



Passenger Boat Waterways Experience

Soft Market Testing – Questionnaire

This is not a call for competition or a procurement exercise

Opportunity: We are seeking a partner, business or organisation to develop and operate a brand-new passenger boat waterways experience at the thriving visitor hub Everards Meadows.

Background: Over the last year Blaby District Council have completed a project with Planning Solutions Consulting Limited to assess the feasibility of developing a waterways experience boat trip concept to attract visitors to the area. The study concluded there is strong support for a seasonal canal based on-water passenger experience to utilise the potential of the Grand Union Canal as a leisure, educational and tourism resource. Research has shown that enhanced on water leisure can bring economic, social and environmental benefits, and water-based experiences are growing in popularity.

Please note further background information can be found at the end of this document.

Market: There is a strong population catchment within the immediate 30 minute drivetime: the overall population reaches nearly 750,000 residents and this increases to more than 4 million residents within the overall 60 minute drivetime.

The proposed experience aligns with and builds on the success of Everard's Meadow as a new visitor destination which would act as the hub for this project.

There is an opportunity to take advantage of the growth of the health and wellbeing market (including the 'Fitcation' market – outdoor and active) linking in the network of walking and cycling trails. Potential to link to the nearby Aylestone Locks which already has some visitor infrastructure including tearooms.

Concept: Below are the ideas for boat trips from the above study. However, there is opportunity to consider alternative waterway experiences and we are open to ideas, including potential visitor accommodation or other form of water experience.

Seasonal (April to September, December) passenger boat trips departing from Blue Bank Bridge – Everards Meadows, 45 minutes to 1 hour duration.

Round Trip Journeys:

Blue Bank Bridge to Gee's Lock (short distance/no locks)

Blue Bank Bridge to King's Lock towards Aylestone Mill Lock (1 lock + café)

Blue Bank Bridge to Glen Parva (2 locks – longer journey 2.5 hours)

Special Interest Experiences:

The Leicester Line Industrial Heritage Story

The Leicester Line Nature Trail

Everards Brewery Tasting Tour

Educational Tours

Holidays and Events – Christmas, Easter, Halloween, parties, corporate

Boat to carry 10 passengers plus 2 crew

Consideration to sustainable power and accessibility for passengers.

Expected pricing £5 per head

Initial expected passengers per year: 2200

Location: Everards Meadows is a newly developed tourism destination fully opened in Summer 2021, with over 70 acres of green space to explore, quality cycling and pedestrian walkways that connect to Route 6 on the National Cycle Network. Bikes can be hired from the award-winning Rutland Cycles, coffee and cakes are available at local coffee house – Jennos and it is home to Everards's state-of-the-art brewery where there is The Beer Hall for breakfast, lunch and dinner, shop and brewery tours. The destination has quickly become popular with visitors locally and from further afield.

It is easily accessible, just four miles from Leicester City Centre, less than a mile from Junction 21 of the M1 and the start of the M69 plus accessible from the cycling and walking paths. Opposite the recently redeveloped Fosse Park Shopping Park – one of the UK's top out of town shopping destinations. Plenty of parking is available on site (free for 3 hours).

Located within Everards Meadows is Blue Bank Bridge on the Grand Union Canal which is the proposed location for a brand-new waterways experience. The idea has support from the three businesses above. There are two hotels within a short distance – Marriott and Hilton hotels for staying guests.

Soft Market Testing (SMT)

SMT in this case is where Blaby District Council ("the Council"), at an early stage in development of its proposals but prior to formulating any formal procurement opportunity, seeks input from the market as to what might be the most potentially attractive way of packaging and scoping a future procurement opportunity.

This exercise will also provide an opportunity for the Council to obtain insight into how potential providers might approach the delivery of the service in question. It also gives useful early insight into the likely level of interest in a proposed project from that market.

Potential bidders will not be prejudiced by any response or failure to respond to the soft market testing. Potential bidders must also note that a response to this notice does not guarantee an invitation to participate in this or any future procurement that the Council may conduct, nor that the Council will procure any such supply and services or accepts any proposals offered.

