

# Tourism guidance for market towns

A step-by-step guide to help market towns realise their tourism potential



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**TOURISM**  
**SOUTH EAST**

Developed in partnership by the Countryside Agency and Tourism South East

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# Foreword

As rural centres for social, heritage and cultural activity, England's market towns offer unique possibilities for visitors, who in turn provide wealth and employment generation opportunities for local communities. The towns play a key role in providing information and other resources such as public transport. They are often the first point of contact with visitors through Tourist Information Centres, providing opportunities to promote surrounding areas and encourage sustainable behaviour.

This guide provides market towns with the information and tools they need to make the most of their tourism assets. It is initial guidance, which is currently being piloted in a small number of towns predominantly in the South and South East of England. The guidance will be updated and improved to take account of feedback we receive from the pilot exercise. We would therefore welcome your views on the guide, as well as suggestions for case studies to illustrate it.

Please send feedback and case studies to Cathy Butterfield, Countryside Capital Team, Countryside Agency, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham GL50 3RA or by email to [mt.tourismguide@countryside.gov.uk](mailto:mt.tourismguide@countryside.gov.uk)

## Our commitment to sustainable tourism

The Countryside Agency and Tourism South East endorse sustainable tourism, which seeks to maximise the potential for wise and sensible growth, and minimise any negative impacts that tourism might have on rural environments and communities.

Specifically, our aim is to:

- maintain and enhance the quality of the rural environment;
- ensure that a high quality of visitor experience is available to everyone;
- maintain and increase the availability and quality of employment in rural tourism enterprises; and
- spread the benefits of tourism throughout rural communities.

Further information about sustainable tourism can be found on the Countryside Agency's website [www.countryside.gov.uk/livinglandscapes/countryside\\_capital/tourismactivity.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/livinglandscapes/countryside_capital/tourismactivity.asp)

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# Background

Market towns today face great change, challenges and opportunities. As a result, many towns are taking steps to reinvent themselves as vibrant, thriving centres for commercial and social activity.

For some market towns, part of the solution to future prosperity lies in making the most of their potential as a place for people to visit. For these towns, visitors can play a key role – bringing benefits to the local economy, to the community and to the surrounding areas. Income from visitors helps to create employment, increases the viability and range of businesses and services available locally, contributes to community activities and encourages local authorities to make improvements to the town.

Historically, market towns have welcomed visitors by providing places to eat, drink and stay. With their markets, heritage buildings and traditions, these towns offer particular opportunities for visitor enjoyment. At the same time, the countryside surrounding England's market towns provides for a wide range of leisure activities and represents a unique asset.

## About this guide

This guide aims to help community groups, market town partnerships or other representative bodies to assess whether their town might benefit more from visitors. It then discusses the steps that town partnerships can take to maximise the tourism potential of their town. Finally it discusses how partnerships can produce a tourism vision and tourism action plan. These processes will help town partnerships develop projects that are right for their town, with the right structures to take them forward.

This eight step guide is based on the Countryside Agency's market towns healthcheck, vision and action plan processes. You can find more information about these in the **healthcheck handbook** at: [www.countryside.gov.uk/newenterprise/market\\_towns/healthcheck.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/newenterprise/market_towns/healthcheck.asp)

Many of the steps suggested here will use the same information that is gathered through the healthcheck worksheets. These can be found at:

[www.countryside.gov.uk/newenterprise/market\\_towns/worksheets.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/newenterprise/market_towns/worksheets.asp)

Worksheet EC5 (Economic worksheet 5: tourism and visitor services) will have particular relevance.

However, results from other worksheets covering the town's wider economy, environment, transport, social and community aspects, will also be helpful.

In this guide we use the term 'visitors' broadly, encompassing those who come to a town to see friends and relatives, for a day out, to visit an attraction, for shopping, school trips, special events, and more. The town may act as a gateway to the surrounding countryside, or as a focus for culture, the arts, local markets and events.

