



New Forest Tourism C-19 Recovery Plan

Phase 1: June – Dec 2020

Introduction

This tourism industry recovery plan has been shaped by input from Go New Forest's Little Acorns Marketing Group, individual GNF members and our main partner organisations; New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry England. Because of the nature of the situation it will evolve and develop as we move through this first phase and on into 2021.

As with all collective plans it will only be fully effective if everyone involved continues to contribute to its content, ongoing evolution and the delivery of the actions identified in it. The plan has been designed and will be delivered within the policy context of GNF's overall Business Plan (2020 – 24) and be subject to review and refreshment at regular stages throughout its life.

Timetable for Recovery

Some travel restrictions were relaxed in mid-May and the associated visitor issues following this easement became apparent very quickly, particularly throughout the Crown Lands. With no tourism businesses open, the critical visitor management role of services normally provided by the hospitality sector has been brought into sharp focus. The industry's ability to absorb large numbers of visitors within their grounds and buildings and the vital provision of additional toilet and car parking facilities has never been more noticeable.

This normally unseen role, along with its better understood function as a provider of jobs, revenue and a big additional customer base for non-tourism businesses and local supply chains, has dramatically demonstrated tourism's central importance to the area's wider visitor management and wellbeing as well as its economy. For this reason, decision makers have an even greater reason to work towards the sector being re-opened as quickly as possible.

We are hopeful that the 4th July date proposed by the Prime Minister as the earliest opportunity to re-open may now even be brought forward, as long as Covid-19 Security can be proven by each individual business concerned. It seems inequitable and nonsensical for non-essential retail to be able to re-open from 15 June, when tourism businesses such as Holiday Parks & Campsites, Self-Catering properties and certain Visitor Attractions have to remain closed until 4th July. Quite why it is safer to enter a shop rather than enjoy the grounds of outdoor Attractions, Historic Sites and Gardens is difficult to comprehend.

In the meantime, whatever the outcome of that particular debate, there is a lot we can do to prepare for re-opening now we have a target date to aim at. We will continue to build on the virtual delivery of destination and individual business offerings by distributing photographic & video imagery and adopting key message content targeted at existing and potential consumers identified in our existing 2020 destination marketing plan.

A GNF Member's Handbook has been designed to partner the Recovery Plan and details "how to" information and ideas to help businesses develop their operational and promotional output in readiness for reopening. This output will give member businesses a direct opportunity to help deliver the recovery plan through the actions identified under each of its four main sections.

IMMEDIATE ACTIVITY

Aim: *To maintain and enhance the market profile and allure of the New Forest as a day visitor and holiday destination in advance of re-opening. Provide customer confidence by communicating our member businesses' adherence to Government Covid-Secure guidelines for the safe re-opening of the New Forest tourism industry.*

We know that during lockdown consumers have used social media and other online features far more than previously. Potential visitors are looking forward to returning to enjoy day and overnight visits. They have developed a pent-up desire to get away on a break from home as soon as restrictions allow and are creating their own wish lists to do so.

We need to make sure the New Forest and its visitor offer are on those wish lists by communicating not only that the New Forest is a wonderful and uniquely magical place, but is also a safe, responsible, and welcoming destination. And most particularly, that it is a place with a unique cultural heritage full of wide open spaces, which lends itself perfectly to natural social distancing.

We will continue to work with our partner organisations to provide a New Forest Covid- Secure Charter for our member businesses to use. All business messages should refer where appropriate to social distancing and responsible behaviour, particularly in the forest itself which is now open for day visits. It is crucial for the protection of our cultural heritage and wildlife such as ground nesting birds and ponies with new born foals, that businesses give the existing New Forest Code a very high profile (see Members Handbook).

1. Destination Website

Give potential customers a virtual visit to the New Forest, so they can dream of future holidays and visits by virtually experiencing all the great things that makes this place so special.

GNF Action:

1.1 Continue to re-engineer the destination website with C-19 related content particularly on all relevant landing and product pages. (Done & ongoing)

1.2 Use social media to promote this new content including uploading and distributing business and consumer video and web cam content. (Done & ongoing)

1.3 Refresh old content and publish new C-19 related Blog and YouTube content. (Done & ongoing)

1.4 Produce and promote a 30 second destination 're-opening video' by changing the storyline and re-editing last year's successful Escape is Closer than you Think video (June).

Member Action: (More detail in Members Handbook)

1.5 Improve old content and find new ways of telling your own business story. (Now)

1.6 Learn new skills, improve and practise new processes and create new partnerships. (Now)

1.7 Focus on building your email lists. (Now)

1.8 Work on a new piece of “big content” for your re-opening – be big, be bold. (Now)

2. Social Distancing Visitor Management Plan

It will be essential to have a destination wide social distancing and visitor management plan in place before the New Forest is able to welcome back visitors when tourism travel restrictions are adjusted or lifted altogether. This plan will need to accommodate Government guidance and also take account of the destination’s rather unique landscape, cultural heritage and physical layout.