Any future procurement will be carried out strictly in accordance with the relevant regulations. For the avoidance of doubt no information provided in response to this questionnaire will be used by the Council in assessing providers during any future procurement process.

Blaby District Council has developed a questionnaire that they would like interested parties to complete.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

A1 Full name, address and website:

Organisation name	
Address	
Town/city	
Postcode	
Country	
Website	

A2 Main contact for correspondence about this questionnaire:

Name	
Position	
Telephone number	
Mobile phone number	
Fax number	
email address	

A3 .

Please describe your general business/service/charity?	
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B.

Key questions for consideration:

Q1) The Council are looking for informal expressions of interest in these services at this stage in order to establish the level of market interest. Would your organisation be interested in bidding for these services?

Please detail your interest in this project?

Q2) Please detail your organisation's experience in providing a similar service?

Q3) Would your organisation be interested in having a pilot scheme / short-term arrangement to test the service and demand (or is this not required)?

If you do not feel a pilot scheme is required, please briefly explain your reasoning.

Q4) Would your organisation need any support from the Council or Canal & River Trust in setting up and delivering your proposed service (the Council would look to promote the service through its social media channels)?

Q5) How would your organisation's proposal benefit the local community (volunteer opportunities, creating local jobs etc)?

Q6) How would your organisation plan to fund the service?

Q7) Finally, please details your expectations of the timeline in setting up this service, and perceived risks, and what that Council or organisation would need to do to mitigate and overcome these risks?

DECLARATION BY THE RESPONDER

I/We certify that the information supplied is accurate to be best of my/our knowledge.

Name*	
Signed	
	Duly authorised on behalf of the Provider

	(Electronic signature required here)
Position	
Date	

*Please note the term “Provider” refers to sole proprietor, partnership, incorporated company, and cooperative as appropriate. The undertaking should be signed by a partner or authorised representative in her/his own name and on behalf of the Provider.

Confidentiality and Freedom of Information

All information included in this soft market testing questionnaire is confidential and only for the recipient’s knowledge. No information included in this document or in discussions connected to it may be disclosed to any other party without the Council’s prior written authorisation.

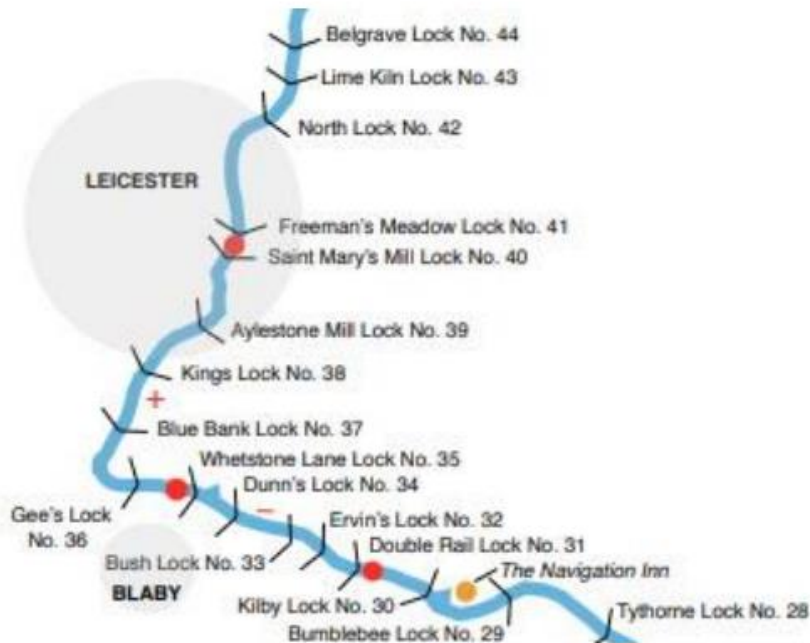
Please be aware that the Council is subject to the disclosure requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and that potentially any information we hold is liable to disclosure under that Act. For this reason, we would strongly advise that any information you consider to be commercially sensitive and confidential is labelled as such in your response. In the event that a request is subsequently made to the Council for disclosure under the FoIA, any information considered commercially sensitive and which may prejudice the commercial interests of the provider would not be disclosed in accordance with Section 43 of the FoIA.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document is preliminary in nature and may be subject to further amendment and revision. Accordingly, no representation or warranty, expressed or implied, will be made and no liability is, or will be, accepted by the Council as to the adequacy, accuracy or completeness of this document. Any liability however arising is expressly disclaimed.

