

THE GRIZEDALE PROJECT

The Grizedale Project

The plans for the Grizedale Visitor Centre are part of the wider Grizedale Project which aims to improve the quality of the visitor experience and support the local economy in the South Lakes. With no significant reinvestment made at the Grizedale Centre for the last 17 years the plan is to re-develop the Centre to improve the layout, refurbish and upgrade existing facilities. The plans are about improving the quality of the visitor experience and sustainability rather than increasing visitor numbers. The Grizedale Project proposes a unique combination of opportunities for visitors, local communities and businesses through collaborative working and a holistic "whole landscape" approach.

Project area

The project area is the Furness Fells which extends from Windermere in the east to Coniston Water in the west, from Hawkshead in the north to the A590 in the south (see enclosed illustrative map). This area is historically associated with the coppice and iron industries which has left a legacy of one of the most wooded Districts in England today. Grizedale Forest Park, which extends to 2500 ha of forest and farmland, is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission.

Vision

Through collaborative working and a holistic approach at a whole landscape scale level, provide a unique combination of opportunities for visitors, local communities and businesses. The new Grizedale Centre will be the hub and catalyst providing access to the unique natural, built and cultural heritage of the Furness Fells within the Lake District National Park.

Objectives

- To work in partnership with the local community, Lake District National Park Authority, Cumbria Tourist Board, Rural Development Service (DEFRA) and other agencies to achieve a co-ordinated, strategic approach and help deliver their objectives.
- To provide a year round attraction catering for all sectors of the community which exceeds user expectations.
- To help local rural businesses achieve long term sustainability by offering direct business opportunities at the Centre and by encouraging visitors to stay longer, base their stays in the area, spend more and visit in the quieter periods (while respecting the quiet area designation, both geographical and seasonal, in the Lake District National Park Management Plan) rather than increase visitor numbers.
- To broaden the existing environmental education programme to make it accessible for all ages and backgrounds.
- To develop an integrated sustainable transport plan connecting with a network of walking, cycling and horse riding routes with associated bike hire and riding stables.
- To market the visitor opportunities in a co-ordinated way, developing a stronger and wider Grizedale identity, including the development of a

Grizedale website and the Grizedale Centre offering Tourist Information services.

- To apply sustainability principles to all new developments and encourage activities and developments which are in keeping with the special qualities and identity of the area and enhance the natural, built and cultural heritage within the Lake District National Park.
- To maximise the economic benefits of the visitor centre and forest for the local economy.

Fundamental principles

- Build on the existing strengths which are considerable rather than introduce new activities or developments which are not connected with or sympathetic to the areas exceptional natural and cultural heritage.
- Build on and increase awareness of the historically strong identity of the area (Furness Fells) through branding eg use the boar logo and making the heritage come alive and relevant to today.
- Increase the integration between farming and forestry which is starting to develop and encourage integrated land management.
- Focus on activity based on the outdoors, natural environment, crafts, rural industries and the arts.
- Conserve and enhance the old estate buildings and grounds of Grizedale Hall, restoring more of the original character and interpreting the history of the place.
- The Grizedale Centre to be a hub for visitors which acts a tourist information centre for the area, retails local products and is an activity centre for all ages. Not all visitor developments to be at Grizedale but support and promote others so that development and marketing is co-ordinated.
- Encourage the active management of woodlands and farmland producing products available for sale locally.
- Maintain the heritage value of the sculptures in the forest and create new sculptures linked to craft, using local materials and which have a sense of place.
- Work in partnership with local communities and those with particular expertise going beyond consultation. The FC will often have an enabling role in future rather than directly doing it itself.
- Encourage visitors to stay longer and to travel on foot, by bike or on horseback thus reducing traffic.
- Provide opportunities for all ages to learn more about the working countryside, cultural heritage and special qualities of the Lake District National Park by direct contact and having a go.
- Apply sustainability principles and become an exemplar of sustainable development.

Example of partnership project

Mr Arthur Threlkeld, Bowkerstead Farm, in the Grizedale valley, has obtained planning consent for riding stables, a campsite and camping barn and has now secured funding through the Rural Development Service to implement his farm diversification project. This is an excellent example of the application of

the principles and a contribution to the achievement of The Grizedale Project vision and objectives. For example it will encourage visitors to stay longer, there is direct access from the farm into the forest for riding and walking, the viability of the farm has been secured and local businesses will be supported. The FC is working closely and has supported Mr Threlkeld so that a co-ordinated approach is taken.

What will happen to the Grizedale Visitor Centre ?

The existing Visitor Centre will be re-developed to improve the layout, refurbish and upgrade the existing facilities such as the café, information centre/shop, toilets, bike hire and education facilities mainly utilising the existing buildings better. The only new activities/facilities at the Centre will be the “have a go” craft workshops, function/meeting room, craft workshops and woodfuel heating. The plans are about improving the quality of the visitor experience rather than increasing visitor numbers.

Traffic and transport

We produced a Travel Plan which contains a package of connected proposals, some of which are not fully within our control but we are committed to working with other people to progress. This includes a potential park and ride scheme linked to Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway but this is not possible to implement at present due to the lack of suitable car parking at Haverthwaite

As we cannot guarantee that some of these proposals will happen and it may take several years for others to come to fruition we have decided to commit to providing a subsidised shuttle minibus service connecting to the local service buses to Ambleside at Hawkshead and to Kendal and Barrow at Haverthwaite. It is not a park and ride scheme.

Larger vehicles on the narrow roads was a particular concern identified. We already offer school groups the option of being escorted on the forest road which links High Cross to Moor Top at the north end of the forest. We intend to increase the proportion of coaches which use this route by making all visiting groups aware of the option and by offering discounts on parking/education service fees.

Funding and timescales

The total cost of the project is currently estimated at over £5 million which includes the Visitor Centre re-development and initiatives such as the shuttle bus service. We are applying for grants to pay for the project and if we are successful plan to start work in late summer 2006 and finish the Centre re-development by spring 2008.

If anyone would like to see the full plans including site layout, architectural plans and Travel Plan or have further questions please email enquiries.nwefd@forestry.gov.uk or phone on 01229 860373. As the plans progress we will provide further updates.