebook had been noted and that on the back of the campaign London Kayak Tours had managed to increase its business by approximately 50%.

It was noted that discussions were being about the possibility of the Visitor Information Centre being refurbished. Members were informed that designers, the Ice Gallery, were in the process of confirming costs for the three options suggested at the last meeting. The Visitor Manager hoped to have further details next week. It was noted that interest had been expressed by Legoland and that there was scope for more out of town attractions to be involved in the refurbishment.

Members were informed that the Tourism Development Day had taken place on the 10 November 2015 which had been attended by just under one hundred businesses. The Visitor Manager explained that she had received some really useful feedback which would help her make the event even better next year. Members were informed that the feedback received had suggested that it might be beneficial next year to reduce the number / length of presentations and increase the number of key meetings held in both the morning and the afternoon. The Visitor Manager stated that she would be really pleased to hold the event at Ascot Racecourse again if that was an option open to her.

The Visitor Manager explained that looking ahead she hoped the Visitor Information Centre refurbishment would be agreed. It was noted that a town wifi project was underway to offer free wifi in Windsor and Maidenhead Town Centre. The Visitor Manager went onto explain that she was very conscious that the Royal Borough had a very good destination app already that could be fully adapted to be more pro-active by giving welcome messages to visitors and by listing available attractions. Members were informed that discussions on this topic would be starting next week. The Visitor Manager went onto explain that the Windsor.gov.uk website would be updated next year and that web developments were being looked into (e.g. top level refresh of index pages). Members were informed that the Visitor Survey Report which was mentioned at the last meeting could now be found on the website and contained positive findings.

In the ensuing discussion the following point was noted:

That whilst Peter Langthorne (Windsor Town Horse Drawn Carriages) liked the new Official Visitor Guide 2016 he felt it included a section about “Windsor Carriages” which mentioned trips he did not offer. Peter Langthorne went onto explain that he attended a Forum meeting just over a year ago and gave a presentation on what he planned to do and after that meeting he had found there to be an operator with the same name. Peter Langthorne stated that he felt he should have been consulted. Rebecca Seear (Windsor Carriages) responded by informing everyone present that her family had used the “Windsor Carriages” name for years

and she and her family fully supported more carriages in the town and welcomed Peter Langthorne to develop his business as long as the carriages used were safe.

UPDATE FROM ASCOT RACECOURSE

Craig Staddon (Ascot Racecourse) informed the Forum that 2016 would be an exciting year for the Royal Borough and Ascot Racecourse as the Queen would be celebrating her 90th birthday and the racecourse would be holding 26 race meetings throughout the year. It was noted that whilst Ascot Racecourse did a lot regarding holding race meetings it wanted to expand outside of that area. Craig Staddon explained that 2016 would be the third year that Ascot Racecourse would host the Red Bull Air Race although the format might be different next year. Members were informed that Red Bull International (Austria) felt Ascot Racecourse to be the best at ensuring Red Bull customers had the best day possible.

It was noted that Craig Staddon felt Ascot Racecourse was a little disconnected from Windsor and wanted to see how they could work more together in the future. Ascot Racecourse hoped to see more engagement from locals too.

Craig Staddon informed the Forum that Ascot Racecourse planned to reduce its numbers in its premiere enclosure from 4500 to 2600 next year in order to make customer experiences better.

Members noted that from December onwards Ascot Racecourse had changed its values and branding and that each member of staff (60 FTE and 20 temporary staff) now had to speak to 5 visitors / guests to learn from their experiences at Ascot Racecourse.

Councillor Grey mentioned Ascot Racecourses change in dress code and wondered whether it was possible to keep it as it had been. Craig Staddon responded by explaining that changes to the dress code had been made as over the last 4-5 years the dress code had been more relaxed. It was noted that whilst shorts were acceptable in the silver ring race days were a different matter. Craig Staddon explained that Jump Day was the exception due to the cold weather and that at this event flat caps and Barbour jackets were allowed.

Craig Staddon informed the Forum that Ascot Racecourse had learnt a lot in the previous year with regard to traffic issues that occurred when the Red Bull event took place on the same day as a busy Legoland event. It was noted that this year traffic had felt to have been better as the traffic system put in place on event day had worked really well.

It was noted that Craig Staddon felt Ascot Racecourses biggest challenge over the next five years was the changing market place. Members were informed that Ascot Racecourse used to offer discounts but now held their pricing so that customers received the best experience.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

Members were asked to email any additional item suggestions for future meetings directly to the Visitor Manager, Julia White at julia.white@rbwm.gov.uk and the Clerk, Tanya Leftwich at tanya.leftwich@rbwm.gov.uk

DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman informed Members that the date of the next meeting was as follows:

- Tuesday 8 March 2016 at the MacDonald Windsor Hotel – 6.30pm start.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

“That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on items 10 & 11 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act”.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....