

Tourism Strategy 2023



Overview

The Ross-on-Wye Tourism Strategy sets out key information which may be used to inform the town council on its strategy to benefit the environment for its residents and businesses and attract tourists and visitors to the town and surrounding areas of HR9. An overview of the town council's key objectives and five year plan are outlined in the following pages plus details of agreed priorities and an Action Plan to take the tourism strategy to the next stage.

Working with local partner and tourism organisations, such as Ross-on-Wye Tourism Association, Ross Business Association, Visit Herefordshire, Visit Dean Wye and Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire, Ross-on-Wye Town Council is in a strong position to actively participate in relevant marketing campaigns, working in synergy with these partners' aims and objectives, to the ultimate benefit of the town and Herefordshire county as a whole.

Ross-on-Wye Town Council's 5 year plan (2023-27):

It is important to consider the Ross-on-Wye Town Council's 5 Year Plan in conjunction with its Tourism Strategy as both are co-dependant and rely on each other for the success of the town's economy and environment.

Ross-on-Wye Town Council's 5 Year Plan Mission Statement:

Ross-on-Wye's parish council is passionate about ensuring the town remains a vibrant place for residents, businesses, and visitors. Working with others, the council aims to maintain and improve the quality of life in our historic market town by:

- Delivering services fairly and efficiently
- Listening to and supporting residents and businesses
- Protecting and enhancing our environment
- Encouraging strong communities and representing their interests
- Promoting tourism and cultural activities to make Ross-on-Wye the best place to live in Herefordshire.

Ross-on-Wye Town Council's 5 Year Plan Strategy:

To deliver the town council's vision, the following key strategies have been identified. It is not to say that projects or initiatives that don't naturally fit these strategies will not be funded, the brigading of projects and initiatives into the following primary strategies is purely a mechanism to communicate how RTC plans to meet the agreed vision.

Again, to aid simplicity and focus, three key strategies to enhance residents', visitors', businesses' and workers' experience of Ross-on-Wye are:

1. Local Economy	2. Art & Culture	3. Wellbeing
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Benefits of tourism

Tourism offers untold opportunities for the local environment - it not only creates jobs, strengthens the local economy and contributes to local infrastructure development but it can also help to conserve the natural environment and cultural assets and traditions. The results are far reaching and have the potential to reduce poverty and inequality. In summary, benefits of tourism for Ross-on-Wye include:

- Improved local environment and community pride
- Celebration of local events, music, arts, culture
- Happier residents and therefore, visitors
- Job creation and potential to foster entrepreneurial spirit
- Preservation of heritage
- Preservation of wildlife and natural environment
- Healthy living and wellbeing
- Sustainability – better quality of life, better retail/leisure/eating out/transport provision, improved environment as the town will see the benefits out of season and not just during peak holiday periods.

Stakeholders

In addition to tourists visiting the area, the following should be considered tourism stakeholders with a vested interest in a flourishing tourism offering for Ross-on-Wye (this list is not exhaustive):

- Residents
- Businesses
- Business associations (*Ross Business Association, Marches Growth Hub, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire Means Business*)
- Tourism partners / developers (*Ross-on-Wye Tourism Association, Visit Herefordshire, Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire, Visit Dean Wye, Visit Gloucestershire, Visit Worcestershire, Visit Monmouthshire, Visit Wales, Visit Britain, Visit England*)
- Government (*Herefordshire Council, Environment Agency, local politicians / councillors*)
- Competitors (*other market towns in the county and destinations bordering Wales and the South West*)
- Media (*local channels such as Ross Gazette, Hereford Times, BBC Herefordshire & Worcestershire, Sunshine Radio, Ross-on-Line, Your Herefordshire as well as national media channels*)
- River activists & organisations (*Save the Wye Coalition, Ross-on-Wye Angling Club, River Action, Wye Valley River Festival, 3 Wyes Women, Herefordshire CPRE, Friends of the Upper Wye, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, other wildlife charities*)



Tourism trends / 2023 forecast

There are several key trends which are deemed important to travellers and tourists when planning a visit or holiday:

- Short leisure trips or weekends away
- Leisure trips to rural destinations
- Quirky destinations / experiences
- Learning new skills or sports
- Sustainability
- Wellbeing breaks
- Outdoor activities (rowing/walking/cycling)
- Eco-friendly travel
- Local food/produce

For Ross-on-Wye, the above criteria for travellers puts the town in a unique position to fulfil travellers' desires - particularly with short breaks, taking place in the beautiful Herefordshire countryside.

