

Formalising a strategy for supporting and promoting tourism in the market town of Highworth



A paper containing thoughts and ideas for discussion

November 2017

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1. BACKGROUND

Introduction

- 1.1 The strategy for supporting and promoting tourism in Highworth and its surrounding countryside is prepared by the Highworth Community Partnership Group (HCPG). It is a voluntary organisation comprising of local people who came together, in 2006, with the view of producing a local plan for the place. This became a reality with the adoption of the Highworth Neighbourhood Plan in July 2017.
- 1.2 The geography of the area is such that the tourism strategy is intended to cover both the town and the countryside surrounding it. The extent of Highworth is defined by its clearly defined built-up area. The surrounding countryside includes other settlements, as well as farms and fields. In landscape terms, the countryside comprises of the Thames Vale, to the north, and the Mid Vale Ridge, to the south, with their own distinct landscape characteristics.
- 1.3 The HCPG considers that the sphere of influence of Highworth includes other places too. These include Hampton and Hannington to the west, Inglesham to the north, Coleshill to the east and Sevenhampton to the south.
- 1.4 The basis for encouraging people to visit Highworth, in both the short and long terms, stems from what the HCPG consider are two important factors. These are as follows:-
- The planning policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Development Plan. The latter encompasses both the adopted Swindon Local Plan (March 2015) and the Highworth Neighbourhood Plan (July 2017); and
 - The benefits to be had from becoming a member of “VisitWiltshire”, a non-profit organisation that actively encourages long stays/visits with associated itineraries.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 1.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates that sustainable development has three dimensions and these are economic, social and environmental. These roles are considered by the NPPF to be mutually dependent.
- 1.6 The NPPF sets out 12 core land use planning principles which are intended to underpin plan making and decision taking. In this case, the following core principle is deemed relevant:-

“Take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs”.

1.7 The NPPF is supportive of economic growth in rural areas as such development is seen as helping to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. The document considers that in order to support a strong local economy local planning policies should do the following:-

“Support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.”

Development Plan

Local Plan

1.8 The Swindon Borough Local Plan includes a policy specific to Highworth that seeks to encourage tourism. This is RA1 and it states the following:-

“Development at Highworth shall be in accordance with Policies SD1 and SD2 and should support the following local priorities:

□ *Support a sustainable market town economy for Highworth by:*

- *realising tourist potential, in the form of appropriate attractions and accommodation, as a historic market town and gateway to the Cotswolds;”*

1.9 The supporting text to the policy acknowledges that Highworth has an historic town centre and is surrounded by attractive countryside. It also acknowledges the desire for the town to promote sustainable cultural tourism.

1.10 The provision of the policy RA1 refers to the provision of attractions and accommodation. The HCPG considers an “attraction” to be a place which draws visitors by providing something of interest or pleasure while “accommodation” is a building where someone can stay or be something which has been supplied to either satisfy a need such as lodging, food and service or travelling space and related services. At present, the town and countryside possess the following:-

TOWN

COUNTRYSIDE

Attractions

St Michael's Parish Church
Recreation Centre (The Rec)
Pentylands Country Park
Bowls Club
Saracens Head Hotel
and Queen Inn
Rose and Crown
The Highworth Restaurant
Rafus Indian Restaurant
Ciao Eatalia Restaurant
The Emporium
Bloomfields Fine Foods
Coffee Republic (Co-op) Old
Bakery Coffee Shop
TT Linnett cafe
Saturday market

Wragg Barn Golf and Country Club
Wickstead Farm Equestrian Centre
Roves Farm Visitor Centre
Buscott Park
Coleshill Estate (National Trust) King

Accommodation

The Highworth (Hotel)
Saracens Head Hotel
Highlands Guest House
Hayward House B & B
Plough Inn Public House

Freke Arms (Caravan Club site)

1.11 The HCPG accepts that this list is not exhaustive. It could include other facilities that cater for the needs of visitors.

1.12 The Local Plan includes a policy, EC5, which supports farm diversification. The term is seen as including all activities other than farm work that have an economic impact on the holding. These activities must make use of the farm's resources (such as the land, buildings or machinery) or products. This can include tourism, which is seen as including accommodation and sport/leisure activities.

1.13 The Local Plan includes a policy, EN10, which seeks to sustain and enhance the Borough's historic environment. This includes historic buildings, conservation areas, historic parks and gardens, landscape and archaeology.

