

Case Study

Visit by Rail: Lewes Castle

Background

Visit by Rail is a schools Sustainable Travel project delivered in partnership between The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and Sussex Community Rail Partnership and funded through the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF).

The project had two aims:

1. To increase the number of schools accessing the National Park by rail and to embed sustainable travel values and experiences in a wide range of secondary students, equipping them to travel confidently by public transport and to consider the role of sustainable transport in managing rural tourism.
2. To boost the market for outdoor learning providers within the South Downs National Park by encouraging and enabling a wider range of schools to visit by sustainable transport.

Secondary schools within easy reach of train stations were targeted for the project.

A series of Educational Visit Plans were developed and delivered by National Park Learning Providers who are accessible by rail travel.



The project

Lewes Castle is situated in the centre of Lewes town and is a 5-minute walk from the train station. Lewes is in the heart of the South Downs National Park and easily accessible by train with links north to London, east to Eastbourne and Hastings and West to Brighton and Chichester. Lewes Castle was built shortly after the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It is a motte and bailey castle and is ideal for exploring both the impact in England of the Norman Conquest and life in the Middle Ages.

The Eastbourne Academy is just a 20 minute walk from Hampden Park station so an easy walk for the 30 Year 7 History students and 4 members of staff who made the trip in February 2016 to start their visit to Lewes Castle.

The educational material was provided by the Education Team at Lewes Castle. The students were divided into 2 groups for the 4 activities that comprised the visit. These were a Drama workshop, where the pupils acted out what it was like to live in a Medieval Castle, an Artefacts Handling session, a tour of the Castle with a talk about the history associated with the Castle and Lewes town and finally a look around the Medieval Gallery in the Museum.

Thanks to the generosity of Southern railway, this pilot visit benefitted from 30 free pupil and 4 free adult tickets. Even if the group paid for their rail fare this would have resulted in a saving of £120 compared to the cost of hiring a coach for the visit. This represents a huge potential saving for the school, especially if the whole year group takes part in the trip next year.

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“We would normally have taken the coach to Dover to study Medieval Castles, but this visit has shown us how easy it is to use the train without having to travel so far. A very stress-free journey. We will be doing this again.”

Mr Pavey, Head of Humanities, The Eastbourne Academy

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The outcome

30 Year 7 History students and 4 adults visited Lewes Castle in the South Downs National Park by train when normally they would have travelled by coach to a Learning Provider outside of the park much further away from their school.

The Lewes Castle Education Team have gained confidence that schools from Eastbourne can travel to the Castle by train through this pilot visit. They will be promoting this sustainable travel option in the future.

The pilot visit has demonstrated that is cheaper for some schools to travel by train than by coach for educational visits to locations in the South Downs National Park.

An Educational Visit Plan has been produced to encourage other schools to visit Lewes Castle by train, and this will be promoted through the South Downs National Park Authority, the Sussex Community Rail Partnership and the Lewes Castle websites.

The future

The LSTF funded Visit by Rail pilot projects will come to an end on the 31st March 2016.

The Case Studies, Educational Visit Plans and Lessons Learnt documents will continue to be shared on the partner websites and a dedicated Visit by Rail page has been created on the SDNPA Learning Zone to promote sustainable rail travel for future education visits.

The legacy in terms of proven financial benefit of rail over coach travel for schools provides a strong marketing approach. In addition, work with the rail companies to simplify the online school booking process will directly benefit schools using rail travel in the future.

