

VISITOR MANAGEMENT FORUM

THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Colin Rayner (Chairman), Jesse Grey, Nicola Pryer and Shamsul Shelim

Also in attendance: Majella Baldacchino (Windsor Racecourse), Tot Brill (Windsor Castle), Jill Britton (Windsor Great Park), Amanda Bryett (Windsor Tourist Guides), Janet Cole (Windsor Castle), Nick Day (The Crown Estate), Sharan Endor (Cophorne), Ingrid Fernandes (Legoland), Wyatt Gates (South West Trains), Steve Harris (Fringilla), Jade Humphrey (Cophorne), Sunil Kalia (Jetset Coaches), Alan Mellins (Maidenhead Heritage Centre & Sterling Travel), Paul Sedgewick (Windsor Great Park), Rebecca Seear (Windsor Carriages), Anne Taylor (The Windsor & Eton Society), Sue Watts (Windsor Royal Shopping Centre), 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 The Savill Garden for kindly hosting the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Burbage, Moor Hall Conference Centre (Claire Pearce), Professional Tourist Guides (Laura Comley-Smith), Royal Collection (Abbie Kirkwood), The Runnymede on Thames Hotel (Louise Martin), Visions of History (Tony Howe), Windsor Castle (James Perowne), Windsor & Eton Tourist Guides (Bobbie Latter), Windsor Racecourse (Stuart Dorn), Windsor Welcome Tourist Guides (Hilary Thompson), Windsor Town Horse Drawn Carriages Ltd (Peter Langthorne) and Windsor Town Horse Drawn Carriages Ltd (Svetlana Langthorne).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

- Members were informed that major works were planned during summer 2017 which would be quite a challenge as it equated to a loss of between 40-50% of train services.

WELCOME AND UPDATE ON TOURISM ACTIVITY ACROSS WINDSOR GREAT PARK

The Operations Manager – The Crowne Estate, Nick Day, welcomed everyone to the venue and informed the Forum that he arrived approximately nine / nine and a half years ago and wanted to develop this building and the tourist offering in the Great Park.

It was noted that nine and a half years ago visitors to the Great Park had not always been seen as an asset and were at best tolerated. Something that the Operations Manager had been working on over the past eighteen months to two years was to extend the welcome to the visitor.

When counted it was noted that 5.5 – 6 million visitors visited the 4,800 acres of Windsor Great Park every year rather than the 2.5 million that had been predicted. It was noted that the Crowne Estate had a responsibility to look after the 4,800 acres whilst ensuring visitors enjoyed the 'green loveliness'.

In the last financial year it was noted the Crowne Estate in Windsor had recorded a small profit for the first time ever. It was noted that the Crowne Estate was the only company in the country that paid 100% tax. The Operations Manager explained that the real priority was to protect and preserve the Windsor Great Park.

With regard to the vision of the business it was noted that 40,000 visitors bought a ticket with a further 60,000 visiting The Savill Garden via memberships which left 5.4 million people visiting the Park without paying. It was noted that the Operations Manager needed to find ways of generating income from the 5.4 million visitors without compromising the integrity of the Park. It was noted that the biggest single source of income from the estate was from property rental followed by car parking.

It was noted that there were just under 12,500 members at The Savill Garden compared to 1,800 in 2007. The Operations Manager explained that they were looking to involve the local community more in what they did in the future. It was noted that some market research had taken place in Virginia Water a few years ago which had resulted in a new burger van being installed, along with a visitors centre, nice toilets and an ice-cream unit which totalled a turnover of £7,500 per annum. It was noted that the Operations Manager ensured a certain degree of facility was in the right place but that it did not destroy the surroundings.

It was noted that The Savill Garden was open free of charge over the winter months in December, January and February in order to encourage visitors. The Operations Manager explained that on a busy day there were approximately 1,500 visitors at The Savill Garden which could be increased to 2,000 – 3,000. It was noted that The Savill Garden needed to appeal to the younger and elderly market and that the gardens needed to be more fun. Members were informed that the gardens currently had a sculpture in it as part of the art garden season and that themes had been created this year.

The Operations Manager explained that a lot of film crews visited The Savill Garden on a fairly regular basis which generated income for the estate and local companies.

It was noted that new caterers had been introduced to The Savill Garden after 18 years and that the caterers were called Benugo. Members were informed that catering would close down on the 7 January 2017 and open again at the end of March.