## Getting it right for visitors

Whatever the reason for their trip, visitors will require basic services and facilities such as: parking, toilets, cafes, pubs and information. Other elements, including the fabric of your town, its architecture, cleanliness and overall ambience, all determine how appealing the destination as a whole is to visitors. The warmth of welcome visitors receive, as well as the quality of service provided, also play a part in the overall visitor experience.

Getting these things right will not only better satisfy visitors, but will also improve your town's appeal to those living locally, helping enhance overall quality of life.

## Involving others

As the visitor experience is made up of a wide range of elements, it is essential that any plans to make the most of tourism have the full involvement and commitment of key stakeholders. In addition to the **local community**, key stakeholders are likely to include the groups and organisations set out on the next page.

Key stakeholders	Areas of interest/responsibility
Local authority - parish council - town council - district council - county council - unitary authority	Public toilets Signposting Accessibility Tourist Information Centres Tourist Information Points Street cleaning Sunday trading Car/coach parks Highways issues Rights of way Development control Health & hygiene Tourism marketing & print Events organisation/promotion Quality standards
Local tourism association	Represent member views Tourism marketing, individually and collectively
Local hotels association	Represent member views Tourism marketing
Local traders/retail association	Represent member views Retail marketing Events
Chamber of commerce	Represent member views Events Business support channel
Local special interest groups, e.g. heritage society	Special interest print Websites
Regional Tourist Board	Tourism marketing Business support Tourism training Research Quality assurance
Transport operators	Buses Trains

## The role of tourism in your town

Determining the role tourism might play in a town's regeneration is a complex process. You will need to consider:

- your town's potential for attracting visitors – from a visitor's perspective; and
- how tourism might fit within the whole range of possible ways to revitalise your town.

These assessments will need to be made in a realistic way, based on careful evaluation and research.

The Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative healthcheck, which many towns have gone through or are about to embark upon, can form the basis of this work.

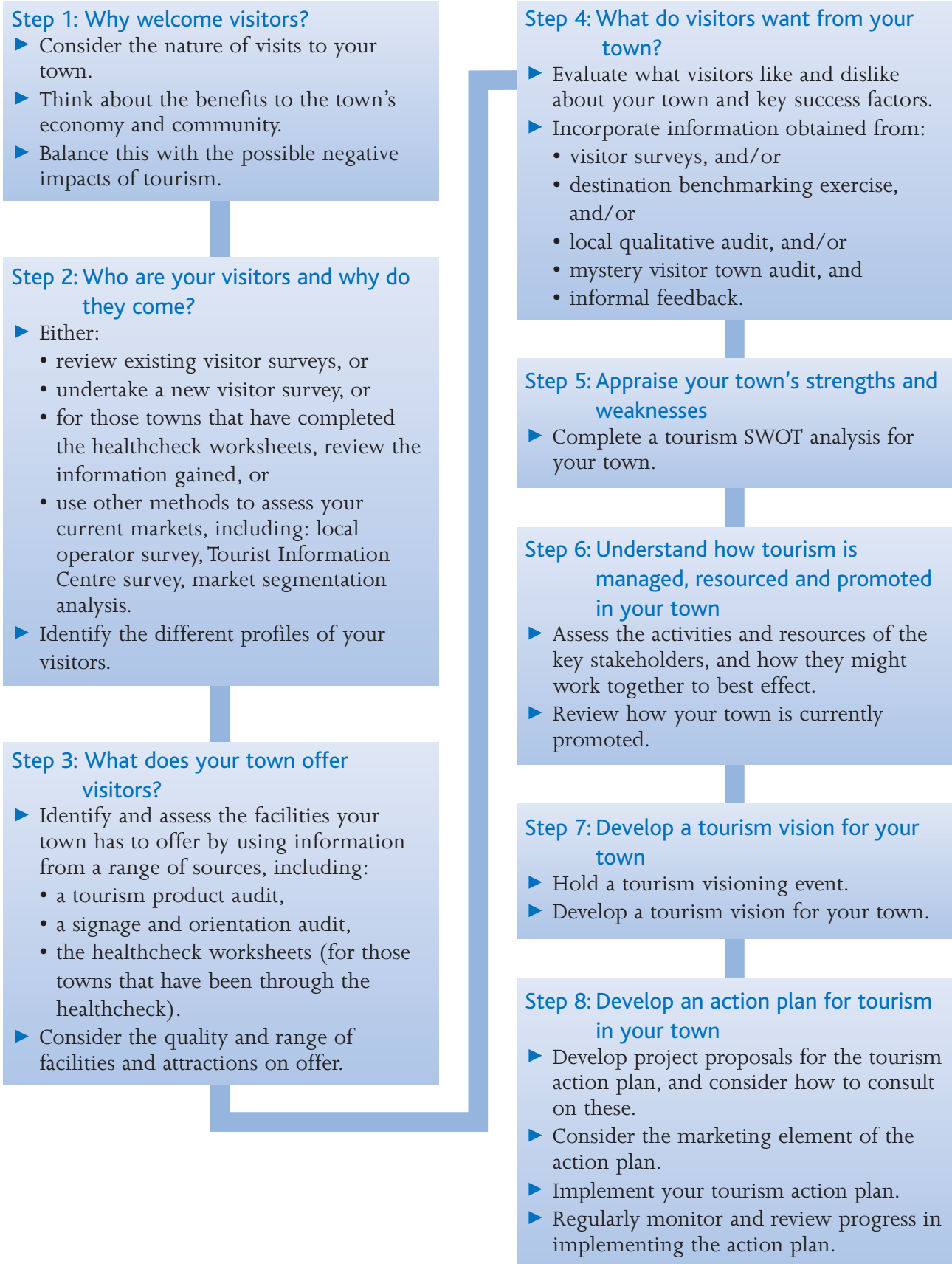
## What is the Market Towns Initiative healthcheck?