No expense in responding to this soft market testing will be reimbursed by the Council.

Background Information – the following information may help you further understand the opportunity to develop your ideas and provides some useful considerations:



Map extract from Leicester Line through the city and Blaby District

Waterways are an incredibly valuable asset and research has shown that improvements and enhanced on-water leisure provision can bring economic, social and environmental benefits to an area. Water-orientated tourism and outdoor recreation is growing in popularity. The rural nature of the network as well as the history and heritage of the Leicester Line provides an opportunity to promote the benefits that come from on-water activity. By fostering appropriate tourism and leisure development on the canal and providing an accessible range of community infrastructure, it is hoped that such an on-water operation will support the visitor economy and improve health and wellbeing without causing detriment to wildlife, biodiversity or natural, built or cultural heritage. Clearly, improving the economic potential through attracting new visitors must also be balanced against protecting the ecological and historical value of the waterways. www.pslplan.co.uk 6 There are a number of examples of successful skippered canal boat trips, which run short cruises, for a few hours or less, on many canals. They have a skipper and crew and often provide on board refreshments.

Tourism in Blaby

Situated in Leicestershire, Blaby has a population of 97,700. An important characteristic is its accessibility off the M1 with a number of well-known destinations centred around Junction 21, including Fosse Shopping Park and Everards Meadow. The current tourism propositions for the area are relatively weak, resulting in comparative low visitation levels and spend from overnight stays. However, the Tourism Growth Plan (2020 to 2025), developed by the Blaby District Tourism Partnership, recognises the growing importance and the potential of tourism for the district. The Growth Plan notes a key strength of the district is the “network of canals & waterways.” From the 2016 STEAM report it is noted that visitor spend reached £159m (66% linked to day visitors and 34% to overnight visitors). Visitor numbers were 3.26m (90% were day visitors and 10% overnight visitors).

Key markets identified in the Growth Plan are:

Primary

- Local residents and communities
- The Midlands
- Domestic staycationers Secondary
- Group travel operators
- Mature international markets (Europe and North America)

There are ambitious growth plans with a desire to increase the value of tourism within the District by £50m, increase visitor numbers by 1.3m and increase the number of tourism jobs by 40%. The Growth Plan also notes an opportunity linked to the “development of Everards Meadows, Rutland Cycling, Fosse Park and positioning these as a visitor hub to attract and disperse visitors around the district.”

The introduction of a canal boat passenger service linked to Everards Meadows has the potential to add positively to the development of this new hub. Interestingly, the Action Plan within the Blaby District Tourism Growth Plan 2020 – 2025 notes a number of key actions which could be supported by the development of a seasonal canal boat passenger service.

One of the Actions refers to product clusters: “Identifying and supporting clusters of operators to the history & heritage, outdoor activity, food & drink, shopping, events & festivals to create, package and deliver compelling quality, authentic visitor experiences across the District and that fit with the Tourism Growth Plan themes.”

A further action relates to experiences: “Developing quality authentic experiential itineraries for the area (with links to wider Leicestershire area) for the core propositions, facilitation of innovation workshops to support businesses develop their experiences.”

Tourism in Leicestershire: existing markets The visitor data that exists at a regional level is the STEAM data from 2018.