Members were shown a short video of the Great Park.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- That the Windsor Free Festival would not be returning.
- That the new keeper of the gardens at The Savill Garden had links with Kew Gardens.
- That the coffee vehicle that had been located at the top of the Great Park would soon be relocated in the Great Park.

The Chairman thanked the Operations Manager for addressing the Forum and for his hospitality.

OVERVIEW OF THE WINDSOR CASTLE FUTURE PROGRAMME

The Chairman welcomed the Future Programme Director, Royal Collection Trust (Tot Brill) to the meeting and invited her to address the Forum.

Members were given a short presentation on Windsor Castle's Future Programme (January 2017 – December 2019) which covered the following areas:

- Vision.
- Aims.
- Windsor Castle.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- It was noted that Windsor Castle were designing something to stop people from having to queue out on the street outside the castle. It was explained that booking online and timed visits were not something the castle was currently looking to do.
- It was noted that no change would take place to the Royal families privacy once the State Entrance was opened up to visitors.
- That a tester café had been in the Undercroft for one season in the past.
- That an Instagram account had been opened by the castle which was doing really well.
- That the castle wanted to increase visitor numbers at off-peak times, such as in February.
- That the tour of the castle took approximately 1.5 hours.
- That the castle did after hours / back stage tours at a premium.
- That 30 minutes early entry could be offered as an incentive to visitors staying in certain hotels for longer periods of time.
- That group prices in to the castle were available.
- That a Windsor Castle & The Savill Garden joint ticket was available to purchase by the group market. It was noted that the Visitor Centre enabled visitors to tailor their tickets as part of packages.
- That no new rooms would be opened in the castle.
- That there was probably more scope for partnership / association work.
- That visitors should be encouraged to come to Windsor by train where possible.
- It was suggested that the Coach Park could be offered a location just outside town with good facilities to free up some parking space in Windsor.
- That work at the castle would start in January and would be part of a two year programme. It was noted that the works would not interrupt visitors to the castle.

The Chairman thanked the Future Programme Director, Royal Collection Trust for her presentation.

VISITOR MANAGER UPDATE

The Visitor Manager gave Members the highlights since the last meeting.

With regard to refurbishment of the Information Centre plans and a budget were being finalised. It was noted that the Visitor Manager would soon be able to start planning the visual display which would include six digital advertising screens. Members were informed that the Information Centre would probably be closed for three days for installation purposes.

It was noted that the new Visitor Strategy was being written and that consultation meetings would be arranged in October and November.

The Visitor Manager informed everyone present that she had yesterday received the latest economic impact report which she would circulate early next week. It was noted that the Royal Borough had bucked the trend and increased overnight stays by nearly 4%. It was noted that whilst overnight trips had increased day trips had reduced which was in line with the UK as a whole and the South East.

Members were informed that the Social Media Strategy had just been finalised and that no comments had been received to date. The Visitor Manager explained that she would need businesses content and imagery shortly.

The Visitor Manager informed everyone present that the Tourism Development Day would be taking place on the 6th October and that this was her final call to people interested in attending the day. It was noted that the networking time this year had been increased.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- That whilst Brighton had increased their footfall to 8 million the Royal Borough which was much smaller in size had achieved 7.5 million.
- That the Highways Overview & Scrutiny Panel had been tasked with finding an additional 1000 parking spaces in Windsor which was hoped would help increase footfall.

The Chairman thanked the Visitor Manager for her update.

DISCUSSION ITEM: SHOULD THE VISITOR MANAGEMENT FORUM CHANGE NAME?

The Chairman asked Forum Members whether they felt the Visitor Management Forum name should be changed as he felt it needed a better title. It was noted that the Chairman felt that the Forum needed more tourism industries to attend these meetings and asked for suggestions.

The following suggestions were noted:

- Experience Windsor.
- Tourism Development Forum.

The Chairman requested that this item be included in the next agenda.

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

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman informed Members that the date of the next meetings were as follows:

- 5 December 2016 (6.30pm start) – venue to be confirmed.
- 30 March 2017 (6.30pm start) – venue to be confirmed.

The Forum was reminded that the final race day of the season at Windsor Racecourse would be taking place on the 17 October 2016 with the gates opening at midday and the racing starting at 2pm.

The Chairman also reminded the Forum that on the 10 October 2016 it was the Windsor and Maidenhead Young Farmers Club for the over 18's and under 26's.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....