The key element of the Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative is the healthcheck. The healthcheck is part of a web-based toolkit ([www.countryside.gov.uk/market-towns](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/market-towns)) which is available for all market towns to use.

Communities use the healthcheck as a tool to identify their town's strengths and weaknesses, then determine how to address them. The healthcheck not only covers the whole town and its surrounding countryside, but enables people to look at a wide range of connected issues that affect overall quality of life.

The healthcheck consists of a series of worksheets containing questions about environmental, social and economic issues in the town. One of the worksheets relates to tourism and visitor services. Information from the worksheets can help you to draw up a vision for your town, from which a local plan of action can be prepared. The action plan is endorsed by a local/regional partnership of organisations, some of whom may be able to offer funding to support practical and imaginative projects.

Figure 1: Overview of the eight step process





## Step 1: Why welcome visitors?

This section explores the nature of visits to market towns, the importance of encouraging visitor spending and how this income can benefit the whole community.

### The nature of visits to market towns

People come to market towns for a wide variety of reasons. Their trips may be day visits (originating from and returning home), short breaks of one to three nights, or longer holidays of four nights or more. Some visitors to your town may come from overseas.

Unless your town is located in a busy holiday area, the number of staying visitors (that is people who stay overnight in your town) is likely to be small. Most visitors to market towns come from within a ten-mile radius, often for shopping<sup>1</sup>.

Market research shows that most visitors to market towns travel by car (87%), with 5% travelling by bus or coach, 1% on a coach tour, 1% by train, 2% by cycle and 1% walking.

#### Day visitors' profile

A day visitor is defined as someone spending three hours or more away from home where the visit is not undertaken on a regular basis. Their home is not in the town or surrounding countryside.

Day visitors might visit a town:

- for shopping, eating and entertainment;
- to use facilities and services offered by public and private sector organisations in the town;
- to visit attractions and local sights;
- for recreation and to enjoy the surrounding countryside;
- for business or education.

The average length of stay in market towns is approximately 3.2 hours.

#### Overnight visitors' profile

Overnight visitor accommodation includes:

- hotels, guesthouses, inns and bed & breakfasts;
- self-catering flats, cottages and boats;
- youth hostels and other group accommodation;
- holiday parks, caravan and camp sites;
- accommodation belonging to friends and relations.

Typical visitors include:

- those who return to holiday accommodation outside the town and hinterland that day;
- those who are staying overnight in the town or surrounding hinterland.

