

SHIFNAL TOURISM GROUP

SHIFNAL TOURISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

AIM OF THE SHIFNAL TOURISM GROUP

Shifnal Tourism Group was established in late 2013 as a spin-off from the Shifnal Forward Economy Action Group. It is a joint-working Group with representatives from Shropshire Council, Shifnal Town Council, local community groups and the business community.

The aim of the Group is to lead the development of the visitor economy in the town and surrounding area through encouraging both residents and visitors to appreciate its heritage and its wide range of retail businesses, thereby stimulating the local retail and leisure economy and creating additional employment.

PURPOSES OF THE SHIFNAL TOURISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The purposes of the Shifnal Tourism Strategy and Action Plan are to set out the current position and to identify those Strategies that are needed in order to achieve this aim.

This includes the setting of Objectives which are to be delivered in partnership with public, voluntary and private organisations. It is recognised that meeting some of these Objectives will require financial outlay, and adoption of the Plan will facilitate applications to appropriate funding bodies.

The Group consulted with interested local organisations in the preparation of this Plan and now present it for adoption by Shifnal Town Council.

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CURRENT POSITION

Income from tourism is not a significant contributor to the local economy and there is much potential to improve on this position. Visitors from the immediate local area come to Shifnal for its restaurants and public houses, its specialist shops, its Farmers' Market and especially for its Annual Carnival, but the town does not have any obvious attraction to draw visitors from further afield into the town

Shifnal has a limited range of accommodation, especially in the middle price-range: there are two up-market hotels, some small-scale B&B accommodation and a 'Day's Inn' motel at the M54 services 2 miles away. This means that visitors to museums and other attractions in the Telford and East Shropshire areas are unlikely to use Shifnal as a base.

WHY COME TO SHIFNAL?

The Town's History

Shifnal is an historic market town which originated in Saxon times. It is surrounded by attractive countryside where agriculture remains an important element in local life.

In 1245 a charter was obtained from the king (Henry III) to hold a weekly market and yearly fair, indicating, together with the size and beauty of the parish church, a prosperous medieval community. A few centuries later, George Talbot the 6th Earl of Shrewsbury set up an ironworks in 1564, building a blast furnace close to the Manor House. This was probably the first blast furnace in Shropshire, using water power from the Wesley Brook to make pig iron.

In 1591 Shifnal suffered its own 'Great Fire' when a number of houses were burnt down and the Parish Church was severely damaged. Some of the reconstructed buildings survive to this day. During the Civil War Charles II passed through Evelith (just south of Shifnal) as he attempted to escape from Boscobel after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Shifnal town enjoyed considerable prosperity catering for coaching traffic. In 1785 the Irish mail coaches began to pass through Shifnal en route from London to Holyhead and the coaching trade became really important in the local economy. However, the coaching trade rapidly disappeared when the railway from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury was opened in 1849. The long brick railway viaduct dates from then and is a notable feature of the town.

The Industrial Revolution in the East Shropshire coalfield area had little effect on Shifnal, which by the middle of the 19th century had reverted to its earlier character of a small market town offering a comprehensive range of services and shops for the growing population of the town and surrounding hamlets and farms.

The Town Today

Shifnal has kept much of its ancient character as a market town. The Conservation Area in and around the town centre has over 30 listed buildings, including many of the old inns and houses dating from its coaching days.

Communications are very good, the town being close to the M54 motorway and to other major roads and having a good rail service to Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton and Birmingham. A National Cycle Route passes through the town.

Shifnal is a popular place to live and there is a good community spirit with many active community groups. It has excellent schools and sports facilities. Its evening economy, in particular, is thriving with its restaurants, eating places and public houses attracting visitors from the surrounding towns.

Shifnal has a busy town centre with a good range of shops and services which cater well for the needs of its residents. An unusually high number (over 80%) of these are independently owned and managed, including a growing range of specialist shops which attract customers from a wide area. However, only 40% of town centre users spend over one hour in the town centre, and only 20% spend over £20.00 per visit. On average, however, only 17% of shoppers come from outside the town.

Interestingly, 27% of town centre users stated that they were visiting Shifnal to 'access services', which is noticeably higher than the National Small Towns figure of 16%, whilst 70% of Town Centre users stated that 'access to services' was a positive aspect of the Town Centre. Some 93% of respondents visited Shifnal once a week or more. (*Shifnal 2012 AMT Town Benchmarking Report*).

Visitor Attractions

There are many cultural and leisure activities in the local area to suit all tastes and ages. These include:

- Outdoor activities: walking, riding, geo-caching, cycling and golf
- History and Heritage: Shifnal local history display, Town Trail around our historic churches and buildings and Conservation area
- Monthly Farmers' Market
- A wide range of Restaurants and Public Houses
- Annual Christmas Light display and 'switching-on' Ceremony
- Annual Carnival

Shifnal is also an excellent base from which to visit major local attractions such as Museums, English Heritage and National Trust properties, and historic churches.