Neighbourhood Plan

1.14 The Neighbourhood Plan too is supportive of tourism but stresses that so far it is only an aspiration as no formal work has been undertaken to take it forward. It

refers to the HCPG giving support to the local history society to produce a “town trail” and highlighting the possibility of the town becoming a “tourist hub” by advertising destinations within 10, 50 and 100 mile radii of the town.

1.15 The Neighbourhood Plan

It includes a number of community objectives. In the context of this strategy includes the following:-

Economic Development - Tourism: Promote and develop the tourism industry and visitor facilities within Highworth

Transport - Protect and extend the rights of way and off-road cycle routes to promote informal recreation and access to the countryside, sustainable travel and tourism.

Arts and Culture - Protect buildings and features of local historic interest to preserve the rich and unique cultural heritage of Highworth.

1.16 The provisions of Policy 5 seek to establish new cafes and restaurants in the town centre as they are seen as making a valuable contribution to the daytime economy of Highworth. In recent years coffee shops have opened in the Coop supermarket (Coffee Republic) and the former Nat West Bank (TT Littens). Another coffee shop, the Old Bakery in the High Street, reopened after being refurbished by its new owners.

VisitWiltshire

1.17 The HCPG recently met with VisitWiltshire as a fact finding exercise and to identify what benefits, if any, would prevail if Highworth was an integral part of the organisation. The outcome of the meeting was deemed a success. The HCPG, following this meeting, has undertaken research on the economic benefits of tourism and these are well illustrated in the following table:-

	2011	2015	Difference
Staying visitor trips	1.50m	1.84	+0.34m
Staying visitor spend	£269m	£368m	+£99m
Day visitor spend	£549m	£668m	+£119m
Visitor related spend	£859m	£1036m	+£177
Tourism business turnover	£1130m	£1530m	+£400m
Number of jobs	20,917	29,159	8242
Estimate GVA	£638m	£860m	+£222

1.18 The data is collected by VisitWiltshire. They indicate that, despite the small drop in the number of day visits, the organisation deemed 2015 to be a record year. They also consider that staying visits, visitor spend and economic impact is all at record levels.

1.19 In January 2015, VisitWiltshire published the Wiltshire and Swindon Destination Management and Development Plan 2015-2020. This is a shared plan between Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council that seeks to manage and invest in the development of the visitor economy in their administrative areas for the next 5 years. The document considers the needs of the area's historic towns by advising that:-

“All Wiltshire’s towns and villages should optimise their visitor potential through the presentation, good management and marketing of their place.”

1.20 The Destination Management and Development Plan (DMDP), at Section 7, indicates that this could be done as follows:-

- Explore the opportunity to offer a Visitor Card that provides discounts at participating attractions, tours and entertainments as well as shops, eating and drinking places;
- Develop further visitor accommodation, realising the recommendations of the Visitor Accommodation Futures Study. It considers that pub accommodation and boutique inns and hotels are particularly relevant to towns and relevant stakeholders (e.g. Town Council's and other local partnership groups) should signpost these to relevant business development advice and support on upgrading and expanding into providing visitor accommodation.
- Work together on themed marketing, local events planning and cross promotions to help present the towns of Wiltshire as complementary offers.

1.21 The DMDP identifies a number of “areas of activity” which it considers need to be worked on during the period. These include the following:-

Provision of food and drink

1.22 This is seen by the DMDP as being one strand of the rural tourism experience and should be celebrated as part of local culture. It is also seen by the document to be an essential part of the visitor spends.

Promotion of festivals and events

1.23 The DMDP considers that major festivals, whether they are signature events rooted in Wiltshire and Swindon, or bought-in events, provide reasons to visit now. They are also seen by the document to be a

valuable marketing and PR platform. A good example of this is the recent May Day celebrations.

Improvement of accessibility and connectivity

1.24 The DMDP considers that the development of tourism in a historic town is dependent on two important factors, most notably, accessibility and connectivity. It stresses that visitors must be able to get to their destination and, when they do, they must be able to get around. The document is positive to the promotion of more sustainable transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport.

