



Watlington

Project Case Study



Supported By



From November 2006 the England Rural Development Programme has been implemented by SEEDA. Hidden Britain is a programme managed under the existing scheme and supported by Defra, Tourism South East, and SERCC. The project works to ensure social and economic growth in rural communities across the South East through small tourism initiatives. www.seeda.co.uk



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TOURISM SOUTH EAST

Tourism South East is the regional body dedicated to fostering tourism growth and innovation in the region; a partnership of industry with regional and local government.

www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com



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Project Report	4	This report is intended to describe the process used and results delivered by an individual Hidden Britain project. It covers all the major elements of the project so it can be used as a case-study for other communities. In order to make this as useful as possible it is presented in an objective light with attention paid to the failings as well as the successes.
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Overview of project

This project planned to implement the development of a rural tourism product in the Watlington area, with the main aim of promoting and sustaining local businesses by taking advantage of the high number of walkers and other leisure visitors arriving in the Chilterns area. The project aimed to develop a wider collaboration between the communities, businesses and the Chilterns brand and identity. By doing so Watlington and its parishes become part of something larger and stand to increase the benefit derived from tourism to the area by attracting sustainable numbers of visitors and ensuring longer stays by increasing awareness of what the area has to offer.



Need for the project

Watlington has a good variety of local businesses appealing to mainstream and niche markets; there is also a fair amount of accommodation and attractions in the



immediate area. What has been widely recognised is the need for a joined up effort to promote and publicise the strengths the town and its surroundings offer, and to take advantage of the large number of visitors to the Chilterns to ensure the communities benefit from the visitor spend. Watlington is situated in a very rural area and has a main road which goes through the town centre which is one of the main routes in the surrounding area. Due to this, the perception of visitors to Watlington is seen as being mainly passing through.

The other key challenge Watlington faces is one of recognition. Whilst being directly below the Ridgeway brings the benefit of a large visitor base, very few visitors are aware of the town and area below the Chilterns. However Watlington's resident's key concern is that of traffic management. Watlington sits on the B4009 which is something of a rat run for traffic along the slope of the Chilterns, so whilst attracting more



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visitors is desirable they must be managed effectively to ensure that the detriments caused by traffic flow and parking are not outweighing the economic benefits.

Watlington undertook a town appraisal in 2002. Whilst tourism is not specifically mentioned there is much emphasis in the results on sustaining and expanding local businesses, and also to improve accessible information on footpaths.



The Parish Council was invited to a meeting in 2004 about the role of Watlington (population 2200) as a “market town”. This was a Government initiative, supported by County and District Councils, but the type of commercial/social projects envisaged did not seem applicable to Watlington.

However in December 2005 South Oxfordshire District Council took the step to reduce its tourism unit and handover of all tourism by SODC to an external

marketing company and Destination Management System. With Henley retaining the only TIC it was unclear where Watlington will fit into the new scheme of things.

Planning of the project

Having taken on board the issues identified in the appraisal and these larger factors, there has developed a keen community interest in working together to ensure the sustainability and future of Watlington’s business and community. The Watlington Hidden Britain group was set up to take forward a community owned and led tourism strategy for Watlington and the surrounding parishes.

A key element of the planning process was to create closer ties between Watlington and its surrounding communities, but also with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This helps define a brand for Watlington, makes them part of a more cohesive and better





known destination, and provides additional products for the AONB.

From the base data provided by the 2002 town appraisal the group developed an action plan of tourism projects.



Who was involved?

The group grew from the Watlington economic development committee of the parish council and consists of representatives from Watlington Parish Council, Swyncombe parish council, Pyrton Parish Council, Lewknor Parish Council, local business association, walking groups and local residents.

With the advice and support of the Project Development Officer from Hidden Britain and the Chilterns Conservation Board, the group was able to turn this action plan into achievable objectives by securing funding.

Status of funding

£11, 563 grant obtained from England Rural Development Programme, Rural Enterprise Scheme in June 2006. This was matched by an estimated £3,000 of in-kind time and £500 of services given free of charge.

What was included?

Design and install 4 information boards showing a pictorial map of the area and illustrating where businesses and attractions are located. These boards will be located in car parks and at the Oxford tube bus stops.

To design and produce a selection of four circular walks taking in the surrounding parishes but starting and ending at the main car park in Watlington. The guides will be A3 in size folded to DL, with a print run of 10,000 copies of each.

To create a small display and visitor





information point area in St Leonard's Church.

To create Watlington and its surrounding parish's WebPages that can be added to the existing www.watlington.org to showcase the visitor offer in and around Watlington.

An event was also planned to launch the project to the general public. There will be accompanying publicity to promote the project to both local residents and visitors.



Project implementation

We found a small group of interested people, (from Watlington and neighbouring villages), a manager, and someone to provide detailed design for Guided Walks. 3 outcomes were agreed – 4 new Walk Guides, 4 large Information Boards, and a new website, with a display of much of this in the Parish Church as an add-on.

Developing the Walk Guides brought



together some keen walkers with knowledgeable critics, who also influenced the Information Boards; but success was also due to the professional input from James Turner and Glyn Kuhn (designer). The website planned by James received late help from a Parish Council web expert and visits to all Watlington businesses.

The Walks Guides and the website were well received by Watlington businesses, residents and visitors so that, by the official launch on the late May Bank Holiday, 1500 leaflets and 30 display stands had gone to nearly 40 outlets.

Who benefits?

In terms of tourism the project has delivered Watlington a cohesive visitor package, which can be used to draw visitor in, inform them when they arrive, and interpret the surroundings in a meaningful way. The benefits from this will in main be to the local businesses by increasing visitor spend, however the



community as a whole will profit through the boost this will give to the local economy.

However in delivering this project, a large cross-section of the community has been involved thereby ensuring this is a real community owned and led project. Skills have been gained in several areas by those involved in the project group and capacity has been built for future projects of this kind.



Hidden Britain input

The Hidden Britain Development Officer (James Turner (JT)) worked hard with the group initially to put together an action and delivery plan, as well as to prepare the funding bid. He supported the group every step of the way, giving advice and guidance on content, layout, images, legislation etc.

JT led the work on the design and layout of the website and worked with the group to plan the launch and distribu-

tion of the leaflets.

Achievements

- ◆ The high quality of work and input by a small group of volunteers.
- ◆ The continued support of the public and private bodies in and around Watlington
- ◆ The support and input from the AONB unit.
- ◆ The delivery of a large project under budget on a tight timescale.

Lessons learnt

- ◆ With good support community projects can be delivered on short timescales.
- ◆ Groups with little tourism expertise require a larger amount of guidance.
- ◆ Joining HB projects to larger initiatives (AONB) increases effectiveness.
- ◆ Involving businesses from the start is key.





- ◆ Parish or Town Council support is crucial to maintain projects.
- ◆ With support even inexperienced groups can achieve excellent results



Future Plans

An evaluation of the project is planned with a view to developing a tourism strategy. JT has been asked to help facilitate the development of this.

The website is an ongoing concern under the ownership of the parish council as are the information boards. There are plans to implement an advertising package to businesses for website listing which will help generate funds for reprints of the walks guides.