Shifnal is a town with a long and interesting history where much of its past can still be traced in the modern town, but it is not an obvious tourist attraction like some other towns in Shropshire and the local visitor economy is very weak.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Geographical position: less than 15 miles from the West Midlands conurbation
- Excellent transport links: M54 Motorway, railway service, bus routes
- Nearby major visitor attractions: Ironbridge Gorge Museums, Telford International Centre, RAF Museum Cosford, Weston Park, Boscobel House, David Austin Roses
- Retains character of a small market town
- Free car parking
- High number of independent retailers
- High number of restaurants, eating places and public houses
- Interesting local history with public display of material supported by strong group of volunteers
- Conservation area with over 30 listed buildings
- Historic churches
- Town trail information
- Good range of excellent sports facilities: football, cricket, golf, tennis, bowls
- Excellent access to attractive countryside with good network of footpaths
- Annual Carnival
- Annual Christmas Lights ceremony
- Monthly Farmers' Market

Weaknesses

- Lack of any major tourist attraction
- Few cultural opportunities
- No Tourist Information Office
- Shortage of visitor accommodation
- No signage from M54 junction or services
- Central shopping area in need of refurbishment and suffers from 1960s redevelopment
- when many historically important buildings were knocked down
- Empty/unused buildings in town centre
- Lack of marketing of town as a visitor destination
- Poor signage in and around town centre
- Poor traffic management

Opportunities

- Improved signage in town centre
- Raising awareness of town's important buildings and its heritage
- Increase in population could help local retail economy and also provide funds for town centre improvements etc
- Potential for sustainable tourism
- Independent retailers could attract more customers away from Telford Town Centre
- Funding becoming available to allow town to be marketed as a visitor destination
- Learn from those who do it well, e.g. IGMT
- Internet-based marketing of short breaks

Threats

- Character of town could be lost with over-development
- Increasing traffic congestion
- Competition from other local towns for visitor income
- Competition from other local towns for resources
- Insufficient volunteers to initiate and manage projects
- Budget cuts in public funding

POLICY CONTEXT

The National Context

The Government Tourism Policy was published by DCMS in March 2011. It confirmed the importance of tourism in helping to generate jobs and growth across the country, and recognises that the tourism offer in other parts of the country must be broadened in order to match the performance of London. Visit England has stated its intention to continue to improve the visitor offer, and has adopted a Strategic Framework for 2010-2020, which aims to “maximise tourism’s contribution to the economy, employment and quality of life in England”, with a target for growth of 5% on average year-on-year over the ten years. The Strategic Framework aims to achieve four independent objectives:

- To increase England’s share of global visitor markets
- To offer visitors compelling destinations of distinction
- To champion a successful thriving tourism industry
- To facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience

The second and fourth of these objectives fit particularly well with the Shifnal area as a destination.

The Sub-Regional Context

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) acknowledges the contribution of tourism to the sub-regional economy. Tourism represents one of the LEP’s five core growth sectors as defined in its Strategy for Growth, 2013-2022. Sub-regional funding for tourism has undoubtedly reduced since the abolition of regional development agencies such as Advantage West Midlands, but there are still some funding streams available. The Marches LEP will also take responsibility for the administration and allocation of European funding designated for tourism.

Overall, the sector generates more than £1 billion annually across the Marches LEP area, employs over 33,000 people and accounts for over 15% of Marches LEP GDP.

The Shropshire Context

The Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board was established in 2010 to provide strategic leadership for the visitor economy sector in the geographic county of Shropshire. Its aims are to increase the value of tourism and so help to grow the county’s economy. Its key priorities include:

- Key Infrastructure Provision
- Effective Collaboration through Partnerships
- Sector Market Intelligence and Research
- Raising Awareness of Shropshire
- Developing the appeal of local Market Towns
- Shropshire’s Countryside – A Tourism & Heritage Asset
- Shropshire’s Heritage – A Tourism Asset
- Shropshire’s Food and Drink – A Tourism Asset
- Support strategic investment in Heritage Developments where appropriate

Tourism also represents one of the priority sectors defined within the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy.

SO WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

What is our aim?

Our aim is to increase the contribution of tourism-related activity to the economy of the town, while preserving its environment for residents and visitors. We wish to increase the local income from tourism and the number of jobs supported by tourism.

What is our strategy?

Our strategic objectives are to:

1. Encourage and support activities which will increase the quality and consistency of the tourism offer in Shifnal
2. Continue to raise awareness of Shifnal through targeted and focused promotion
3. Encourage the preservation and enhancement of local heritage and culture
4. Promote and encourage sustainable development, both economic and environmental

What will we do and how will we do it?