The key headlines were:

- Just under 35 million (34.93m in 2018) visitors to the county, 89% are day visitors
- Since 2013 to 2018, there was an increase of 26.9% in value from the tourism sector (£1.88 billion in 2018), 18.6% increase in visitors, and a 12.6 increase in employment (23, 076 jobs in 2018)

- 3.76 million staying visitors – peak months are July, August and December • 56% of visits to the area are visiting friends and relatives
- 19% of domestic overnight trips are for business purposes (higher than the national average of 14%) Visitor and non-visitor research conducted by Visit Leicester showed that:
 - Awareness and understanding of what the destination has to offer tourists, and the perception of the quality of that offer, is a significant barrier to sector growth. Nonvisitors are unsure of what is on offer whilst those who have visited are muted in their evaluation
 - Leicester is recognised for its vibrant cultural diversity and its connectivity (in terms of transport links)
 - There was no strong sense of place for Leicestershire compared to other rural shires, but there was a sense of rural beauty and tranquillity

Importantly, Visit Leicester’s research showed that the area’s waterways (70 miles of water and eight rivers) have untapped leisure potential.

Tourism trends National

- Whilst the impact of Brexit has been a concern for the UK in recent years, in March 2021, Visit Britain concluded its five-year tracking project on EU exit sentiment which shows that most travellers feel their likelihood to visit Britain has not been affected by the EU referendum decision and subsequent exit from the EU and that most travellers continue to see Britain as a destination which is welcoming to visitors, open-minded and tolerant. However, the sentiment in Europe is slightly more negative than in long haul destinations with many Europeans confused about the conditions for travel to Britain following the exit from the EU and end of the transition period.
- Multi-generational groups, ‘Grandtravel’, and differently shaped, non-linear families are all increasingly prevalent. This was on the up before the pandemic, but 2020 highlighted the importance of sharing with family. Large group accommodation will be popular in the coming years.
- People are looking for authentic experiences – visitors want to connect with a place and its people and have the opportunity to try and buy local food, drink, crafts offered through independent businesses rather than chains. People are seeking experiences that combine fun /learning/self-improvement/well-being.
- People are looking for new, attractive places that are easy to get to when they take a leisure trip. They are attracted to destinations with high quality eating and drinking, and to hotels offering accommodation deals.
- Visitors want to maximise behaviour by cramming a lot into a short space of time, enjoying unique experiences across the day and into the evening. It is important that there is a range of quality experiences on offer that are sufficiently different from www.pslplan.co.uk 10 home. Inspiration and information about what there is to do, and how to access and book, is important. Emerging from Covid

The travel industry has suffered enormously as a result of the global pandemic – in February 2021, the Office for National Statistics published data that showed air transport turnover fell 89% year on year to December 2020, travel agent and tour operator turnover fell by 86%, and accommodation turnover was down 73%. It found that travel and tourism-related sectors comprised eight of the 10 most impacted by Covid-19. The Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership’s Covid-19

Economic Recovery Action Plan 2021 recognises the region's travel, tourism and hospitality sectors have been among the hardest hit, with the impact having been keenly felt across the area, particularly through the extended Leicester lockdown. In terms of recovery, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) states that 'domestic tourism is expected to recover more quickly and offers the chance for driving recovery'. However, the landscape has changed and people have changed their perceptions of travel.

In the short term, the post-Covid tourism landscape will be influenced by the following factors:

- Demand likely to be greater for rural areas, destinations with open/car-free public space
- Greater demand and appreciation of outdoor based experiences in terms of activities and the natural environment
- High demand for self-catering accommodation because it offers greater flexibility and individual 'control' of the visitors' environments. This includes campsites and touring sites
- It is likely that visitors will want to explore new, less-well known destinations which are 'off' the tourist map
- Faster recovery in demand from families (and larger multi-generational family groups) and those visiting friends and relatives
- Reassurance that there is enough and of the right type of things to do
- Ease of booking either before or during the trip; clarity on terms and conditions, cancellations etc
- People are concerned by sustainable and responsible travel and how they travel to and around a destination, and where the food and drink comes from. According to Booking.com's Sustainable Travel Report for 2020, 82% of global travellers have identified sustainable travel as being important to them. This offers a real opportunity to embrace a more sustainable approach for the whole tourism sector which will help to avoid conflict between visitors, host communities and the environment and ensure that impacts can be measured and mitigated through effective planning, development and operating regimes, with social equity and cohesion at the root / core of all decision making

