

Invitation of expression of interest

Catering and cycle business opportunity at Hicks Lodge in The National Forest.

Contact details

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The Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is the government department that oversees the nation's woodlands on behalf of the Government.

Forestry Commission delivers the Government's forestry policies through:

- Management of the Nation's woodlands
- Working in partnership with others to promote the interests of forestry.
- Encouraging good forest management, which maximises public benefit by providing targeted grant-aid for woodland owners.
- Regulating forest practice in both public and private woodlands through consultation, the use of felling controls and environmental impact assessments.

Our strategic goals include access to woodlands, the use of forests for tourism, health and well being, social inclusion, employment and education as key targets. The environment, renewable energy, active community participation, rural and economic development and well-managed woodlands are also key delivery areas.

More detailed information on the work of Forestry Commission can be found on the Commission's website, www.forestry.gov.uk

Background

Hicks Lodge, The National Forest Cycle Centre is a new and unique visitor experience located in the heart of the National Forest. The overall site is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission (FC) and the centre will become the official National Forest Cycle Centre. This brand new family focussed cycle centre is in North West Leicestershire and just a few miles away from Junction 11 of the M42. The site has good transport links and is located within easy reach of major conurbations including Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham, Stoke on Trent, Derby and Burton on Trent. Ashby de la Zouch is the nearest town. The nearest current postcode is LE65 2UP.

This new cycle centre development is located on a reclaimed site which was sensitively landscaped and planted with trees between 2002 and 2005. Traditionally the 138ha site (combined area including Dilworth Clumps) has consisted of a number of multi-use trails, large water bodies and a rich mixture of trees and open space. The current £1.5 million development, due for completion in April 2011, will significantly upgrade the site and includes a building encompassing a café and cycle centre with a combined ground floor area of 240 square metres. The project also includes the development of a 100 space pay and display car park and 13.6km of new purpose built off-road cycle trails. One of the things that sets this new trail centre apart from others is that it is designed and built for beginner and intermediate family riders. The design and style of the off-road cycle trails comprise 4.38km of 3m wide DDA compliant shared use path, 2.54km of 2m wide green grade cycle trail and 6.71km of 1.5m wide blue grade trail. This is in addition to the existing shared user trails.

The new building has a number of environmentally friendly qualities including woodfuel heating, the use of fully sustainable timber throughout as well as solar water heating and rainwater harvesting. The building also has an equipped (fridge, dishwasher etc) but unfurnished two bedroom flat on the second floor. Other on site facilities include public rest rooms, a play area, 100 capacity car park, disabled toilets, baby changing facilities, public showers and furniture such as benches.

It is envisaged that the site will become a regional centre for family cycling within a very short period of time. Nearby complementary visitor facilities include the Conkers visitor centre, Moira Furnace, Rosliston Forestry Centre and the National Forest Youth Hostel.

Additional information including a site plan, building plan and photographs of the building and site are attached as appendix 2.

The business opportunity

The Forestry Commission is seeking a partner to help operate the site and in particular the catering and cycling experience. We are interested in proposals that provide details of

- Basic background information about the applicant
- `The offer` in terms of the catering and cycling experience.
- Main income streams
- Projected audience (numbers and demographics)
- Links to key government agendas such as big society, localism, health, education and climate change as well as links to local communities and potential knock on economic benefits and job creation.
- How to engage with less mobile visitors and under represented groups to provide a better forest experience.
- How the site operation would seek to minimise environmental impacts.
- How the café and cycle centre would integrate with other activities and the Forestry Commission brand.

We are anticipating an initial agreement of up to seven years to fully evaluate the potential of the business opportunity but will be considering the most suitable arrangement and duration as part of the business opportunity process.

Process

The table below sets out our intentions regarding selection process and likely timetable. This is dependent on identifying suitable business partners at the expression of interest stage and subsequent parts of the process. We reserve the right to alter the timetable to ensure that we get the right partner to deliver the service.

Stage	Dates	Description
Receipt of expressions of interest	To be submitted by 12 noon on the 24 th January 2011.	The applicant should provide information about the nature of the business and proposals to deliver a catering and retail offer at Wyre. The FC wishes to understand what the market might want to offer so that we can develop a detailed requirement for stage 2 of the process.
Review of submissions	Late January 2011	Including clarification where necessary and development of detailed specification of requirements
Formal bid and selection process	Late January until late February 2011.	Selection based process to be outlined following review of submissions. Likely to include a formal bid and competency process followed by an interview process for shortlisted applicants.

Returning expressions of interest

It is strongly recommended that applicants arrange for a site visit before returning the expression of interest.

Completed expressions of interests must be submitted in the format provided in Appendix 1, and as outlined in the `Questions to be addressed` section above, by the following method:

2 copies via the postal system or by hand. With an additional set provided on Mass Storage Device or CD, Ensuring that the information provided is not protected as the information has to be transferred to a central storage system.

Respondents are advised that responses may be reproduced, solely for the purposes of this exercise.

Date for Return:

The final date for the return of completed expressions of interest is 1200hrs noon 24th January 2011. Any expression of interest received after the date and time specified may not be considered.

Return address

Sue Hardwick (Hicks Lodge Proposal)
Forestry Commission – West Midlands
Birches Valley
Rugeley
Staffordshire
WS15 2UQ

Appendix 1.

Questions to be addressed as part of the expression of interest

1. In no more than 300 words please give a brief overview of who you are, what your current business / occupation is and outline any directly relevant experience that you may have. Applicants invited to stage 2 of the process will be given the opportunity to supply more detailed information.
2. Describe the type of catering and cycling offer that you think would work at Hicks Lodge and:
 - A. main activities or elements of the business, i.e. mode of operation
 - B. main income streams
 - C. the projected audience (numbers and demographics)
 - D. links to key government agendas such as big society, localism, health, education and climate change
3. As well as developing our own business interest we would like to develop Hicks Lodge to maximise benefits for the local community and the National Forest economy. Please provide examples of how you would help achieve these aims.
4. Outline how you would ensure that the business is inclusive (so that all sections of society can access the site, activities and services) and in particular any ideas around engaging under represented groups.
5. Briefly describe how your business would seek to minimise any environmental impacts associated with its operation on the site.
6. How would you integrate the activities that you would undertake with the Forestry Commissions other business areas, brand and requirements for the site?
7. What would be the likely infrastructure implications or requirements for your business, i.e. power, storage, security, transport, etc?
8. What would be your strategy for marketing the attraction?

Continued overleaf

About your business

Please tell us about your business.

Name of Organisation	
Address for all correspondence	
Contact Name	
Telephone Number	
Fax Number	
E-mail address	
Website Address (if applicable)	
If applicable, address of Registered Office	
Nature of Organisation (E.g. Plc, Partnership etc).	
Number of employees:	
Length of time Organisation has been operating	
Company Registration Number (Or alternative EU registration number).	
VAT Registration Number (Or alternative EU registration number).	