



Slimbridge Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan

Regulation 15 consultation

Tourism Report

Attractions

Slimbridge is a very popular tourist destination. The main attraction is the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) which is second only in Gloucestershire to Westonbirt Arboretum¹. The visitor numbers are shown below²:

Financial Year	Numbers of visitors
2016/17	258,576
2017/18	245,325
2018/19	271,767
2019/20	233,927
2020/21	112,908

In addition, the Gloucester Sharpness canal attracts boating visitors as well as paddle boarders using the facilities based at the Black Shed (Shepherds Patch) and walkers using the towpath. The number of visitors using the canal is not known but is a small fraction of those visiting the WWT.

Facilities for visitors include three caravan sites, a hotel, a public house, a café, a bed and breakfast and marine services (fuel etc).

Benefits of tourism

It is difficult to estimate the benefits that tourism brings to the Parish. There is a direct benefit to businesses such as the pub, café etc, but the extent of such benefit is difficult to quantify.

Problems associated with tourism

Question 41 of the NDP questionnaire asked about expansion of the WWT site. Opinions regarding expansion of the WWT varied widely between Slimbridge and Cambridge. 59% of Cambridge respondents favoured expansion, against only 34% of those from Slimbridge.

Question 25 asked residents if they are affected by traffic noise and pollution.

¹ <https://www.visitbritain.org/official-statistics>

² Private communication, Claire Rees, WWT

Traffic noise is seen as a serious problem, with over half the respondents affected. However, 66% of Cambridge residents are affected, against 41% in Slimbridge. This represents a serious level of noise pollution. The problem with traffic (air) pollution is smaller, but a significant minority of residents are affected by traffic pollution (35%). But again, Cambridge is worst affected, with 45% of Cambridge residents expressing concern, against 29% in Slimbridge. Again, this represents a serious level of concern regarding air pollution from traffic.

Recent development by SUP Stroud (Stand Up Paddle boarding) has increased the level of traffic at Shepherd's Patch. This and inconsiderate parking, dog fouling and boat mooring has generated a significant increase in complaints to the Parish Council (See SPC minutes 6 September and 20 September 2021).

For many years the relationship between the Parish and the WWT has not been totally harmonious because of the perceived level of traffic generated by visitors to the WWT and the lack of benefit to the Parish. The WWT responded to the NDP Business Survey and acknowledged the issues:

“Our main concern / risk to business is that there is only one road into the village and one bridge crossing the canal. It is the only way in or out of WWT and poses a high risk to business continuity should it fail. We also have concerns about parking along the road from the canal to WWT Slimbridge. WWT Slimbridge donated £10,000 to the Parish Council to create a car park at Shepherds Patch which has alleviated some of the parking, however due to the car park charge, cars still park on the road, resulting in the road being a single lane and blocking traffic. We would like to see no parking roadmarks along this stretch of road.”

n.b. The car park at Shepherd's Patch is free.

An exploratory meeting was held on the 5th July 2022 between the NDP Steering Group, Slimbridge Parish Council, WWT, Tudor Arms and the Black Shed to explore cooperation in the future regarding tourism and traffic. The meeting was successful and paves the way for the formation of a Working Group to examine the issues and propose solutions. The notes of the meeting are at Annex A.

Annex A

Notes from Tourism meeting 5th July 2022 at the Pavilion

Present: Parish Clerk Helen Dunn, Cllr Anna Butcher, NDP Chair David Thombs, Parishioner Suzette, Black Shed representatives Jane, Sally, Sonia, plus one more (sorry didn't get name), WWT representative Keith, Tudor Arms representatives Emma and Richard.

Dave Thombs gave an overview and update on the NDP, and how this group has come about from comments and evidence gathered through consultations.

In the draft NDP there will be a Tourism and Rural Diversification Policy. This had been circulated amongst everyone.

The Stroud Canal Strategy was also shared for anyone to comment on directly with Stroud DC if they wished. It was noted that there was little knowledge of this occurring due to what felt like limited publicity by SDC.

A list of questions had been circulated as part of the agenda, and these were discussed as a whole rather than individually.

- The Tudor Arms has no capacity to increase, and are not yet back up to pre covid levels of business
- The Black Shed recently had to shut for a week due to covid amongst staff. Plans are to carry on as they are, the Business has evolved, wants to bring the community together, continue to manage the boats in their control. They do only have a small car park which is a big issue. They do advertise the Parish Council car park and encourage people to park on there, noting the times of use available. The canoe and bike hire has had a lower uptake, but the weather has not helped with this.
- The verges between WWT and the canal used to have daffodils all down it, these are no longer there due to the damage caused by parking on the verges.
- The Patch area is an amazing place with lots of activities and tourism opportunities, however parking is an issue.
- WWT continues with their completion of the 2020 project with a push to modernise the centre. There is an aim to have a modest increase in visitors, but this does only equate to an additional 1-2% increase on previous years. Improvements include a new flamingo house as it is currently falling down, but overall no big plans for WWT. The numbers of visitors currently for January to March was good, however May – June has been lower. The memberships for WWT continue to be good, but the one off paid visitors are less.
- Need to address speeds – drivers need to be more aware of the diversity of road users. Horse riders have been met with confrontational drivers on the roads. The Parish Council's Road Safety Group continue to work on 20mph schemes and keep pushing with Gloucestershire County Council on their policies around this. WWT promote 20 is Plenty in all of their material. The Black Shed offered to do the same too.
- Further comments on road safety included parking outside the school and how people get out of their cars onto the road, and an increase on the smaller lanes in the parish such as Ryalls Lane where either Satnav directs people, or visitors to the canal. These roads are unable to sustain this volume of traffic. It

was noted that when the recent Scarecrow trail was on for the Jubilee week, that traffic did slow to look at them!

- Double yellow lines – the Parish Council are still waiting for information on the most recent consultation which is just coming to an end in the next couple of weeks. Parish Clerk also updated on the speed cameras that are being looked at for the parish too.
- David Thombs summarised the meeting noting that overall there is an increase in traffic visiting the tourism ‘hotspot’ of the parish, although business volumes are currently the same of slight decrease. More visitors are going to the canal. Need to look at practical ways to manage the traffic, look at comparisons before and after any implementations. Assess double yellow lines impact once put in.
- WWT try to only have coaches visit during the week instead of weekends where possible.
- Query on local households driving to school instead of walking
- Patch area could do with a tidy up – i.e. fences all painted and mended, verges tidied and planted (verge outside the car park is due to be built up, so this could be looked at once done) – verge management and conservation
- Paddle boarding – the Black Shed manages this as much as able, however have no control over facebook groups or general gatherings.
- Wildlife seems to be doing ok and going forward
- WWT have data on traffic and wildlife which he is happy to share
- All businesses want to dispel the ‘them and us’ between the businesses and parishioners and build a better relationship with the parish. WWT could advertise better what they offer such as 50% discount to all households in the parish.