They may be visiting for holiday, social, educational or business reasons. The average length of stay in market towns is 6.3 days.

### How much visitors spend on their trip

The money that day and overnight visitors spend during their visit will bring direct benefits to businesses that cater for visitors (such as hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops) and their employees. By spending money, visitors help to create and sustain employment in the town.

The average spend for visitors to market towns is approximately:

- £26.55 per day for overnight visitors, and
- £12.45 for day visitors.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of how this money is spent.

Table 1: Average spend per person per day in market towns (all visitors)

Eating and drinking	£3.55
Shopping	£6.80
Entertainment (entrance fees, leisure activities)	£0.90
Travel and transport	£1.20
Overnight accommodation (if applicable)	£14.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>£26.55</b>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all data provided in this report is from the English Regional Tourist Boards' Destination Benchmarking research programme. For further information about this programme, see page 11.



This spend has a 'ripple' (or multiplier) effect throughout the local economy. Some of the money spent in 'front line' businesses (such as hotels, shops and cafes) will be paid to employees as wages; they will in turn spend some of this income locally. Other visitor spending will benefit suppliers of goods and services to the front line businesses.

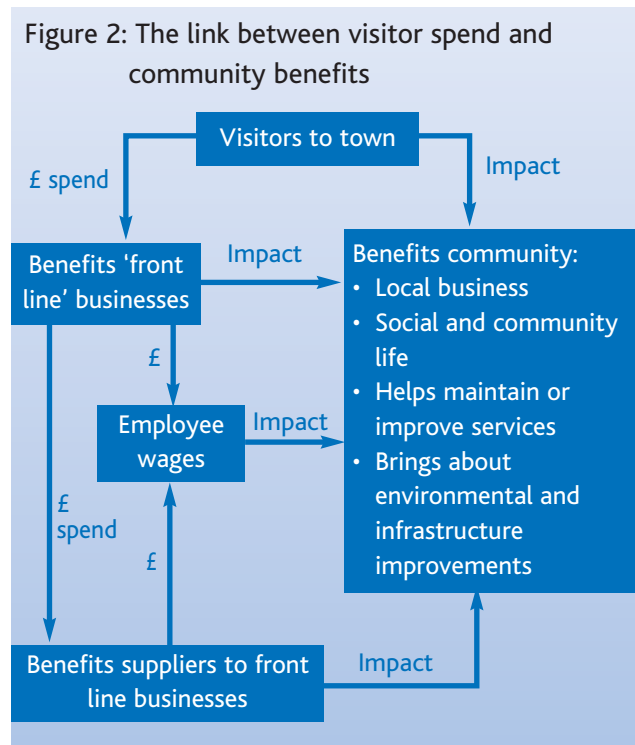
### Other benefits that visitors bring

Benefits go beyond those 'front line' businesses that cater for visitors and include 'softer' community benefits. Research<sup>2</sup> carried out in 11 settlements (including some market towns) identified the following benefits:

- Tourism can increase the range, size and viability of local businesses such as general stores, post offices, garages, pubs and restaurants, which are also used by the community.
- Visitors can contribute to, and improve, the social and community life of settlements. For example, by supporting local charities and taking part in fairs and music festivals.
- Tourism can lead to improvements to, or maintenance of, services such as the fire and health services.
- It can also lead to improvements in infrastructure such as road improvements and upgrading sewage works.
- Finally, a healthy local economy well supported by tourism can result in improvements to the built environment.

Figure 2 illustrates how visitor spend impacts on the local economy, environment and community.

**In 2002-03 the English Tourism Council (now VisitBritain) commissioned a survey of residents living in tourist areas in England to find out their attitudes to tourism<sup>3</sup>. Of those living in the survey areas, 94% believed that "on the whole tourism is good for the area" while 93% were proud that their area is worth visiting.**



### Measuring the benefits of tourism activity

A number of measures can be used to quantify the benefits of tourism activity at a local level. Three existing surveys that are led by the Regional Tourist Boards are summarised below.