Travel within the UK

According to *Visit Britain's* latest survey, in the 9 months of 2021 (April-December) British residents took a total of 119 million overnight trips within Great Britain (including England, Scotland and Wales). 36% of these trips were taken in the final quarter (October-December) whilst away from home visitors spent a total of £27 billion and stayed a total of 421 million nights.

'Holiday' and 'VFR' (Visiting Friends & Relatives) were the most popular reasons for taking an overnight trip in England and Great Britain in 2021 (April-December). Combined, these trips represented around 73% of all trips. However, when looking at the combined spend by journey purpose, holiday trips contributed almost half of all spend at both the England and Great Britain level (47% and 49% respectively).

What does this mean for Ross-on-Wye? This demonstrates that UK travel and holidays remains very much an attraction for the UK target market. In particular the central location of Herefordshire and Ross-on-Wye has a strong appeal for anyone planning a countryside break, whether en route to another destination in the UK or for a unique stay in the area eg to Cornwall, West Wales.

Target audience

Establishing key target audiences and visitors to Ross-on-Wye and the surrounding area will help to shape the marketing and tourism offering. Visit England and Visit Britain provide a detailed breakdown of these profiles and can be considered alongside any marketing campaign for maximum impact. The greatest potential for market growth comes from short breaks by older and younger couples who are relatively up-market, well-travelled, with high disposable incomes. There is also scope for young and extended families who wish to connect with the values of rural life.

Key geographic targets identified are*:

- London and South East
- Bristol / Gloucester / Bath
- West Midlands conurbation
- Cardiff / Swansea / Newport
- Merseyside

**Herefordshire Tourism Strategy (2010-2015)*

Segments

There are four key traveller profiles as identified by Visit Britain – the third and fourth being viewed as key target audiences for British tourism strategies:

1. **Business visits / events:** covering trade fairs, conferences and congresses, outdoor and entertainment events as well as business tourism.
2. **Luxury:** the appetite for luxury travel translates into increased visitor spend and, thereby, economic growth.
3. **Visiting friends & relatives (VFR):** A very resilient segment of the inbound visitor economy over recent years, with those travelling to the UK to see friends and relatives.
4. **Youth & study:** The youth traveller is identified as a key target audience in the Britain Tourism Strategy as youth visitors plant the seeds for return trips: 60% of holiday visits to Britain are by repeat visitors.

About Ross-on-Wye

Overview: The second largest of the five market towns in Herefordshire, the historic market town of Ross-on-Wye, with its medieval, Georgian and Victorian heritage, stands high on a rocky outcrop of red sandstone overlooking a horseshoe bend in the River Wye. The view is dominated by the spire of St Mary's Church which is illuminated at night and can be seen for many miles. Close to the church are the Prospect Gardens, given to the town at the end of the 17th Century. From here is a wonderful panorama looking across the meadows to the hills of Garway and Orcop with the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons beyond.

History: In 1770, William Gilpin, took a tour of the River Wye from Ross to Chepstow and loved the journey so much, he published the UK's first tourist guide called *Observations on the River Wye* and the town is now acknowledged as the birthplace of British tourism. The town's key benefactor and philanthropist, John Kyrle - known as The Man of Ross - is referenced in many buildings, walks and other historical features throughout the town. The hedgehog, the ancient emblem of the town dating back to 450 AD, has links to an ancient kingdom called Archenfield, and in St Mary's Church, you can see hedgehog icons on family crests dating back to the 17th century. The town became officially known as Ross-on-Wye in 1931, to distinguish it from the other towns with the same name.

Location and transport: Ross is located on the A40 around 16 miles south of Hereford city, 17 miles west of Gloucester and just over 10 miles from Monmouth on the Welsh border. It is the only market town within the boundaries of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is perfectly located for visiting Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, including the nearby Forest of Dean and the Brecon Beacons National Park. The town has good links with Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff and therefore ideally placed to attract international travellers to the area, as well as being centrally located to attract domestic travellers for unique stays, day trips or short breaks en route to other UK destinations. Without a train station, the principal means of public transport remains buses and coaches connecting with key transport hubs at Hereford, Gloucester, Cardiff, Birmingham and London. The nearest train stations are Ledbury, Hereford and Gloucester.

Demographic: With a population of around 11,000, Ross remains a very popular destination for those who enjoy the outdoor life, walking, river activities and exploring the area. According to the English Indices of Deprivation 2019, Ross is less deprived than England on all measures. However, it has 8% more over 65s than the national average and fewer jobs per head than the Herefordshire average. The age structure however is representative of Herefordshire as a whole, although with slightly fewer people in the 5-14 age group and slightly more in the 75+ age groups. The town displays a lack of diversity in general with a population predominantly white British (95%).



