

FOCUS ON TOURISM NETWORKING MEETING

JULY 2008

REPORT COMPILED BY BETH WHITTAKER



Left: The newly enlarged Beechenhurst Visitors' Centre. **Middle:** walking all over the Dean – the UK's first physical Geomap. **Right:** Braving the heat to listen and learn from fellow Market Towns

Tourism and ways in which to encourage more visitors to member towns was the focus of the GMTF Networking Event held in the Forest of Dean on July 3rd 2009.

The **Chairman of Forest of Dean District Council**, Councillor Mairilyn Smart welcomed visitors and said the Forum was crucial in helping the district's four market towns develop and prosper. *Read more? [Click here.](#)*

Chris Dee, Tourism Manager for Gloucestershire, passed on his **top tips for Market Towns keen to increase visitors**, and visitor spend, in their communities and explained how he and his small team worked for the benefit of the county. *Read more? [Click here.](#)*

The headline results of a questionnaire looking at the **impact of the recession on visitor numbers and spend** in our member towns were revealed. *Read more? [Click here.](#) Note: the full report will shortly be available on our website.*

Visitors were given the chance to discovery more about the fascinating **history of the Forest of Dean** – both below and above ground – with visits to the UK's first ever physical [GeoMap](#), the ancient [Speech House](#) and the newly extended [Beechenhurst Visitors' Centre](#). *Click on the links for brief reports and more information.*

Representatives of member towns shared their experiences and ideas at the ever-popular **Information Exchange** which ranged from reports of how Forum funding and the new 15-hours expert support is making a difference to member towns, to how Coleford's Christmas Lights hit the headlines in the USA! *Read more? [Click here](#)*

To see who **attended** the AGM Networking meeting click [here](#)

With grateful thanks to...

To find out **more about GMTF** visit www.town2town.org.uk.



Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum
Networking meeting report July 2009
www.town2town.org.uk

Marilyn Smart

Chairman of Forest of Dean District Council
Speech made at the GMTF Networking Meeting July 2009

"It is both an honour and a real pleasure to welcome you to the Forest of Dean for this meeting of Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum. I hope that on your journey here you have been able to see something of the Forest of Dean and perhaps you can understand why we are so proud of our very special landscapes and heritage.

"We are also fiercely proud of our four market towns of Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney and Newent. They are each very special in their individual ways and are perhaps the barometers for the prosperity and well being of our community. They are also import anchors for the many smaller rural communities that surround them.

"The four towns are an important part of what's special about the Forest of Dean so we must cherish them and do everything we can to ensure they survive and prosper.

"Your forum is crucial to this and over the last ten years you have grown into a strong, independent, community-led support group to help people and communities to take action to help themselves. Because you work at very much a grass roots level you are close to the towns you serve and ideally placed to find locally based solutions to the challenges faced by all market towns.

"Partnership working is very much a buzz word these days but the Forum has proved to be masterly at establishing and, more importantly, maintaining and building upon key relationships with organisations such as local authorities and the regional development agency.

"You have developed an effective voice which demonstrates how much can be achieved by collective effort and collaboration.

"The future will hold many new challenges for our market towns. They make an important contribution to our way of life and are a source of strength to our communities.

"Due to the efforts of the Forum I know our market towns will be able to face the future with more confidence and hope. For that I thank each and every one of you."



Chris Dee **Tourism Manager, Gloucestershire First**

Chris heads a team of three people at Gloucestershire First, based at Chargrove House, in Shurdington - contact 01242 864172, chris.dee@glosfirst.co.uk.

They support the tourism website www.cotswolds.com and, through Forest of Dean District Council, www.visitforestofdean.co.uk, they host around 200 annual visits from international travel and food writers to gain essential media coverage across the world, support tourism businesses with advice and information and offer advice and royalty-free photographs to communities for tourism-related activities.

They have an operational budget of £38,000 but this is boosted to around £250,000-£300,000 through commercial activity.

Results of recent national attitudinal research into people's awareness of Gloucestershire are included in a Powerpoint presentation on the GMTF website at www.town2town.org.uk .

