

Case Study

Visit by Rail: Southease

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

YHA South Downs is situated 3 minutes walk away from Southease Station and is next to the South Downs Way, the 100 mile long distance footpath that traverses the South Downs from Eastbourne to Winchester. It is perfectly located for exploring the South Downs. For the visit in October 2015, the Eco-club from Downlands Community School, Hassocks agreed to pilot a visit to YHA South Downs to test out sustainability travel within the South Downs and to do the visit by train.

The visit consisted of going up on to the South Downs walking on part of the South Downs Way, and taking note of the vegetation and wildlife whilst exploring and understanding the landscape. The YHA Education Team provided the educational expertise and an eco-explorer pack that contained various things to help with plant and animal identification during the visit. On returning to the Youth Hostel the students all participated in making nettle tea, which was a hugely enjoyable experience for all concerned. On the train home the students completed a questionnaire to help them think about sustainable travel within the National Park, which was a useful exercise in making the best use of travelling time.

Thanks to the generosity of Southern Railway, this visit benefited from 14 free pupil tickets and 2 free adult tickets. However the cost of travelling by train for the visit (less than £50) would still be much lower than the equivalent cost would have been by coach (in the region of £100). This represents a huge ongoing saving for schools if they use the train for travelling on educational visits.

“This visit has given some of our students an opportunity to do an educational visit for something that really interests them, one of whom had never been on a school trip before”

Mr Cole Science Teacher

The outcome

14 Year 8 and Year 10 students and 2 adults visited Southease in the South Downs National Park by train when normally they would have travelled by coach.

The YHA Education Team at YHA South Downs, Southease have gained confidence that schools can travel to the South Downs by train through this pilot visit. They will be promoting this sustainable travel option in the future.

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

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