Summary comments on tourism market

Overall, the data shows that tourism is a growth sector for Leicestershire with the value of the sector, the number of visitors and the number of tourism enterprises all growing. Local businesses are optimistic about business performance over the next 5 years. Leicester and Leicestershire are currently dominated by day trips, there is a high value business tourism sector on which to capitalise and the visiting friends and family market is important.

Demographics

It is important to understand the size of residential market place within the primary 30 and 60-minute drivetime contours (for day visitors) and the wider two-hour catchment, which is key in terms of the short break sector. As part of this study, we have carried out a demographic review of the residential population living within the 0 to 30 and 31 to 60 minute drivetime profiles. Within the immediate 30-minute drivetime contour there are over 70,000 residents living within the catchment and this increases significantly by over four times the population to over 4 million within an hour.

Technical and operational considerations

There are a number of technical and operational considerations, which will impact on the provision of a skippered pleasure boat experience on the canal.

Size and scale of the operation

Commercially operated boats will need to comply with boat build and equipment requirements.

A key consideration will be the size of vessel. For vessels that carry 13 or more passengers, it is necessary to obtain an MCA Class V Passenger Certificate. For boats which carry 12 or fewer passengers, certification is more straight-forward. For this size of vessel, you are required to hold a non-private boat safety certificate (BSS Certificate) and a declaration of compliance with the Small Passenger Boat Code.

The Small Passenger Boat Code is a best practice guide for designers, builders and operators of passenger boats that carry 12 passengers or fewer. The code is available via the Maritime and Coastal Agency (MCA) website www.mcga.gov.uk. It is not a statutory code but is applied under mandatory licensing regime by the Canal and River Trust in their capacity as a competent licensing authority. The primary aim is to establish standards of safety and protection for all users, particularly passengers.

As well as obtaining third party and public liability insurance, a Boatmaster's License or equivalent will be required. Under the jurisdiction of a Navigation Authority the situation differs, as a Navigation Authority may have power to licence all navigation i.e. private pleasure craft as well as commercial vessels.

Several Navigation Authorities require that vessels under their jurisdiction are registered and have a navigation licence. The main navigations authorities include the Canal & River Trust, the Environment Agency and the Broads Authority but there are many more; some navigation authorities are members of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA).

Depth and Width

The depth and width of the Grand Union Canal will impact on the type of passenger boat operation on the canal. Following extensive dredging work (which is on-going) by the Canal and River Trust, the average depth is around 1.68m and the minimum width is 7.9m (although these figures are the average for the canal) with a 2.13m headroom at Kings Lock.

Secure and safe moorings

An important consideration is to ensure that the boat is in excellent condition and repair. A boat operator will need to provide permanent home moorings, usually on the off-side to the towpath. Depending on the scale of operation, there may be a requirement to access services such as fuel, water, waste disposal, secure customer parking and a safe place to board the vessel. An operator using one boat will be able to use Canal & River Trust facilities.

Food, alcohol and entertainment

If the boating experience involves the preparation or sale of any kind of food or drink, live or recorded music or other entertainment, then further licensing will be required from the local authority. Application process and fees The Canal and River Trust is responsible for issuing a business license to set up a new boating business on the canal.