Chris' Top Tips for Towns to attract Tourists:

- Keep the county tourism team in touch with what's going on in your town; events which might particularly appeal to visitors as being 'typically British', new local food outlets, quirky local history and customs, interesting characters and traditions
- Read about how Tetbury developed its own successful tourism strategy – visit the Forum website www.town2town.org.uk, click on Case Studies, then the Developing a Tourism Strategy case study
- Take off your rose tinted spectacles! Look at your town as a stranger would, do a survey of visitors and ask what they think
- Have a plan – it can take between three and five years to raise awareness in your target markets
- Do an audit – on the street & on the web – what your town offers visitors, what it could offer; how your town is referred to in published guide books on on existing travel websites. Send information to publishers to update them if necessary, or supply better photographs
- Get the local population behind you: public and business. Face to face consultation is best
- “Give me one good reason” – think about your most important aspect of your town for visitors - what you want to promote and what would appeal most; identify a 'unique selling proposition' – why should someone come to your town rather than another?
- Tourism and retail = the same thing these days; bring in tourists and encourage them to stay and spend in your town
- Get some good, high quality pictures for your website and marketing materials – contact chris.dee@glosfirst.co.uk to find out if royalty-free photos already exist which you could use.
- Identify local 'heroes' – especially those who are linguists (especially Chinese, Japanese, Russian) and could act as guides, interpreters or meet visiting overseas travel writers – let the tourism team know too
- Don't rush to do a brochure – high quality production costs, the need for regular updating and effective and sustained distribution are all very challenging issues

Continued...



Chris' Top Tips for Towns to attract Tourists - continued:

- Twitter & social networking: find or pay for a web expert to advise you on how this could work for your town. Twitter is an interesting way to give your town some extra personality. Facebook and YouTube empower you to place short homemade movies.
- Food – celebrate local food especially delicacies, recipes or customs associated with your town; develop a dish linked to your town's heritage – again, let the county tourism team know! It's a really powerful motivation for a visit (eg Nailsworth)
- Celebrate your local history – local historians can throw up all sorts of ideas – but keep information simple and interesting for the non specialist visitor.
- Understand and use the local tourism support set up:
- Which campaigns are running?
- Which markets are being targeted?
- Review local accommodation and dining – what's best in your town? Could it be improved. Promote only inspected accommodation
- Stay close to the Market Towns Forum



Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum Tourism Research: headlines

July 2nd 2009

**A full report is to be published soon
and will be available on www.town2town.org.uk**

*Contact was made with all **16 Forum member communities** via Town Councils and Visitor Information Centres, between June 15th and June 30th 2009. In addition, **28 visitor attractions** throughout Gloucestershire were contacted to gauge whether the recession is having an impact on their visitor numbers. A full report of the findings of this research is being produced. In the meantime, these are the headlines:*

- Of the 28 visitor attractions responding to the survey, 16 have reported **increases in visitor numbers since Easter 2008**, while four say numbers have remained constant. Five have seen their numbers fall. (*Note: the remaining three have free entry and did not give visitor numbers*)
- Half of those 16 reporting increased visitor numbers believe the recession or exchange rates are responsible or partly responsible. Most of those believe their increased visitor numbers are because **more British people are choosing to take holidays or trips in the UK**
- Of the five reporting a fall in visitor numbers, two blame or partly blame the recession
- Eight attractions reported a rise in visitor spending and seven reported a fall. Of these seven, five saw a fall in spending while visitor numbers increased or remained constant.
- Of the 16 member market towns, six have **Visitor/Tourist Information Centres**. Two others are due to close in September 09, and another two based in council branch offices have just closed. Six towns continue to offer alternative tourist information provision, eg via town council offices, noticeboards etc.

CASE STUDIES *More examples will be in the final full report*

Chipping Campden Information Centre has been self-funding for around 20 years. It was established by a small group of volunteers who recognised the town's uniqueness and its special position at the start/end of the Cotswold Way. The centre operates under the umbrella of Cotswold Edge Enterprises Ltd, a not-for-profit company.

After relying on whatever space could be found, CCIC eventually found a permanent home in the Old Police Station – a prominent position in the centre of Chipping Campden High Street. Since then the centre has acquired a high reputation for service - it has scored well in 'Mystery Shopper' surveys, ranking it among the highest in the country.

Nailsworth TIC prefers to call itself a town, rather than tourist, information centre; it sees its role as providing information for local people as well as visitors. The centre sells maps and locally-produced postcards, but does not sell goods that might take business away from town retailers. It also sells green garden sacks on behalf of the council, and keeps passport application forms. Bus timetables are a popular request, as well as guides for walks, tours of local mills and other local attractions. And its window is used regularly by local groups to promote community activities.

The centre was set up in 2002 with funding from Nailsworth Town Council. It is staffed by an enthusiastic team of volunteers. "Certainly we get a lot of comments about the helpfulness of our staff, and their willingness to go that extra mile," said a spokeswoman.

