

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**PUBLIC MEETING****PUTTING WINCHESTER ON THE MAP**
CREATING A HIGHER GLOBAL PROFILE**21 June 2006****Chairman's Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 60 members of the public, representatives of local groups and Councillors. He explained that the purpose of the evening was to see Winchester through the eyes of a visitor to the town and to think about how the town could be better marketed to tourists from overseas.

Presentation by Eloise Appleby
Head of Cultural Services, Winchester City Council

Mrs Appleby referred the Forum to a fact-sheet that had been circulated at the meeting and is attached as an appendix to these minutes. The fact-sheet included an updated economic impact assessment which was carried out periodically on behalf of the City Council by Tourism South East.

In the course of her presentation, Mrs Appleby explained that the City Council supported tourism as it contributed £222 million to local businesses. She stated that the City Council's Tourist Information Centre had won the gold medal at the recent Enjoy England Awards for Excellence. However, despite many proactive initiatives to market the city, the number of overseas visitors to Winchester was in decline - making up 9% of the total number of tourist trips to Winchester and a total spend of just £15.6 million. The number of overnight stays by foreign visitors in Winchester had declined by 27% in the last six years from 55,000 overnight stays in 2000 to just 40,000 in 2006.

The majority of tourists to Winchester have always been from the UK. In this respect, Winchester was no different to other UK tourism destinations, where around 5 in every 6 staying visitors were from the UK rather than from overseas. Many of these come because of weddings or other family celebrations for local residents and these were often as important to local hotels as national business conferences. Mrs Appleby explained that the UK visitors were loyal and increasing in number. They were not deterred by events such as the Foot and Mouth epidemic or the UK's war on terror.

However, ignoring the overseas visitor would mean that Winchester could lose out on a potentially lucrative market as overseas visitors spend an average of £390 per trip compared with average spend of £30 per visit from a UK day visitor. Therefore the City Council was actively marketing Winchester as a destination for visitors from overseas. This work is set out in the official tourism strategy for the Winchester District and can be viewed online at:
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/documentlibrary.asp?id=846>

Mrs Appleby highlighted the first objective of this strategy which said that Winchester City Council, working with its many partners and stakeholders, aims to:

"improve the recognition of Winchester as a dynamic and creative destination in its key markets".

She added that the Strategy was measured against key indicators. One of these sought to halt the decline in overnight stays by 2006 and see a 5% increase in bed-nights over 2003 figures by the end of 2008.

Research had shown that most visitors to Winchester were very happy with what they found on arrival. The most recent visitor survey had found that in terms of overall enjoyment, 92% of visitors to Winchester rated their trip as high or very high and 94% of visitors felt the likelihood of them recommending the town to somebody else was high or very high.

Mrs Appleby went on to describe how Winchester was marketed as a destination through two initiatives to support its tourism business. One was Conference Winchester, which had become a real success, handling business bookings worth several hundred thousand pounds to the Winchester District each year. The other was Southern English Cities, a consortium of destinations in the South East keen to reach new overseas markets.

Southern English Cities crossed regional tourist board boundaries and had worked directly with commercial operators such as Brittany Ferries and Ramada Jarvis Hotels. It consists of seven destinations from Salisbury across to Canterbury, with compatible products and marketing objectives. The scheme maximised the modest budgets and very limited staff resources available. The consortium members invest just £6,500 per annum in a joint fund, enlarged by commercial contributions in cash or in kind, and work in carefully identified markets where they encourage multi-centre itineraries for incoming visitors with themes such as food, shopping, gardens and great cathedrals. Currently these were concentrated on the USA, France and Germany. For more information about Southern English Cities, visit: <http://www.southernenglishcities.com>

However, she stated that the biggest single difference for Winchester's tourism marketing aspirations was the power of the internet. It was now possible to reach out to markets worldwide through the website and through emailed campaigns in a way that was prohibitive in cost terms 10 years ago. The Council's tourism website, www.visitwinchester.gov.uk had become increasingly sophisticated and, although it was not currently multi-lingual, she suggested that an attractive and data-clever English language website was still a huge step towards reaching an increasingly English-language-speaking world. The website was set to become a demonstrator website for the South East region.

Mrs Appleby added that, because marketing logic dictated that resources should be invested where they were likely to yield the best returns, it had not made sense traditionally for a local authority like Winchester to participate in expensive overseas campaigns. This had changed with the increased use of the web, but in the overseas market, Winchester still lost out to the better known destinations such as Stratford, Bath and Oxford. Even regular travellers to the UK felt obliged to work their way down the 'must see' list before they visit Winchester.

However, there was a potential to improve Winchester's marketability through its burgeoning creative industry with festivals such as the Hat Fair and a wealth of public art on the streets. It was on this basis that the City Council was planning a Year of Sculpture for 2007 which would culminate in an exhibition in the Great Hall of one of the world's top modern artists.

In addition to these initiatives, the City Council regularly worked with a host of partners to devise and run familiarisation trips for the press, tour operators

and film companies. These have included themed trips for international journalists and tour operators with VisitBritain (the overseas marketing agency for the UK); joint campaigns with Tourism South East (for example, based on last year's film release of *Pride and Prejudice*); air carriers (such as Ryan Air and Southampton International Airport). The release of four major films based in Winchester since last autumn (*The Da Vinci Code*, *Children of Men* and *The Golden Age and Van Wilder II: The Rise of Taj*) should raise Winchester's global profile and enjoy a new-found set-jetting appeal.

Presentation by Chris Melia, Director (Commercial), Tourism South East

Ms Melia gave a presentation which is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

During the course of this, the Forum noted that VFR was an abbreviation for "visiting friends and relatives."

Presentation by Françoise Amet Consultant in Marketing and Communications, France

Ms Amet gave a presentation on the French perspective of tourism in Winchester and her presentation is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Presentation by Julian Tomlin, General Manager of Lainston House Hotel

Mr Tomlin gave a presentation on how the hotel promoted itself and Winchester and his presentation is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

General Discussion

Following the presentations, the Chairman requested that the Forum divide into groups to identify and prioritise what they considered to be the main issues relating to the evening's discussion.

A summary of these are set out below:

- More should be done to work closely with tour operators based at Southampton's docks and airport, through for example, articles in Flybe's inflight magazine;
- Better promotion of local arts and Winchester's quirky nature;
- Improvements to signage in the town centre;
- More promotion of Winchester as an autumn/Christmas destination;
- Need to promote the town as a destination to the parents of students studying at Winchester;
- There should be slow, gentle transport links around the town, such as a horse drawn carriage;
- Better promotion of the Round Table;
- A role for Cittaslow?
- Not enough accommodation – there is a need for a campsite, youth hostel and a cheap, out of town French-style hotel;
- Euros should be more widely accepted, particularly by visitors' accommodation;
- The cathedral should be promoted along with other cathedrals of Europe;
- Better promotion of the South Downs Way, fishing on the Rivers Meon and Test and opening up large, private gardens;

- Promote Winchester as walking destination, riverside walks etc;
- Should be more accommodating to tourists visiting by car – perhaps free Park and Ride passes?
- More plaques on Winchester's buildings of interest.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, a representative of Winchester Cathedral thanked the Tourism Service at the City Council for their energetic and innovative work in promoting Winchester.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the debate and, in particular, thanked Françoise Amet who had travelled from France to address the Forum.

The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and concluded at 9.25pm

Chairman