Competitor profile

The following is a summary of the five market towns' USPs within Herefordshire as identified by *Visit Herefordshire*. Ross-on-Wye's Tourism Strategy aims to differentiate itself from its fellow market towns by providing an alternative reason for visitors to visit - either for a unique stay in the market town, or to attract day trippers travelling through the county or visiting a satellite town/city on a longer vacation.

Whilst Ross-on-Wye's identified strengths are the 'riverside location', 'vintage trail' and 'bordering Symonds Yat', there are additional key features which are also covered by other market towns, including our independent retailers, food and drink producers and walking – all are key attractions and should be included in the overall tourism offering.

Market Town	Visit Herefordshire's identified USPs and key highlights for all five market towns	
	USPs	Key highlights
Bromyard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival town • Foodie heaven • Wildlife walks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional high street with independent shops • Fantastic local food producers • Rich history of hop-growing, cider-making & blacksmithing • Flair for festivals • Easy to access walks & wildlife
Kington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A centre for walking • Jaw-dropping views • Border country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gorgeous location, minutes from the hills • Endless walking routes • Fab cafés & deli • Easy drive to Leominster & Hay-on-Wye • Ideal base for the Black & White Villages trail
Ledbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poetry Town • Historic charm • Independent shops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent independent places to shop & eat • Visit local artisan cider, gin & wine producers • Eastnor Castle & the Malvern Hills nearby • Home to Ledbury Poetry Festival
Leominster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiques mecca • Cider country • Black and White Villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiques treasure trove with more than 120 dealers • Fascinating heritage, including the last ducking stool used in England • Gateway to the Black & White Villages • Perfect base for nearby historic houses & open gardens • Fantastic craft cider producers on the doorstep
Ross-on-Wye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverside beauty • Vintage heaven • Neighbouring Symonds Yat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birthplace of tourism • Perched on a sandstone cliff above the River Wye • Set in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty • Close to Symonds Yat & Ledbury • Heart of the 'Land of Hedgehogs'

SWOT Analysis

The following represents an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to Ross-on-Wye as acknowledged at the CM&T meeting in November 2022.

STRENGTHS

- Strong history of tourism
- Market town status / regular markets
- Strong culture ie Gilpin, hedgehogs, riverside tours
 - Retail / independent shops
- Outdoor activities - river, walking, golf, fishing
 - Riverside - picturesque, linear arboretum
 - Innovative - Museum Without Walls
 - Easily accessible by car, coach, bus
- Community ie friendly, vibrant voluntary network
 - Town ambassadors
- RTC amenities eg Market House & Bandstand
- Wide range of activities for weekenders or long stays
 - Dog / muddy boot friendly

WEAKNESSES

- Crime
 - Access ie no train station
- River - pollution / environmental / political concern
 - Maintenance - dirty streets, litter
- Herefordshire Council / local confusion of asset ownership
- Reputation of Town Council - with residents and local traders
 - Signage / finger signs - old, out of date
- Eating/drinking out - more quality restaurants/bars
 - Hotels (reduced options)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Families / children - PGL
- Shopping trends - shop local / support indie / eco friendly
 - Businesses - team building events etc
 - Weddings - Market House & Bandstand
- Coach parties ie sustainable travel / demographic
 - Youth / younger demographic
- Social media - supporting local businesses / potential for positive PR & 'good news' stories
- Housing developments - attracting new residents into town centre (families / young people / kids)
 - Branding, to create a strong USP
- Improving communication with residents & local traders
 - Promote dog friendly / muddy boot friendly

THREATS

- River - demise will impact heavily on tourism
 - Predicted economic downturn
- Community, residents, visitor feedback = bad PR
 - Negative visitor experiences eg local youth intimidation, vandalism
 - Markets - better ones elsewhere
 - Covid - ongoing strains / isolating



Key priorities (agreed at CM&T)

In order to develop an Action Plan for 2023-2026, the following activities and campaigns from the SWOT analysis were agreed as the next step priorities to focus on, in order to develop the tourism strategy for Ross-on-Wye.



River

- Holidays
- Canoeing, river activities
- Support local organisations to support health of River Wye



Signage / wayfinding

- Review current signage in town
- Investigate suppliers and quotes in the event funding becomes available



Markets

- Improve markets proposition
- More local artisan produce
- Themed market programme
- Open air bars / vintage vans



Wellbeing

- Market Ross as wellbeing destination
- Events eg Equinox, Walking Festival
- Outdoor / river activities
- Fitness classes under Market House



Weddings

- Promote weddings in Ross
- Investigate options to hold weddings at the Market House or at the Bandstand



Events programme

- Year long events programme
- Focus on music, culture and heritage of Ross eg hedgehogs, May Fair, festivals, local crafts (Clayfest)

