

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE**RUFFORD ABBEY COUNTRY PARK: 2016 VISITOR SATISFACTION SURVEY AND VAQS INSPECTION****Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform the Committee of the outcome of the 2016 annual visitor satisfaction survey at Rufford Abbey Country Park, and the biannual quality inspection by Visit England.

Information and Advice**Annual Visitor Survey 2016**

2. Each year a research survey is commissioned from an external marketing company, to measure visitor satisfaction at Rufford Abbey Country Park. The 2016 visitor survey took place in the August school summer holiday – traditionally the Park's busiest period. 337 parties of visitors were questioned (comprising 1,332 individuals) and their responses recorded on iPads.
3. This is a substantial sample, so results give a good reflection of visitor opinion. It should be remembered however that the Park's visitor profile varies from summer to winter so the views of older, more local visitors, tend to be under-represented in summertime surveys when tourists and young families abound.
4. This year's results showed an increase in the number of visitors seeking tourist information online. Asked where they looked before planning a visit, 13% did a Google search, and 11% used Trip Advisor. However, 15% still relied on printed guides. 77% knew the park from previous visits or had been recommended by word of mouth. 88% of those surveyed were repeat customers.
5. 20% of those questioned were over 65 years, and 16% of parties had someone with them who was disabled or mobility impaired. This reflects well on the Park's accessibility. A fairly flat site, mobility scooter hire, free wheelchair loan and a 'Changing Places' loo (adapted for the severely disabled) assist less mobile users.
6. Though Rufford has many attractions, the most cited reason for visiting was the simplest: 'Fresh air, exercise and walking' - 34% of those questioned. Taking children out was the next most cited reason for visiting – over a quarter of all respondents were doing this.
7. Visitors are asked to rate various aspects of their visit either *Very Poor, Poor, OK, Good* or *Very Good*.

8. This year, 67% of all who participated in the survey rated Rufford's shops *Good or Very Good*. At first sight this appears to be a drop in satisfaction from the last survey, taken in October 2015. However, a closer examination shows that more people this year had not used a shop – 28%, up from 19%. Visitors tend to shop indoors less when weather is hot. If non-purchasers are excluded, satisfaction with shops (by those who actually bought from them) is actually up – 96% of shop users rating them *Good or Very Good*.
9. Catering outlets had been visited by the majority - over 90% of all questioned. 85% of all Park visitors rated catering *Good or Very Good* – 2% up on last time. If non-purchasers are excluded, the rate improves further.
10. A key figure for performance measurement is how visitors summarise their *Satisfaction with overall visit*. It would be impossible to improve on last year's outcome (100% rated it *Good or Very Good*), but this year's 97% result was pleasing, given that this survey took place in the peak school holiday season, when niggles over 'queues and loos' easily develop.
11. Other pleasing results were that 81% thought toilets *Good or Very Good*, 100% felt 'Safe' or 'Very Safe' in the Park, and 86% believed the current car park fee 'Fair value' (though a hard-core 3% thought it 'Unreasonable').
12. Negatives expressed by customers were few overall, but 9% of those who commented on the subject disagreed with the Park's Dogs on Leads policy. This was sharply at odds with the 37% who supported it.
13. The difficulties of pulling out onto the busy A614 through the Park's main drive was criticised by some. Sadly, scope for removing that problem is limited. Major improvements to exit arrangements have been previously costed at over £1M.
14. A more frequent – and more easily achievable - suggestion for future improvement was renovations / upgrades to the Children's Play Areas.

Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme (VAQS) Inspection 2016

15. Visit England, the national tourist board, runs a quality scheme in which over 1,000 tourist attractions participate, and accreditation gives venues the right to display the English Rose logo.



16. Sites are scored by means of a 'mystery shopper' visit, whereby a paid external inspector tests all visitor facilities on site – eating in the restaurant, checking visitor welcome from

staff, assessing cleanliness of toilets etc. Seven areas are assessed and to gain the charter mark each must score over 60%.

17. This year Rufford was inspected on 1st September – a sunny day during the school summer break, so a busy day on site. A good ‘pass’ was achieved, with 80% overall score. The mystery shopper noted a 10% improvement on Rufford’s last score in 2014.
18. Particular areas of commendation included excellent TripAdvisor reviews, a strong following for the Rufford Abbey Facebook page, informative signage where work was being carried out in the Park, and a particularly warm customer welcome from commercial staff at Rufford Mill.

Other Options Considered

19. Detailed measurement of quality is expected of large public visitor attractions, but is not cost free. The total cost of the above two quality measures is around £6,000 per annum.
20. The Country Parks Service chooses to undergo external inspections and to commission visitor surveys in order to assess the quality of the visitor offer and to maintain high standards. This assists with the Council’s performance management.
21. Surveys and inspection feedback also give valuable information on the habits, preferences and customer profile of people using the Park, which assists revenue generation.
22. Survey and inspection data provides a useful benchmark of quality standards. Given that a commercial tender has recently been let at Rufford Abbey Country Park, baseline data will be particularly useful this year to help with future monitoring of the contract.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

23. To bring to the attention of the Committee the success of Nottinghamshire’s busiest country park site in meeting visitors’ expectations as at summer 2016.

Statutory and Policy Implications

24. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the outcome of the 2016 annual visitor satisfaction survey at Rufford Abbey Country Park and the 2016 VAQS inspection be noted.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Linda Hardy
Visitor Services Manager
T: 01623 821328
E: linda.hardy@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

25. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (TMR 13/12/16)

26. The cost of these measures was contained within existing budgets.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Survey of Visitors August 2016 – Rufford Abbey Country Park.
Inspection report: Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme (Visit England)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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