

Case Study

Visit by Rail: Pulborough Brooks

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

Pulborough Brooks is a RSPB Reserve near Pulborough in West Sussex and is a popular destination for educational visits.

St Philip Howard Catholic School, Barnham, have a Year 9 Geography visit to Pulborough Brooks to which they usually travel by coach. For the visit in October 2015, they agreed to visit by train.

The RSPB Education Team provided the educational expertise and all educational materials for the visit. The focus was the 'Location and Places' programme, with fieldwork techniques used to investigate a freshwater ditch and woodland habitat. In order for the visit to be made by train the Education Team met the school outside the reserve on the footpath leading to the River Arun and walked the group into the reserve. The Education Officer for RSPB was very happy to accommodate this change as she felt that it was important to promote sustainable travel within the National Park and the Reserve.

Thanks to the generosity of Southern Railway, the pilot visit benefited from 50 free pupil and 5 free adult tickets. The train travel for the remaining 100 students and 10 adults was paid for by the school, costing only half the price of a coach. If all three days of field-trips had used rail travel instead of the 3 coaches necessary there would have been a total saving for the school of over £230.

“The trains worked well for our visit, and the walk from the station fits in very well with the government’s guidelines that young people should engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes... every day”

Mrs Bleakley, Geography Teacher

The outcome

141 Year 9 Geography students and 15 adults visited Pulborough Brooks in the South Downs National Park by train when normally they would have travelled by coach.

The RSPB Education Team at Pulborough Brooks have gained confidence that schools can travel to the Reserve 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 the Reserve.

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