Over...



Tourist information provision for the 16 member Market Towns

Member community	Tourist/Visitor Information Centre?	Alternative information provision?	Tourism website?
Chipping Campden	Yes		Own website
Churchdown	No	Yes - limited	Part of parish council website
Cinderford	No	Just closed	Part of general Forest website
Cirencester	Yes		Part of Cotswold DC website
Coleford	Yes – due to close Sept 09		Part of general Forest website
Fairford	No	Yes - limited	Part of town council website
Lechlade	No	Yes - limited	Part of town council website
Nailsworth	Yes		Part of town council website
Newent	No	Just closed	Part of general Forest website
Northleach	No	Yes – limited (noticeboard)	Part of town council website
Stonehouse	No	Yes - limited	Limited local info on town council website
Stow-on-the-Wold	Yes, but lost funding – being run by volunteers until Sept09		No – VIC was on town council website, but no longer
Tetbury	Yes		Own website
Tewkesbury	Yes		Part of Cotswolds & Severn Vale website
Winchcombe	Yes		Part of Cotswolds & Severn Vale website
Wotton-under-Edge	No	Yes – information point	Part of town council website

Research undertaken by Viva Communications Limited, www.viva-communications.co.uk
on behalf of Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE MARKET TOWNS FORUM NETWORKING EVENT JULY 2 2009 ATTENDANCE

Ashton Lyn	Memento Gifts, Newent
Atherley David	Coleford Town Council
Berry Dave	Forest of Dean Local History Society
Berry Liz	Forest of Dean Local History Society
Cornwall Barbara	Tewkesbury Town Council
Cox Marilyn	GRCC and Coleford Area Partnership
Dee Chris	County Tourism Officer
Edwards Claire	Gloucestershire First
Ellis John	GMTF Board, Chipping Campden Town Council
Goodall Carol	Chair Somerset MTF and Ilminster Forum
Hale Terry	County Councillor for Coleford
Harwood Martin	GMTF Board, Fairford Town Council
Hasler Sue	Stow on the Wold Future Visitor Centre
Hasler Walter	Stow on the Wold Future Visitor Centre
Hincks Jenny	GMTF Board, Cirencester Town Council
Hirst Stephen	Tetbury Town Council
Hughes Janet	Forester Newspaper
Judges Daniel	Gloucestershire First
Marrott Janet	GMTF Board, Coleford Area Partnership
Morton Phil	Forestry Commission
Pavey Chuck (Malcolm)	GMTF Board, Tewkesbury Town Council
Ralph Pete	Forest Tour Guides
Smart Councillor Marilyn	Chairman FODDC
Stokes Pearl	GMTF Board, Churchdown Parish Council
Sykes Glenys	Wotton under Edge Town Clerk
Turner Chris	Stow on the Wold Town Council
Vaughan Dawn	Coleford Area Partnership
Watters Bob (IN THE CHAIR)	Vice Chair GMTF, Lydney AiP
Whittaker Beth	Viva Communications, Stroud
Whittaker Martin	Viva Communications, Stroud
Yemm Derek	Forest Connections



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Information Exchange

Forum Vice Chairman Bob Watters opened the Information Exchange by flagging up the fact that tourism brings in a massive £110m to the Forest of Dean – and even more work on interpretation and heritage will be undertaken in future thanks to European funding.

However, the big challenge was to get day visitors to **stay** in the area, and spend money in the local towns. The key lies in improving the district's 'offer' to visitors – and a new tourism manager at the district council will play a role in that.

Click on the links below to find out more about topics discussed during the information exchange:

- [GMTF Development Fund](#)
- [15 hours of expert advice](#)
- [New, rapid response email address for member towns](#)
- [Member towns training needs](#)
- [Unitary authorities](#)
- [Picture your town....](#)
- [Town Hall Teas](#)
- [Library's new home](#)
- [Community Enterprise Centre on track](#)
- [Recreation for all](#)
- [Our orchard heritage](#)
- [Book of walks](#)



GMTF Development Fund [Back to index](#)

- **Winchcombe** – funding supported a new minibus
- **Coleford** – funding supported buying new extra low watt Christmas light bulbs. Coleford's extraordinary festive displays involve 7,000 lightbulbs, and these have been steadily reducing from 60W to 40W and now down to 1.1W. 1,500 hours of volunteer time go into preparing the lights – and news of the splendid display has even reached the US with an article in the Union Jack newspaper.
- **Fairford and Lechlade** – funding supported the East Cotswolds Strategic Partnership of local towns and parishes worked to reopen an old railway line as a cycle track. **Lechlade** is applying for the new 15-hours expertise support to do a feasibility study into the track.
 - To find out more about how your town can benefit, visit www.town2town.org.uk

15 hours of expert advice [Back to index](#)

Churchdown has benefited from the new service for GMTF member communities – Pearl Stokes recommended all members to take advantage of the expertise available which 'helps turn a dream into reality' and costs nothing. Churchdown has been able to develop a formal proposal document for its ambitions park plans, which will be used to attract the funding needed for the transformation.

