

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 MAY 2009

NEW FOREST TOUR UPDATE

Report by: Chris Gregory, Transport and Tourism Officer

Summary:

This report provides an update on the operating and marketing arrangements for the New Forest Tour in 2009.

Recommendation:

To note the content of this report.

Resources and Corporate Plan:

Included in 2009 – 2010 budget

- £15,000 revenue support funding
- £5000 marketing

Corporate Plan U2: Review strategies and develop proposals to reduce the impact of traffic on the special environment of the National Park and promote alternatives to private car use, working jointly with relevant authorities.

Papers:

NFNPA 298/09
NFNPA 277/08
NFNPA 221/07
NFNPA 59/06

Cover Paper
New Forest Tour 2008 review
New Forest Tour 2007 review
New Forest Tour funding arrangements

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The New Forest Tour is an open top bus experience following a circular route within the New Forest National Park, during the summer months. The route includes the Open Forest, key settlements and visitor attractions and seeks to provide a diverse New Forest car free experience.
- 1.2 Since 2006 the Authority has contributed an annual sum of £15,000 in support of the operation of the New Forest Tour, and additional contributions toward marketing. This three year funding commitment concluded at the end of August 2008.
- 1.3 There are clear links between the New Forest Tour and the National Park second purpose, for example in both 2007 and 2008 93% of customer feedback responses stated that the New Forest Tour improved understanding and enjoyment of the New Forest. The service also contributes to the first purpose by encouraging people to explore the New Forest without a car.

2 Operational Arrangements 2009

- 2.1 In February 2009, Hampshire County Council coordinated a tender exercise to identify an operator for the 2009 service. This exercise clearly set out the requirements for the core New Forest Tour operation, but allowed potential tenderers the flexibility to propose alternative formats for the service.
- 2.2 Bluestar was selected as the successful tenderer and has been offered the contract to operate the New Forest Tour for a period of four years commencing summer 2009. Bluestar operated the New Forest Tour under the previous contract, and therefore already has a relationship with the New Forest and the funding partners.
- 2.3 For 2009, the New Forest Tour will operate between 20 June and 13 September; 86 consecutive days. This represents a reduction of 14 days from the previous 100 day operation which is a reflection on the reduced level of revenue funding available to support the service together with rising operating costs.

- 2.4 The level of funding subsidy required to meet this operating arrangement is £30,000, roughly £349 per day. The Authority and New Forest District Council will meet this cost by each contributing £15,000.
- 2.5 Hampshire County Council has decided not to contribute funding towards the operation of the New Forest Tour in 2009. However the County Council will continue to oversee the contract, be represented on the New Forest Tour Steering Group, and fund the New Forest Tour Official Guides, distributed to all customers.
- 2.7 Whilst most other operational arrangements are as per 2008, a minor route amendment has arisen from changes to the weight limit on the bridge crossing the railway on the B3055 to the west of Brockenhurst. Network Rail has advised that vehicles over 7.5 tonnes can no longer use this bridge and consequently the New Forest Tour will follow the A337 between Brockenhurst and Lymington. All marketing material for 2009 has been amended to reflect this change.

3 Marketing arrangements for 2009

- 3.1 As with previous years, the New Forest Tour will be widely marketed in and around the National Park using a variety of media.
- 3.2 Marketing activity will be coordinated through the New Forest Tour Steering Group which comprises funding partners and representatives from the New Forest tourism industry.
- 3.3 Specific marketing actions in 2009 will include:
- the production of the New Forest Tour Official Guide, which will be available to all customers as they board the bus and include a written commentary, together with discount vouchers for attractions and other services along the route;
 - dedicated [New Forest Tour](#) website, with the ability to offer online ticket sales;
 - product leaflet with a print run of 80 000, distributed to over 300 locations in and around the New Forest;
 - ticket sales through Visitor Information Centres, Local Information Points, and accommodation providers.

4 Performance monitoring

- 4.1 As part of the contract Bluestar will provide the Authority with regular data relating to passenger journey numbers and ticket sales. Customer feedback will be encouraged via the feedback form included in the New Forest Tour Official Guide.
- 4.2 A report on the performance of the New Forest Tour in 2009 will be presented to Members later in the year.

Recommendation

To note the content of this report.