Quality of serviced and non-serviced accommodation

1.25 The DMDP refers to the Visitor Accommodation Futures Report, published July 2014. At the time, the supply of hotels in Swindon was given as follows:-

	No	Rooms
5 Star hotels	0	0
Boutique hotel	0	0
4 Star hotels	4	595
3 Star hotels	9	783
2 Star hotels	0	0
Ungraded	1	17
Budget	7	657
Services apartments	1	16
Total	22	2068

1.26 The report advises that the following prevail:-

- The Swindon hotel supply is a broadly even mix of 4 star, 3 star and budget/limited service hotels. There are no boutique hotels currently serving Swindon and the town has a very limited stock of serviced apartments.
- Many of the UK's leading national and international hotel brands are represented in Swindon, including Hilton, Marriott, Holiday Inn, Jury's Inn, Village Urban Resort, Holiday Inn Express, Premier Inn, Travelodge and Campanile.
- The overall quality of Swindon's hotel supply appears to be good, although a few hotels are receiving mostly negative customer reviews on Tripadvisor for the quality of their bedrooms, public areas, food and service.

- The hotel stock in Swindon is spread across the town, linked primarily to key business park locations. The hotel stock in Swindon town centre is relatively limited and all at the budget or midmarket level.

1.27 The report considers hotel development in the rural areas in the country as a whole. It indicates that the key trends include the development of:-

- Luxury country house hotels;
- Hotel spas;
- Alternative accommodation options at luxury country house and golf hotels;
- Cookery schools;
- On-site specialist sport and leisure facilities at luxury country house hotels;
- Luxury Family Hotels;
- Boutique hotels;
- Golf resorts;
- Hotels at theme parks and visitor attractions; and
- Spa hotels.

1.28 The report sees Swindon, rather than Highworth, as the place where hoteliers want to locate. The budget hotel is of particular interest.

2. HIGHWORTH: A PLACE TO VISIT

2.1 The town of Highworth has always been a place where people have wanted to visit. This is related to its position on a hill where two old drovers' roads cross (Lechlade to Swindon and Faringdon to Burford) and the establishment of a market some 900 years ago.

2.2 The old trade directories published by Kelly's in the 19th and 20th centuries provide an interesting insight into places. The 1915 edition, for instance, describes the town as follows:-

“HIGHWORTH is a parish and union town and terminus of the ~Swindon & Highworth branch of the Great Western railway; the town stands where the old road from Bristol to Oxford crosses that from Swindon to Lechlade and the North; it is 76 miles from London, 6 from Faringdon, 6 north-east from Swindon, and 7.5 east from Cricklade, in the northern division of the county, hundred of Highworth, Swindon county court district and petty sessional division, and in the rural deanery of Cricklade, archdeaconry of North Wilts, and diocese of Bristol.

The town, in consequence of its elevated situation, near the Vale of White Horse, commands a fine view of the surrounding country, of which the scenery is picturesque, and the neighbourhood is considered very healthy: it is lighted with gas supplied by the Highworth Gas Company Ltd, and is supplied with water by the District Council.

The church of St Michael is a building of stone, mainly in the Perpendicular style, consisting of chancel with north and south chapels, nave of five bays, aisles, north porch, transepts, and an embattled western tower with pinnacles, and containing a clock and 8 bells: the tower was repaired and 3 of the bells recast in 1898: the south chapel belonged at one time to the ancient family of Warneford, and the stained windows include one to HRH The Prince Consort, d 14th September 1861, erected by the Society of Odd Fellows: there are sittings for 650 persons. The register dates from the year 1539. The living is a vicarage with the chapelry of Sevenhampton annexed, joint net yearly value £300 with residence in the gift of the Bishop of Bristol, and held since 1906 by the Rev John Frederick Douglas Stephens, MA of Pembroke College, Cambridge, who is also vicar of Inglesham, rural dean of Cricklade, and Hon Canon of Bristol.

Here is a Congregational Chapel, founded in 1788, with 180 sittings; Wesleyan, Baptist and Primitive Methodist chapels.

A cemetery of about 2 acres was formed in 1867, at a cost of £1150, with one mortuary chapel, and consecrated in 1870, when it was first opened for burials: it is under the control of the Parish Council.

The fairs are held August 13th for cattle, and October 11th for cattle and the hiring of servants, and a market every fourth Wednesday.

There a numerous charities in the parish, amounting to £235 yearly, under the control of a body of trustees appointed by the Charity Commissioners. James William Crowdy esq is lord of the manor, and the chief landowners are Sir John Wolfe Barry KCB, VD, the Hon Mrs Pleydell-Bouverie, Charles H Maidment esq, and Jethro Kinch Coleing esq JP.

The soil is loam, stone brash and clay; subsoil limestone.

The chief crops are wheat, barley, beans and grass. The area is 6457 acres of land and 31 of water, rateable value £11,478. The population in 1911 was 2153.