We will deliver these objectives through working in partnership with public, voluntary and private organisations. Details of those areas on which we will concentrate are given in our Action Plan below.

The first section of the Action Plan comprises those activities that we view as ongoing, that is those services that are provided on a continuing basis. These activities are divided into those categories used by the Shropshire and Telford Destination Management Partnership.

The second section outlines those specific projects that we intend to implement or support. This section indicates which of the strategic objectives are being addressed, and will evolve over time as projects are completed and others initiated, and as we review our performance to date against our desired outcomes.

We will provide an annual summary of the actions that we and our partners have taken in the previous twelve months and of those actions planned for the future. The Appendix sets out how we intend to measure our progress against our objectives.

ACTION PLAN

Section A: Continuing Work

Category	Examples	Partners
Infrastructure	Offer clean streets and pavements, clean public toilets, flower displays	Shifnal Town Council Shropshire Council
Infrastructure / facilities	Regularly review visitor management infrastructure (parking, signage etc.) and support improvements	Shifnal Town Council Shropshire Council
Information	Ensure tourist information is widely available and is up-to-date, e.g. internet sites, clear and appropriate signage	Shifnal Town Council Shifnal Business Forum Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association
Business Support	Ensure training in customer service etc. is available Arrange business clinics Assist businesses in finding premises	Shropshire Council Shifnal Business Forum Action for Market Towns National Skills Academy for Retail
Research	Exploit information available from Shropshire Council	Shropshire Council
Funding and resources	Seek external funding for projects, including LEADER and other EU programmes	Shropshire Council Marches LEP LEADER
Lobbying and influencing	Represent Shifnal's tourism interests to national and regional partnerships and other bodies	Shifnal Town Council and as appropriate

Section B: Projects

Development, packaging and marketing	Partners/potential partners identified	Strategic objectives addressed	Comments
Promote Shifnal as a tourist destination	Shifnal Town Council Shropshire Council Shifnal Business Forum	2	
Develop and market rural activities e.g. golfing, riding, running, walking, cycling	Shropshire Council Leisure Service Providers Voluntary Groups	2,4	
Support and market	Shifnal Business	2,4	Need to develop

local shopping and food	Forum		daytime economy
Support and develop Farmers' Market	Farmers' Market Group Shifnal Town Council	2,4	
Encourage and support events e.g. Carnival and Christmas Lights display	Shifnal Town Council Voluntary Groups	2,3,4	Need to develop range of year-round events
Work with partners within and outside Shifnal	Bridgnorth Area Tourism Action Group	All	
Infrastructure and Facilities	Partners/potential partners	Strategic objectives addressed	Comments
Carry out Town Centre signage audit and identify and implement improvements	Shifnal Town Council Shropshire Council	1,4	
Raise awareness of town's heritage through signage, trails, leaflets etc.	Shifnal Town Council The Shifnal Society Shifnal Local History Group	2,3	
Develop ideas to enhance Town Centre through professionally designed traffic and pedestrian management	Shifnal Town Council Shropshire Council Shifnal Forward Shifnal Business Forum	All	Provides a catalyst for economic regeneration
Encourage and support accommodation providers to achieve accreditation for quality and environmental standards	Visit England Quality in Tourism Green Tourism Business Scheme	1	
Work with businesses to promote local facilities for business tourism	Various as appropriate	2,4	

APPENDIX 1: MEASURING PROGRESS

The desired outcomes for tourism in Shifnal are

1. An increase in the total yield from tourism in the town
2. An increase in the number of overnight stays in commercial accommodation
3. An increase in the number of direct and indirect jobs supported by tourism

At present no 'baseline' statistical data for the above is available. There is a requirement, therefore, to research into the availability of data from e.g. Action for Market Towns. This will enable a baseline to be established and against which

progress can be measured. A process will need to be devised and implemented in order to achieve this, and it is recognised that funding may be required for this.

We recommend therefore that as part of this process the Shifnal 2012 AMT Town Benchmarking Report is updated.

It is also recognised that research into ways of measuring progress against Qualitative data such as Customer Satisfaction will need to be undertaken.

National and regional figures will also be monitored to provide a benchmark against which we can measure our performance.

Created by:

Shifnal Tourism Group, September 2014

Explanatory Note:

Shifnal Tourism Group is a working party within the Economy Action Group of Shifnal Forward. It comprises representatives from the following bodies:

Shropshire Council
Shifnal Town Council
Shifnal Business Forum
The Shifnal Society
Shifnal Pathfinders PP3 Group
Shifnal Local History Group
Shifnal Forward Economy and Environmental & Planning Action Groups
Farmers Market Group
Bridgnorth Area Tourism Action Group