In summary, the procedure is as follows:

- Submission of an Operating Proposal via CRT's online system
- Internal consultation and appraisal response within 6 weeks
- If accepted and no works are required, advice will be provided on the next stage of authorisation (e.g. business licence application, mooring agreement etc.)
- If the proposal requires infrastructure works affecting the Trust property, a Works Proposal will be required (£380+VAT fee).
- Following a further round of consultation and depending on the scale of works, if acceptable, the Trust will issue a Works Proposal report and enter into an appropriate formal agreement with the Trust before any works are stated.
- The Trust will provide an 'Authorisation for access' form to enable the works to be undertaken, which will be monitored by the Trusts Engineer or Surveyor as appropriate. The Business Licence Fee for a Skippered Passenger vessel with a carrying capacity of up to 12 is £161.53 per person⁵. Discounts are available according to the type of vessel, for example 25% discount for an electric motor; 10% for an historic boat. Summary
- There are a range of technical and operation factors that will impact on running a skippered boat on the Grand Union Canal, which will determine the scope and scale of the operation.
- There are licensing and registration costs involved in establishing a boating business on the canal. As the navigation authority, the Canal and River Trust are the responsible body for ensuring standards of safety and protection for all users, particularly passengers. Any commercial boating operation will need to be discussed with and licensed by the CRT.
- The depth and width of the canal together with the licensing fees indicate that a passenger boat for 12 passengers is likely to be the preferred size for any initial boating operation.

Degree of support

It is important to emphasise that there is strong 'in principle' support for bringing the canal into greater use for recreation and other activities. Whilst many acknowledged that this initiative has not been discussed or considered in the past there is unanimous support to use the canal network in a more extensive way, particularly for uses related to recreation, health and wellbeing as well as developing an interesting visitor and possibly educational experience. Many consultees highlighted the fact that the canal is under-utilised and many people are not aware of what's on their own doorstep in terms of the attractive canal corridor through the district with the tow path offering walking and cycling opportunities in attractive countryside. The canal provides a link from Leicester city out to the countryside. The on-water experience would help people to enjoy the space along the canal corridor.

People are proud of the locality and the canal represents an important green and blue space on their doorstep. It is important to recognise and acknowledge the rich natural history associated with this part of the canal and river corridor. As an established water course with tributaries flowing in to it, it acts as a corridor for birds, insects and amphibians. There are notable species with successful conservation success stories such as water voles and otters. The bird life is exceptional and there are good populations of bats (offering the potential for night-time interest). Parts of the canal into Leicester are very attractive. There is a notion that if people can experience the natural beauty, they will value it more (experiential-led engagement with nature) which may help to foster behaviour change. Increased access to the canal and waterway may help to engender this.

Support for the concept

The overall concept is to utilise the potential of the Grand Union Canal, specifically the Leicester Line through Blaby District as a leisure and tourism resource to attract and retain visitors in the area. Our research and consultation demonstrate that an on-water pleasure boat experience has the potential to be popular and add to the tourism assets in the area:

- There is as strong policy focus to grow and develop tourism and the visitor economy, particularly through the introduction of sustainable tourism initiatives;
- In tourism terms, an on-water pleasure boat experience has potential to be popular in this area according to key tourism representatives including the City Council. In particular, the experience aligns with and builds on the success of Everard's Meadow as a new visitor destination, which could act as the key hub for the project.
- It is important to note that within the immediate 30-minute drivetime contour the overall population reaches nearly 750,000 residents and this increases to more than 4 million residents within the overall 60-minute drivetime contour.
- There is a specific opportunity to take advantage of growth of the health and wellbeing market (including the 'fitcation' market) which would be linked to the network of walking /cycling routes and cycle hire opportunities to include links with nearby Aylestone Locks, which already has a degree of visitor infrastructure including tearooms.
- There is also potential to include special interest tours such as beer tasting, nature watching (given the rich natural history locally) and heritage themed activities aimed at staying visitors, day trippers and local residents.
- The Grand Union Canal is seen as being an important, if under-utilised, tourism and leisure asset;
- Tourism development at Everards Meadow is an important catalyst to further grow and development tourism in the local area.

Critically, there is strong support to bring forward a sustainable initiative which encourages greater use and appreciation of the waterway through the district and adds to the destination profile of the area. The visitor economy is identified as a growth sector and it is generally accepted that the Leicester Line (Grand Union Canal) is under-utilised as a leisure and recreation asset.