EASTROP, half a mile east, WESTROP, half a mile west, SEVENHAMPTON 1.5 miles south, and HAMPTON, 0.75 miles west, are tithings in this parish".

- 2.3 In the early 1950's, an important visitor to the town included Sir John Betjeman (1906-1984), the eminent writer, poet and broadcaster. He was very complimentary of Highworth describing it as being "extraordinary because it has more beautiful buildings than ugly ones" and "one of the most charming and unassuming country towns in the west of England". The statements made by Sir John Betjeman are significant given that his first love were buildings built in the Victorian age rather than the Georgian age. This is why he was a founding member of the Victorian Society in 1958.

3. FORMALISING THE TOURISM STRATEGY

Introduction

3.1 The HCPG considers that Highworth and its countryside is worthy of a strategy that seeks to support and promote tourism for the benefit of all its residents, both domestic and commercial. In order for such a strategy to be a success the HCPG consider that support should be forthcoming from the local community. As a starting point, a SWOT analysis was undertaken and from this came the vision, priorities and actions.

SWOT Analysis

Introduction

3.2 In seeking to understand the issues HCPG felt is necessary to undertake a SWOT analysis of the town so as to identify its strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. This assessment is an accepted way of identifying and addressing issues.

Strengths

3.3 The history of the town is seen by the HCPG to be a great asset, especially its 13th century medieval plan (including burgage plots) and 18th century architecture (Queen Anne and Georgian). The designation of the centre of the town as a Conservation Area in 1976 is seen by HCPG as being an endorsement of this special history.

3.4 The location of St. Michael's Church at the top of the hill makes it an important landmark in the countryside surrounding Highworth. In fact, there are extensive views stretching to the Wiltshire Downs, the Vale of White Horse in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire from its tower.

3.5 The compact town centre, focused around the High Street and Swindon Street, is seen as being both vibrant and bustling. It possess a wide range of shops and services that include those normally associated with a small town (e.g. chemist, newsagent, estate agents, local library) and a few specialist shops such as a butcher, bridal wear, delicatessen, patisserie, garden and hardware DIY, Christian book, dog grooming and gift shops. There are a number of pubs, restaurants, coffee shops and fast food outlets present too. The market is weekly (Saturday) and includes a number of specialists traders selling cheese, sausages etc.

3.6 The presence of short stay on-street car parking in the High Street and Swindon Street is essential to the success of the town centre. This includes the two free long stay public car parks in Brewery Street. The car park of the Co-op also plays its part despite being short stay. The HCPG acknowledges that traders in

the town centre rely on passing trade and so removing the car parking spaces or charging for them is not an option.

Weaknesses

- 3.7 The “brand” of the town is seen by the HCPG to be weak and, as identified by the public sign on the front of this document, relies on statements (i.e. ancient market town and gateway to the Cotswolds) that are used by other places to promote themselves. A good example of this is Burford. The town is, unlike Highworth, actually located within the boundaries of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and so is truly a “gateway” to the nationally designated and protected landscape. In fact, the Burford Tourist Information Guide Cotswolds specifically refers to it as being the “southern gateway to the Cotswolds”.
- 3.8 The status of Highworth as a “hilltop” town is not helped by the fact that its elevated position is not readily apparent. This is because views to the wider landscape are restricted by modern housing estates, built in the 1960’s and 1970’s, on the west, north and east slopes of the hill. The outlooks are limited with views to the north-east towards Coleshill and the Vale of White Horse, gained from the eastern end of Brewery Street by Parsonage Court and the corner of Cherry Orchard by the entrance to The Mews, providing the best illustration of the old town’s hill-top setting.
- 3.9 Within the Lighthouse Bookshop there is the Tourist Information Point. The HCPD acknowledge that this facility is supported by both Swindon Borough Council and Highworth Town Council. It is unfortunate but this important facility has no real presence on the High Street and is only identified by limited transfer writing on part of the bookshop’s shopfront.
- 3.10 The town of Highworth, as a place to visit, is not even recognised by some of its own attractions and accommodation. In terms of the former, the website for the facility does not even acknowledge its location on the edge of the town. In terms of the latter, the website identifies a number of local attractions, such as Lechlade, Coleshill, Stanton Park, Abbey House Gardens, Fairford (International Air Show) and the STEAM museum in Swindon, but Highworth is disappointingly omitted from the list. In both cases, the town is only identified in the address of both establishments.
- 3.11 The public realm of the town centre is seen by the HCPG as in need of significant improvement in that the visual amenity of the Conservation Area is seriously compromised. This includes overhead power and telephone lines, intrusive road markings, redundant signage, inappropriate street furniture and patchwork of tarmac on the pavements.