- **Visits to tourist attractions** – information is collected annually. Participation is voluntary, but most attractions do complete annual survey forms.
- **Accommodation occupancy** – monthly occupancy data is collected for serviced accommodation (hotels, guest houses and bed & breakfast establishments). Indicative occupancy levels are available for different location types.
- **Tourist Information Centre enquiries** – these are recorded monthly, by type of enquiry (face-to-face, telephone, fax and email).

This information can be obtained from your Regional Tourist Board and is also available on [www.staruk.org.uk](http://www.staruk.org.uk) and [www.tourismtrade.org.uk](http://www.tourismtrade.org.uk)

Access to some of the information may incur an administration fee due to the time involved in generating the requested data.

<sup>2</sup> *The impact of tourism on rural settlements* (Countryside Agency, 1996). Settlements surveyed: Abbotsbury, Blakeney, Bodenham, Moretonhamstead, Helmsley, Beer, Rothbury, Wroxham and Hoveton, Fakenham, Alnwick, Malton.

<sup>3</sup> *Community perception survey* (English Tourism Council, 2003).

## Potential impacts of greater numbers of visitors

As well as bringing benefits, more visitors to the town can result in increased pressure on sensitive areas and on services and infrastructure which may originally have been designed to meet only residents' needs. Local people may consider that visitors sometimes cause additional litter, traffic congestion, problems with car parking and environmental degradation.

Market towns that are 'honey pots' need to have the right infrastructure in place to deal with visitor pressure. There must be provision for traffic control, visitor management and conservation. Any market town action plan that includes tourism development will therefore need to take careful consideration of visitor management objectives and environmental impacts, and include measures to counteract the potential problems that more visitors can bring. Balancing the potential benefits against the potential problems can be challenging when preparing the action plan.

Many issues can be addressed at a local level by finding ways to manage your visitors' requirements, such as sensitive marketing, providing additional litter bins, park & ride schemes and clear signage to car parks. Your local authority should be able to advise on this.

### Step 1 summary: Why welcome visitors?



## Step 2: Who are your visitors and why do they come?

A visitor will view the town differently from a local resident, because they have different needs. When assessing your town's tourism potential, it is important to see the town through the visitor's eyes, and to understand what they require for a successful visit that meets their expectations.

You should start the process by identifying who your town's visitors currently are, and the reasons why they come to the town. Those towns that have undertaken the healthcheck may already have some information about this from relevant worksheets.

Gathering good information at this stage on existing visitor profiles will allow you to reach a realistic view about what you might try to achieve from tourism. It will also ensure that any action you decide to take is relevant to existing and potential visitors.

### Who visits market towns?

Regional Tourist Boards have carried out visitor surveys for many market towns across England through the national destination benchmarking research programme. The results of this provide valuable information about the characteristics of visitors to the town, why they come, what they do, the length of their stay and how much they spend. It also provides information about how satisfied visitors are with their experience and any improvements they would like to see, as well as their likes and dislikes about the town. Finally, it gives towns information about how they compare with other towns in their region and with other towns with similar characteristics.

You should contact your Regional Tourist Board Research Department for further information.

The central benchmarking database provides the following typical visitor characteristics:

- Purpose of visit:
  - 77% are on a leisure trip,
  - 12% are visiting friends and relatives,
  - 11% are on a special shopping trip,
- 44% are repeat visitors,
- the average party size is 2.97 people,
- 2% are part of an organised group,
- in terms of socio-economic group:
  - 19% are AB (professionals, senior and middle managers),
  - 37% are C1 (all other white collar occupations),
  - 24% are C2 (skilled manual workers),
  - 20% are DE (semi and unskilled manual workers, the long-term unemployed, state pensioners etc).

### Why do they visit?

The database also provides information about the main reason for visiting market towns. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Main reason for visiting market towns

Sightseeing	28%
Shopping	16%
Market	15%
Visit to a specific attraction in the town	12%
Visiting friends and relatives	8%
Somewhere for lunch	5%
Antique hunting	4%
Just passing through	4%
Somewhere for coffee or tea	2%
Use a specific service (bank, post office, chemist)	1%
Visit to a specific event in the town	1%
Use the toilets	<1%
Visit the Tourist Information Centre	<1%

## Identifying your visitors through a visitor survey

A visitor survey is the ideal way in which to assess your current tourism market. Carrying out a bespoke visitor survey in your town will provide more detailed information about the specific make up of visitors.