- To find out more about how your town can benefit, visit www.town2town.org.uk

New, rapid response email address for member towns [Back to index](#)

GMTF has launched a new email address for member towns to use to take advantage of the wealth of experience and knowledge among Forum Board members. Just send your questions to info@gmtf.org.uk and you will receive a response within two days.

Member towns training needs [Back to index](#)

GMTF will soon launch a questionnaire for member towns, asking what training they feel they may need to help regenerate their communities, and help build the capacity in their towns to make things happen. The questionnaire will also ask for ideas on timing and venues. Please respond so we can ensure we can provide what you need!

There is potential to combine training with other, neighbouring, market towns forums, through the Market & Coastal Town Network, sharing costs and venues.

Unitary authorities [Back to index](#)

Bob Watters has a particular interest in the development of unitary authorities and how community partnerships of the future can be developed to be most effective. The adoption of core standards across all partnerships would be a huge step forward. He will report back.

Picture your town.... [Back to index](#)

Chris Dee's encouragement for towns to build up a library of high quality photographs to use in promotional activities could be actioned through a photographic competition similar to the one organised as part of the We Love Wotton! event.

The success of the We Love Wotton! campaign held recently to celebrate what the town has to offer and encourage people to 'shop local' was reported by Glenys



Sykes. A photograph competition attracted 150 entries – the best are being used for a new town calendar.

Feedback from traders to the We Love Wotton! event has been excellent, with reports that visitors came back on other days because there was so much going on they didn't have time to visit all the shops! One couple even returned to buy a house after visiting on the day.

Town Hall Teas [Back to index](#)

Another way to promote your town hall is through Town Hall Teas. In Wotton, these have been happening for 15 years. Each Sunday, from April to October, the Town Hall opens its doors to local groups and charities who use the kitchen to prepare teas and cakes for sale, to raise up to £300 for their good causes. £11,000 is raised by the local organisations each year – and people who have never been in the town hall get to know it and come back. It also provides a social opportunity particularly for older residents – and creates a lively heart in an otherwise quiet town on a Sunday.

Library's new home [Back to index](#)

The library in Wotton has found a new temporary home in the Civic Centre. Glenys Sykes, the Town Clerk, was approached to find a suitable site to park a mobile library – which was not possible. However, the Town Council offered space within its building and, three months on, all is working well.

Community Enterprise Centre on track [Back to index](#)

Marilyn Cox gave an update on the new Coleford Community Enterprise Centre which is

- 1 On time
- 2 On budget
- 3 Attracting more positive interest from local people now they can see it is really happening

One negative was the discovery that scaffolding was being loosened, deliberately, overnight. Police are now investigating.

Recreation for all [Back to index](#)

John Ellis from Chipping Campden reported on the work to develop a recreation ground to meet the needs of all ages, and the challenges which have arisen. He suggested a future Forum meeting could share experiences from across member towns.

Our orchard heritage [Back to index](#)

Member towns were encouraged to think of ways in which their communities could celebrate their local orchard heritage. For more information visit:

<http://www.orchard-group.uklinux.net/glos/index.html>

<http://www.tasteandexplore.com/cider-perry-centre.shtml>

<http://www.hartpuryhistoric.org/pears.htm>

Book of walks [Back to index](#)

The latest in the series of Books of Walks developed by towns across the county is Lydney's. Laminated pages from the Book are being made into table mats for local pubs and cafes along the routes to encourage customers to take a walk!



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Forest of Dean Geomap

Guides: Liz and Dave Berry, Forest of Dean Local History Society



At the site of the former New Fancy Mine, a massive physical Geomap – thought to be the first in the country – has been created, using samples of the stone which lies beneath the district to make up the map. Overlaying this map are the towns and the former and present sites of mines and quarries – immediately illustrating why the communities were built in the first place and the source of their local economy.