Opportunities

- 3.12 The Town Council has recently completed the construction of public toilets in Brewery Street. The location of the facility very close to the High Street is seen as the ideal opportunity to provide a designated parking space for coaches. With the closure of Lloyd's Bank in 2016, a mobile bank is now provided for the convenience of its customers and the vehicle parks on the road leading to the toilets and car park.
- 3.13 The HCPG considers that the town would benefit from its own designated visitor centre and the building occupied by Sue Ryder, the charity shop, is seen as providing the ideal location for such a facility. The building could accommodate the Tourist Information Point, as well as the archives of the Highworth Historical Society. In association with this, the HCPG considers that the appearance and function of the adjacent podium should be improved.
- 3.14 The establishment of a Chamber of Trade for the town is considered by the HCPG to provide the ideal solution in which to promote the town in a coordinated way. The marketing of the place by those providing attractions and accommodation should benefit everyone, including those selling goods and services.
- 3.15 The town of Highworth was twinned with Pontorson (Normandy) in 1990 and Wassenberg (Rhineland) in 2011 respectively. This is acknowledged by plaques in the market square. Although the HCPG are not aware of any benefits that have come as a result of the twinning process there is scope for this tripartite connection between England, France and Germany to be given much more weight and attention in the development of international tourism in the town.

Threats

- 3.16 The ability to attract visitors to Highworth is seen by the HCPG as being in direct competition with other similar towns. A good example of this is Lechlade which also describes itself, like Burford, as being a gateway to the Cotswolds. The HCPG considers that the added advantage which Lechlade has over Highworth is the fact that it has a riverside setting being next to the River Thames and the added advantages that brings i.e. boating, walking, fishing etc. Another attraction of Lechlade is its "Christmas Shop", which is open throughout the year!
- 3.17 Similarly, Malmesbury describes itself the "Queen of Hilltop Towns". Its claim to fame is based on the fact that its history is older than Highworth's, being England's first Borough. The HCPG are aware that Malmesbury also promotes itself as the "Festival Town",

Vision

3.18 The adopted Neighbourhood Plan for Highworth includes a vision for the town. This states the following:-

“We see a future where everyone has the opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives, enjoying Highworth’s rich cultural heritage and living in a safe, strong and supportive community. Highworth will become a sustainable community offering lifestyle and work opportunities in an attractive environment; meeting the needs of residents, business partners and visitors. We recognise the importance of attracting wealth into our community and forging a future where poverty and exclusion have been removed.

3.19 The needs of visitors are seen in the context that the town is intended to be a sustainable community. This will be achieved by:-

- Supporting and enhancing the local economy;
- Improving the town centre;
- Protecting the town’s heritage, including the Conservation Area; and □ Preserving the key features of the local landscape.

3.20 In respect of the third bullet point, for instance, the Neighbourhood Plan, as noted above, makes specific reference to HCPG supporting the local history group to prepare a town trail. This is based on the acknowledgement that the town’s history is worth exploiting in the best possible way i.e. a published document that is for sale and supplemented by members of the Highworth Historical Society giving the guided walk.

Priorities

Rebranding Highworth’s identity

Theme: Georgian Architecture

3.21 The HCPG consider that the town’s status as being an ancient market town is commendable but has not really helped its cause in attracting visitors. The view of HCPG is that the town’s claim as being the “gateway to the Cotswolds” is factually incorrect and thus misleading.” As such, HCPG consider there is the need to rebrand the town.

3.22 The view of HCPG is that the town should associate itself more with the comments of Sir John Betjeman. As someone passionate about history the statements made by Sir John about Highworth could provide the basis of a new “slogan” for the town. This could include:-

“HIGHWORTH

SIR JOHN BETJEMAN’S HIDDEN GEM”

3.22 The HCPG are aware of the Betjeman Society. They have an annual programme which includes visits to places associated with him.

Theme: Real and fictional espionage

3.23 The HCPG also considers that consideration could be given to the town’s association with espionage. The secret agent life of Highworth’s postmistress, Mabel Stranks (1883-1971), only came to light in the late 1960’s. She is commemorated with a blue plaque on the old post office (23 High Street) and a cul-de-sac of modern houses, Stranks Close, located opposite Highworth Warneford School on Shrivenham Road.

