



Sustainable Business Awards for the South East 2004

Case Study - Ashdown Forest Llama Park

Company Background

Ashdown Forest Llama Park (AFLP), East Sussex, was originally founded as a working farm to breed and sell llamas and alpacas. The park is situated in the middle of Ashdown Forest, which is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The park opened its doors to visitors on a small scale in 1996. Set on 30-acres of grounds, visitors are able to view over 100 llamas and alpacas that live at the park. The aim of the park is to educate the public about llamas and alpacas and other fibre producing animals and to offer a unique high quality visitor experience.

A major expansion to the visitor facilities took place in 2001 with the creation of a new visitor centre/coffee shop/conference room facilities. The shop sells alpaca knitwear, much of fair trade origin along with South American handcrafts. The park also accommodates a museum, adventure playground and picnic area, open throughout the year except on the 25th and 26th December.



Llama walks are offered to visitors giving them an opportunity to enjoy and learn more about the surroundings



Shop selling alpaca knitwear and other South American hand crafts



Conference room facilities have been built at the park to diversify the parks market appeal



Llama Tom with owner of AFLP, Linda Johnson

Summary of Key Achievements

- Undertook a leading role in the Ashdown Forest Sustainable Tourism Project (AFSTP)
- Hosted training days on AONB awareness which were run as part of AFSTP for local businesses, with all of AFLP staff attending
- Following on from the AFSTP the Ashdown Forest Tourism Association (AFTA) was formed and is chaired by AFLP owner
- Commenced offering llama walks to the public increasing the attraction of the park, improving public awareness of environmental issues and sustainable approaches
- Supportive of the local economy and businesses by sourcing local produce wherever possible

KEY



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS



BUSINESS BENEFITS



ECONOMIC BENEFITS



SOCIAL BENEFITS

Sustainability Initiatives

The expansion of the visitor facilities is intended to improve the sustainability of the park and the local community. Its most recent initiative was the introduction of llama walks around the park and surrounding countryside. The walks are educational and make the public more aware of their natural surroundings and the efforts needed for its continued prosperity. The park is also taking a leading role in the Ashdown Forest Sustainable Tourism Project (AFSTP), which encompasses the local area.

Contribution to a Sustainable Economy

AFLP has recently invested heavily in improving its visitor facilities, developing a visitor centre, shop, coffee shop and conference facilities. This has all helped to attract visitors and increase the sustainability of its operation. The development of conference facilities was seen as an opportunity to diversify their market appeal.

The breeding and selling of its llamas and alpacas is in keeping with the parks sustainable principles as the alpacas are kept for their fibre and the llamas for use in the leisure industry; they do not therefore contribute to European Union agricultural surpluses.

Until recently the visitor centre accommodated a fully networked tourist information centre run by Wealden District Council. For economic reasons, Wealden District Council pulled out of providing this service, however AFLP has taken over the running in an 'unmanned' capacity to ensure that visitors to the area are able access information on the local area.

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Linda Johnson, owner of AFLP has taken an active role in supporting and drawing in economic benefit for the community as a whole. In 2003 Linda and her team played a leading role in the AFSTP initiative, which was co-ordinated by Tourism South East as part of the SE AONB Sustainable Tourism Project. Staff committed over 50 hours of their work time to promoting the initiative and creating enthusiasm among local businesses. One output from the AFSTP was the production and distribution of 70,000 copies of a map and guide to the Ashdown Forest Area.

As a result of the AFSTP initiative the AFTA was formed and is chaired by Linda Johnson as mentioned above. The AFTA was established to represent the business interests in the development of sustainable tourism in Ashdown Forest. The membership currently stands at 35 businesses in the local area with expectations that this number will double by the early part of next year.

Linda Johnson also sits as the business representative on the Ashdown Forest Tourism Forum, a group of stakeholders who meet regularly under the direction of Wealden District Council. Its role is to develop a sustainable tourism management strategy for Ashdown Forest.

AFLP is also very proactive in using local suppliers where possible recognising the increasing public preference for locally produced products.

Enhancing Environmental Quality

AFLP has undertaken several initiatives to improve and manage its energy efficiency and resource utilisation:

- New visitor centre is well insulated with double glazing windows and doors and has energy efficient lighting installed and water saving devices
- Night storage heaters are used to provide cost effective heating
- A large wood burning stove is used to provide heat in the coffee shop area, the wood burned is sourced 100% from the annual maintenance of trees carried out on its land, and therefore represents a sustainable source. The burner is estimated to contribute to 30% of the overall heating requirements of the building, representing an electricity saving of £1,500 and preventing the emission of some 34 tonnes of CO₂ in the generation of electricity
- 3.4 tonnes of waste have been diverted away from landfill through segregation and recycling of waste. Goats effectively recycle stale bread and cakes along with some vegetable peelings. Other organic waste is composted
- 'Bailing twine' from hay and straw are offered to the public free of charge, along with a 'scrap bin' that contains surplus plastic containers and boxes
- Paper llama feed bags are used by a member of staff as flooring for her chicken house, these are subsequently composted
- Rainwater is collected from the roof of the main building in two 200 litre water butts and used for watering of plants. This saves approximately 2,400 litres of mains water annually

Improving the Social Wellbeing of Stakeholders

In addition to strong involvement through various associations and forums developing sustainable tourism for the local business community of Ashdown Forest, AFLP is also supportive of the other areas of its community:

- AFLP support the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) as its 'in house' charity. It also undertakes environmental programmes to encourage the birdlife such as installing bird boxes around the site and leaving much of the grass areas un-mown
- Provide many free family tickets to local schools and charity groups to help with fundraising
- Provide conference room for local crafts group to stage small scale crafts fairs three times a year
- Regularly exhibit at local agricultural shows and other small village events
- Issue a newsletter to regular customers, using it as a forum to promote their sustainable policies



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