The plan will have to identify how the wider New Forest destination area’s infrastructure can be best managed to provide safe socially distanced visitor access to its honeypot locations, car parks, visitor businesses and shopping areas whilst also providing for effective vehicle and visitor flows.

Initial discussions have taken place between GNF, NFNPA and Forestry England who will also work with NFDC and HCC as the Highway Authority to create a basic operational framework for the wider Visitor Management Plan. Just as with all aspects of Covid-19 recovery, timing is difficult until the Government’s detailed timetable is confirmed. Until then, whilst we will work towards 4th July, it will be important to have the Social Distancing Visitor Management Plan agreed and ready to operate as soon as possible.

GNF Action:

2.1 Draft the initial framework of a destination-wide social distancing Visitor Management Plan in partnership with NFNPA, NFDC, HCC and Forestry England (Early June)

Member Action:

2.2 Input to the draft social distancing Visitor Management Plan (June)

3. Local Residents First

Before we start targeting our larger audience which lives at least 30 minutes journey time away, it will be critical to win the hearts and minds of our local residents in supporting the re-opening of local tourism. Major aspects will be the destination-wide social distancing plan and demonstrating our businesses are Covid-Secure. But it will also be important to emphasise the local services the sector provides for the benefit of residents and the large local supply chain we support and the local jobs we create.

Our initial promotional programme will therefore continue to target New Forest, Southampton, Portsmouth, Bournemouth and Salisbury residents for this first stage leading up to re-opening by building on the success of GNF’s weekly Local Services Enewsletter circulated every Thursday which now has a database of over 16,000 subscribers.

GNF Action:

3.1 Continue to publish a weekly Local Services Enewsletter and incorporate its content into the new web pages covering take-away and deliveries, online shopping, virtual events and promote on all destination social media platforms. (Done & ongoing)

3.2 Create and deliver a local residents campaign to elicit the support of the local population for the re-opening of our visitor economy including the need to provide a warm welcome to visitors when travel restrictions are lifted. (early June).

3.3 Create a webpage for Activities Now Open so that as and when businesses are able to open, even in part, day visitors are able to identify and visit. (Done & ongoing)

Member Action:

3.4 If and when open, provide GNF with innovative content for all relevant web pages, blogs, PR and social media activity (Now)

3.5 Adopt the principles of the local residents campaign and help deliver its various actions in your local area, particularly in providing a warm welcome to visitors when travel restrictions are lifted (early June)

3.6 Adopt the New Forest Covid-Secure Charter and the existing New Forest Code and promote key messages in all relevant content (June)

4. All Consumers

We will deliver a programme of activity that builds on our existing rural “Escape” theme using beautiful imagery and video content which will be presented on all destination digital platforms and PR to lift consumer spirits and stimulate future visits. We will target the audiences identified in the current 2020 Destination Marketing Plan.

Relevant imagery will be town/village, countryside, coastline, people and animals. This last group of subjects will include both forest wildlife and our Attraction based animals, what they’re up to and how they’re being cared for during lockdown.

GNF Members have been telling their own stories of lockdown, what they enjoy and how they’ve adapted. Residents and social media followers are also being asked to send in their own relevant lockdown stories and questions; what does a deserted honeypot village look like? We will run a fond memories/looking forward to returning campaign via our monthly destination newsletter where consumers post their favourite forest experience photographic and video memories.

GNF Action:

4.1 Continue posting Daily Polls, Games, Quizzes using forest based content or subjects all posted on the destination’s social media platforms. (Done & ongoing)

4.2 Continue social media programmes to ask engaging questions such as “What are you looking forward to most when you can visit the New Forest again?” (Done & ongoing)

4.3 Continue to add live webcam content from member businesses to relevant destination website pages (Done & ongoing)

4.4 Live Webcam Q&A on Commoners Smallholding to promote the New Forest Code (June)

Member Action:

4.5 Access to exclusive waiting lists to maximise the “missing you” element. (Now)

4.6 Premium product and service development to cover social distancing issues. (Now)

4.7 Social media programme to ask engaging questions such as “What are you looking forward to most when you can visit the New Forest again?” (Now)

4.8 Live webcams on site to provide live links to destination and member’s websites (Now)

ADVANCE REVENUE

Aim: *To help member businesses remain operational prior to re-opening and stimulate innovation, ideas and campaigns to generate immediate income for individual member businesses through gift vouchers and crowdfunding campaigns.*

We continue to promote member activities to support their finances by helping to bring in advance revenue to keep businesses afloat and the destination’s offer uppermost in consumer minds. It’s important that promotional activity does not discount but instead focusses on added or unique extra value and responsible support. Activities should demonstrate a warm and safe welcome awaits when guests are eventually able to take up the offer opportunity.