3.24 Another “spy” is Ian Fleming (1908-1964). He is buried in the parish church churchyard in Sevenhampton. His association with the village is due to him acquiring Warneford Place, an 18th century mansion, in 1960. Interestingly, one of Highworth’s public houses, the Goldfinger Tavern at Newburgh Place, has the same name as one of Ian Fleming’s villains and book titles. The pub is modern in age, being built in the 1970’s. Another interesting fact about Ian Fleming is that two of his films have been filmed in Swindon. This includes “A View to a Kill” (Renault Building) and “The World is Not Enough” (Motorola Building) being filmed in 1984 and 2000 respectively.

Becoming a member of VisitWiltshire

3.25 As noted above, the HCPG had a positive meeting with VisitWiltshire recently. During the discussion they confirmed that the Highworth Hotel had been a member of the organisation since March 2017.

3.26 In view of the above, the HCPG consider that serious consideration should be given to becoming a member of the organisation. The cost of doing so is £760 plus VAT per annum. An important benefit of being connected with VisitWiltshire is that eating establishments within the town would be advertised for free.

Provision of a designated space for a coach

3.27 The HCPG has spoken to a local coach operator who provides trips to the Cotswolds. The feedback received indicates that there is no space for their coaches to park in the town as priority is given to cars. It was suggested that the best location for such a space would be close to the new public toilets in Brewery Street.

Better utilisation of the countryside

3.28 The HCPG considers that the countryside surrounding the town has good potential for visitor attractions and accommodation. The most obvious places to consider are the farms themselves and include the following:-

- Wickstead Farm - an established equestrian centre
- Red Down Farm - includes a farm shop and tea room
- Rives Farm - includes a visitor centre with a cafe
- Crouch Farm - provides DIY livery

3.29 The Wickstead Farm Equestrian Centre, for instance, includes livery, schooling and competition facilities including indoor/outdoor ménage, horse walker, cross country and a spa. It is registered by the British Horse Society and is an approved Pony Club Centre and a Registered Riding for the Disabled Group.

3.30 Other farms, such as Eastrop and Roundhill, produce organic beef being sold directly to the end user. Both farms are certified by the Soil Association.

3.31 The Wragg Barn Golf and Country Club offers a range of activities. This includes not only an 18 hole golf course but conference facilities (for up to 280 people) and function rooms (for up to 190 people) as well.

3.32 The Freke Arms is a designated Caravan Club site. It can accommodate up to 6 caravans at any one time.

3.33 There are other parts of the countryside which have the potential to offer a development opportunity. This is well illustrated by the planning permission given on appeal, in September 2015, for the 18 holiday let lodges at the former Twelve Oaks Golf Course on Lechlade Road. The Inspector concludes that the site's easy access to the main road, and also being very close to Highworth was seen as providing economic benefits to local traders and service providers. The HCPG considers it unfortunate that the above development will not be forthcoming because the land is now owned/leased to Swindon Town Football Club who uses it as their local training facility having been given planning permission in June 2016. In time, this may become an attraction to fans but this may be dependent upon how well the club does in the league!

Actions

3.34 The HCPG consider that the main action points to be as follows:-

- Ask the Town Council to consider subscribing to VisitWiltshire as soon as practically possible;
- Update the town trail booklet, including map; and
- Contact local business and other groups and make presentations of what could be provided.

Target

3.35 The HCPG would like to have this strategy in place by the Spring of 2018.

4. WAY FORWARD

4.1 The HCPG is very aware of the commitment in the Neighbourhood Plan to promoting tourism in the town and surrounding countryside. The group feels that this is just an aspiration at the moment and so in order to make it a reality there is the need to take the next step.

4.2 This short paper seeks to start the debate locally with the view of getting feedback from relevant stakeholders as to what direction to take as the status quo is not an option. It is hoped that a formalised tourism strategy for the town and its countryside will benefit everyone.

4.3 The HCPG would very much like to have your views on the thoughts and ideas contained in this paper. You can send these to us by using the following contact details:-

Email us at:

Keith Smith (Chair)

contact@highworthpartnership.org.uk

Write to us at:

Highworth Community Partnership Group
c/o 35 High Street
Highworth
Wiltshire
SN6 7AQ

Telephone: 01793 764372

4.4 All comments received will be treated in the strictest confidence unless advised otherwise.