NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 MARCH 2010

NEW FOREST TOUR 2010 REVIEW

Report by: Chris Gregory, Transport and Tourism Officer

1 Summary

The New Forest Tour is a recreational open top bus tour which operates for 86 days during the summer season. The Authority is a key funding partner, and leads on the overall project management and marketing of the New Forest Tour. The 2010 summer season represented the second year of a four year contract with the public transport operator Go South Coast.

This report presents Members with a review of the New Forest Tour during 2010 and the emerging situation for 2011

2 Recommendation

For Members to note the content of this report.

Resources and Corporate Plan

Papers

NFNPA 376/11 Cover Paper
NFNPA 331/10 New Forest Tour 2009 Review
NFNPA 298/09 New Forest Tour 2009 Update
NFNPA 277/08 New Forest Tour 2008 Review
NFNPA 221/07 New Forest Tour 2007 Review
NFNPA 59/06 New Forest Tour Funding Arrangements

Contact

Chris Gregory
Tel: 01590 646683
Email: chris.gregory@newforestnpa.gov.uk
NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 MARCH 2011

NEW FOREST TOUR 2010 REVIEW

Report by Chris Gregory, Transport and Tourism Officer

1 Introduction

1.1 The New Forest Tour is an open top bus experience following a circular route within the New Forest. The route includes key settlements and visitor attractions and seeks to provide a diverse New Forest car free experience.

1.2 The service is provided as a partnership between the Authority, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, the New Forest Tourism Association and public transport operator Go South Coast.

1.3 There are clear links between the New Forest Tour and national park purposes and the duty.

2 Background

2.1 The New Forest Tour was first introduced in 2004, and despite the use of older buses, the service proved popular with the public and received national recognition as a leading car free tourism initiative. The same buses remained for the 2005 season, and patronage continued to grow. However, feedback suggested that customers were becoming increasingly disappointed with the reliability and comfort of the buses used.

2.2 A new operating model was developed for 2006, which included securing the use of two nearly new buses, increasing the service frequency to hourly and improvements to the route. The Authority, together with Hampshire County Council, and New Forest District Council, agreed to subsidise the service for a period of 3 years.

2.3 2007 saw the introduction of a new brand and livery which offered greater synergy with the New Forest, both as a destination and a national park. The livery has proved popular with customers and enabled the New Forest Tour brand to become established in and around the New Forest.

2.4 Passenger Journey numbers and revenue from ticket sales have grown year on year since the service was introduced. This can be attributed to strong partnership working, effective marketing and increasing brand awareness. Members of the New Forest Tourism Association have, in particular, been key to the continued growth of the New Forest Tour.

2.5 2010 represented year two of a four year contract with the current bus operator. The contract covers the subsidy payment required for the operation of the New Forest Tour, which is set at £30k for an 86 day operation. In 2010, this subsidy was
achieved through contributions from the Authority, New Forest District Council, Beaulieu National Motor Museum, and Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway.

3 2010 Season Performance

3.1 In 2010 the service operated for 86 consecutive days between 19 June and 20 September. 17600 passenger journeys were recorded during this period, a rise of 13% over 2009.

3.2 Ticket sales generated £66171 in revenue in 2010, which demonstrated an increase of 16% over 2009.

3.3 The benefit of the Tour to businesses along its route is well illustrated by Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway. In 2010, approximately 1400 customers used the New Forest Tour to travel to Exbury Gardens and paid an entrance fee to visit the attraction. In return, Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway made a financial contribution to the operation of the New Forest Tour and this is clearly a model which could work for other tourism businesses along the route.

Figure 1. New Forest Tour Performance 2006-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of passenger</td>
<td>9015</td>
<td>9879</td>
<td>14103</td>
<td>15623</td>
<td>17600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating days</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of public subsidy</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue from</td>
<td>£36118</td>
<td>£40582</td>
<td>£53845</td>
<td>£57199</td>
<td>£66181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ticket sales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average revenue from</td>
<td>£361.18</td>
<td>£405.82</td>
<td>£538.45</td>
<td>£665.10</td>
<td>£769.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ticket sales per day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidy per passenger</td>
<td>£3.32</td>
<td>£3.04</td>
<td>£2.13</td>
<td>£1.92</td>
<td>£1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority subsidy per</td>
<td>£1.66</td>
<td>£1.52</td>
<td>£1.06</td>
<td>96p</td>
<td>85p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passenger journey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 2010 Season Marketing

4.1 The Authority led on the development of a product marketing plan and action plan to ensure a joined up and consistent approach to marketing.

4.2 Marketing highlights for 2010 included:

- High profile coverage in a range of local and national media, including Radio Solent and the Independent on Sunday
- the production of the New Forest Tour Official Guide, which was offered to customers as they boarded the bus and included 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;
The option for customers to purchase New Forest Tour tickets on linking bus services from Southampton, Hythe and Bournemouth. Effectively providing free bus travel from surrounding conurbations to the New Forest.

5 Proposals for 2011

5.1 For 2011, a second New Forest Tour route is likely to be introduced as a six week pilot during the school summer holidays, operating between 23 July and 4 September. This is in response to the continued growth of the current route and feedback from existing customers on the current route, and tourism businesses in the north and west of the Forest.

5.2 Communities which will be served by this second route include Burley, Ringwood, Fordingbridge, Ashurst and Lyndhurst. Attractions along the route include Sandy Balls, New Forest Water Park, Ringwood Brewery and Liberty’s Owl and Reptile Centre.

5.3 The route will be served by sister buses to those operating the current New Forest Tour, which already form part of the Wilts and Dorset fleet. New Forest Tour branding will be applied to these buses for the pilot period.

5.4 The second route will be operated commercially by Go South Coast, with an element of the risk or profit being shared with other partners. The operation of the second route will sit outside of the contract for the operation of the current route.

5.5 Promotion of the second route will be built into the 2011 New Forest Tour marketing campaign; in particular, the New Forest Tourism Association business members will be encouraged to have an active role in ensuring the success of this pilot.

5.6 The second route will complement the existing New Forest Tour operation, which will remain unchanged in terms of route, frequency, timetable etc. Joint ticketing options for both Tours, and other attractions, are actively being explored for 2011.

5.7 New options for raising the funding subsidy for the existing route are being explored. These include income generation opportunities arising from advertising and sponsorship.

Recommendation

For Members to note the content of this report.