GNF Action:

5.1 Continue to add GNF Member businesses to the Crowdfunder page on the destination website and include any other campaigns businesses may be running to keep afloat. (Done & ongoing)

Member Action:

5.2 Individual and itinerary based online gift voucher promotion, to link to or be separate from Giftpro (Now)

5.3 Develop your own Crowdfunder campaign to raise advance income and which might be match funded by Solent LEP. Inform GNF of any other campaigns you are running to raise income. (Now)

RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Aim: *To deliver a minimum three seasonal programmes of activity for the promotion of the New Forest’s visitor economy, targeting agreed audiences and in accordance with Government guidelines.*

The GNF business and membership model is built around common purpose, mutuality, strength in numbers, working together and taking collective action to reach further and more completely into the consumer marketplace. All these principles will be central features in this Recovery Plan but it will require co-ordinated delivery by all GNF members and partner organisations to maximise impact and conversion rates. For Members, it will be critical to promote and repeat the key messages of each of the three seasonal programmes below and embed them into their own immediate business and communications plans.

Government guidelines are yet to be confirmed and the sequence of re-opening the whole visitor economy is still unclear. The order in which tourism’s different business sectors are able to re-open will have a big impact on the whole plan and particularly it’s communication to consumers.

However, whatever the format or configuration, we should plan for all promotional activity to be delivered virtually, socially distanced and with variations of the two for some time to come.

During the re-opening period, consumers will be drawn to destinations which are able to demonstrate responsible and caring policies, especially if they are delivered as components of great visitor experiences. In 2007, the New Forest won the World Responsible Tourism Awards, so GNF will be refreshing and relaunching the New Forest "Green Leaf" business scheme which won this major international accolade and embed it into this plan.

Similarly, consumers are now more likely to be conversant with the real truth about OTAs following the way they were treated during the cancellation processes at the outset of the crisis. GNF are currently refreshing the Book Direct New Forest scheme. Leading up to re-opening, efforts will be made to persuade every GNF accommodation provider to join the newly refreshed book direct campaign.

The Communications Plan for Phase 1 of the Recovery Plan will cover the next three seasonal periods:

6. Summer

A programme driven by the existing 2020 destination content plan promoting businesses that have adopted the New Forest Covid-Secure Charter. Alongside this, a New Forest wide social distancing plan constructed by GNF/NFNPA/NFDC & Forestry England for car parks and popular locations will help reduce both resident and consumer concerns and aid the safe and co-ordinated re-opening of the forest.

GNF Action:

6.1 Relaunch the Book Direct the New Forest Scheme by refreshing material from consumer learning on OTA policies during the initial stages of the C-19 crisis and circulate for every GNF accommodation member to sign up. (Early June)

6.2 Relaunch the New Forest Green Leaf Scheme (Version 3 currently being business tested)

6.3 Complete the new Persona/Itinerary target audience profiling tool to support delivery of the Content Plan. (June)

6.4 Develop a clear and simple programme of promotion for each of the Accommodation, Attractions and Food & Drink segments and include businesses which are open in each segment at any point in time during the re-opening period.

Member Action:

6.5 Produce new socially distanced operational plans for all aspects of business including staff training and health & safety programmes in readiness for recovery. (Now)

6.6 Create maximum awareness of the destination's key Recovery Communication Plan messages by embedding those messages in play at each moment in time in their own marketing and communications plan. (Now)

7. Autumn

Continue to improve the "safe to visit" operations of our business sectors and promote the unique attraction of autumn colours and harvest time by maximising the NPA's October Half Term Walking Festival and GNF's November Food & Drink Festival Fortnight, linking them to individual business offerings which are operating safely within the New Forest Covid-Secure Charter.

GNF Action:

7.1 Refresh and re-work the 2020 New Forest Food & Drink Strategy for Covid-Secure delivery and embed as the framework to deliver the New Forest Food & Drink Festival Fortnight in November (June)

Member Action:

7.2 Produce individual Food & Drink Festival Fortnight menus, activities and promotional material for inclusion in GNF media promotion (Early June)

8. Winter

Christmas, New Year and the rest of Winter will be extremely critical periods to build on learning from sections **6 Summer & 7 Autumn**, to maximise business opportunity and aim to recover previous lost income.

GNF Action:

8.1

Member Action:

8.2

BIG NEW IDEAS

Aim: To develop any big picture ideas that don't fit into any of the above.

Create a range of virtual New Forest experiences especially a series of subject based (Food & drink, history, wellbeing, cycling, walking and nature etc) treasure hunts with linked itineraries and maps.

GNF Action:

9.1

Member Action:

9.2

28/05/20