The development of the Geomap was the result of a huge effort on behalf of a wide range of passionate individuals and organisations, working in true partnership in every sense of the word.

Those involved were:

- Forestry Commission
- Forest of Dean District Council - Funding Officer and Tourism Officer
- Forest of Dean Local History Society
- Gloucestershire Geological Society (Dave Owen)
- Coleford Area Partnership
- Forest of Dean District Councillor George Read (now sadly deceased)
- Etheridge Construction
- David Yeates, Sculptor
- plus others who were called upon for physical help on occasion.

To find out more, visit:

<http://79.170.40.163/forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/LHSnewsGeoMap.htm>



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The Speech House

Guide to the Verderers' Court in the Speech House: Peter Ralph, Green Badge Guide (thanks to the Speech House)



The Speech House Hotel in the Royal Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire was built in 1676 as a hunting lodge for Charles II (his arms can still be seen in the stonework above the exit door to the Verderers Court) – and the building is, in fact, still owned by the Queen!

It was soon recognised as the administrative centre of the Forest of Dean, and the largest room became the Verderers' Court. It became the place one went to talk or to make a Speech - hence the name "Speech House".

The office of the Verderer was instituted by King Canute in the early 11th century. There were four to each Royal Forest and their chief duty was the guarding of the 'vert' and the 'venison' (trees and deer) on behalf of the King.

The Verderers Court of Attachment is still held every 40 days at The Speech House. If there is no business to be dealt with the court is formally adjourned for another 40 days. In fact the court now sits on an average of four times a year when matters concerning the Forest of Dean are discussed.

The Verderers are still appointed by the Crown and are paid a doe and a buck a year (although none of the present Verderers have claimed their "salary" since taking office).

Few deer are now in the main area of the forest, so offences concerning venison are rare, and since 1924 such offences have been dealt with by the local magistrates court.

However, the Forest itself is very much still a working forest, producing around 60 tonnes of timber a year with about 40 per cent used to make paper pulp. Efforts are being made to ensure the Forest continues to be mainly hardwood

The Court Room is on the ground floor of the hotel, still with much of its original decoration.

For more information, visit <http://www.thespeechhouse.co.uk/history.asp>



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Beechenhurst Visitors' Centre

Host: Phil Morton, Forestry Commission



Beechenhurst before the new extension



.... And after

The Beechenhurst visitors centre, at the heart of the Forest of Dean, re-opened last October after undergoing a major makeover thanks to major investment by its owners the Forestry Commission, £200,000 from the Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance programme and a further £75,000 from Forest of Dean District Council.

Beechenhurst is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Gloucestershire with an estimated 250,000+ visits every year. It is expected that visitor numbers may double as the Dean's reputation as a visitor destination continues to grow.

It has come a long way in boosting the growth of the tourism industry in the area. From its humble beginnings as a log cabin serving ice creams, through to the installation of the Sculpture Trail, to its redevelopment.

Beechenhurst is the starting point for the famous Sculpture Trail and the new extension is the home of the Gavellers Cafe and Forest Connections, a shop area showcasing local products and the Forest of Dean area.

Charcoal BBQ hearths and a loft suitable for meetings and seminars can be hired from Forest Connections, please enquire on 01594 822612 or pop in for more details.

The Adventure Tower, 13m of crazy climbing and abseiling, can also be found on site. This opened in April 2009 and has 24 colour coded climbs and 2 abseils. Individuals can 'pay and play' at weekends and in the school holidays, advanced booking is required for groups. For more details contact Motiva on 01594 861762.

A special events area with a group gas BBQ is available for hire from the Forestry Commission on 01594 833057.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/Recreation.nsf/LUWebDocsByKey/EnglandGloucestershireNoForestForestOfDeanBeechenhurstLodge>



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www.town2town.org.uk

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With thanks to....

Hosting: Bob Watters, Chris Howell, Janet Marrott, Dawn Vaughan (CAP volunteer) did the registration. Martin Harwood. Thanks to Derek Yemm for room preparation and assistance and to Janet Marrott for the local food buffet..

Visits: Beechenhurst - Phil Morton, Forestry Commission; Verderers' Court - Peter Ralph, Green Badge Guide (thanks to the Speech House; The Geomap - Liz and Dave Berry, FODLHS.

Coach: Heritage Travel.

Welcome: Councillor Marilyn Smart, Chairman of the Forest of Dean District Council.

Speakers: Chris Dee, Cotswold and Forest of Dean Tourism. Martin Whittaker, Viva Communications.