Surveys may be commissioned from the Regional Tourist Board, an independent market research company or the local authority. Ideally, the survey should take place over the peak visitor months (June to September). Remember to check that this work has not already been carried out by contacting your Regional Tourist Board and local authority.

Visitor surveys can be used to gain information about:

- visitor characteristics and profile,
- reasons for visiting the town,
- activities undertaken and facilities used,
- how long visitors stay,
- how much visitors spend in the town,
- visitor satisfaction with existing facilities,
- visitor likes and dislikes,
- suggestions for improvements to the destination.

It is also possible to use the survey to seek visitors' opinions about issues that are specific to the local area.

Not all towns will have the resources or time to complete a full visitor survey of this kind. However, you will be able to gain a good idea from local people who have direct contact with visitors. This will include retail, attraction and service business staff, Tourist Information Centre staff and accommodation providers. They usually know who their visitors are and where they come from.

### Other local surveys

There are two additional types of local survey that could be undertaken to gather useful background information. The information provided by the surveys could also inform other areas of the market towns healthcheck and action plan.

### Local operator survey

Accommodation and visitor attraction operators deal directly with current visitors to the town and

surrounding areas. You could ask them to provide information that covers the following:

- the number of visitors to the attraction or the level of accommodation occupancy (monthly);
- opening times (seasonality may be an important issue in your town), charges and standards;
- the origin and type of visitor, length of stay, reason for visit, activities during visit, spend and likes and dislikes;
- the operator's current activities (including which activities produce most business for them);
- development plans they have for their business and any assistance sought to realise these;
- any suggestions they have for developing the town in order to improve customer satisfaction and help to grow tourism;
- whether they are part of a business forum/traders association/chamber of commerce.

**Appendix 1** is a sample questionnaire for local operators to complete. This could form the basis for your survey, and could be adapted to include any specific issues that you want to explore.

We suggest that you try to cover the following range of serviced accommodation providers: hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses.

### Tourist Information Centre survey

You could also ask your local Tourist Information Centre to complete a questionnaire. This information should cover:

- the total number of enquiries;
- a breakdown of this total by origin (local/out of area, UK/overseas) and by enquiry method (face-to-face, telephone, email, fax);
- the number of accommodation bookings;
- the views of Tourist Information Centre staff about why people visit the area;
- the most frequent requests for information;
- the printed literature they need to meet these requests;
- any products they need to meet visitor requests.

A sample questionnaire for the Tourist Information Centres to complete is included at **Appendix 2**.

### Analysing your market by category

By collecting together the information you have gathered so far, you should be in a position to produce a 'market segmentation analysis'. This is the process by which different types of visitor to the town are put into various categories, or 'segments'.

You may be able, for example, to segment your market:

- by geographic origin, eg domestic (UK) visitor, overseas visitor;
- by socio-economic group, eg ranging from professional occupations to retired people and unemployed people;
- by length of stay, eg day visitor, staying visitor;
- by activity or special interest, eg cyclists, walkers, school groups;
- by lifestyle characteristics, eg 'empty nesters' whose children have left home.

Analysing your market in this way allows you to identify common characteristics that can be used to reach this market. For example, if you wish to market the town to cyclists you could do so via relevant journals and websites. It also enables you to plan for their product needs by providing, for example, well marked cycle routes, literature to support these routes, cycle-friendly accommodation and secure cycle parking.

**Appendix 3** is a sample market segmentation analysis form. You can use this as the basis for analysing what you know about your town's market segments, including what attracts visitors to your town and the facilities that each segment wishes to use.

Step 2 summary: Who are your visitors and why do they come?



## Step 3: What does your town offer visitors?

You will now have a good deal of information about who visits your town and why. The next stage is to carry out an audit of the range of facilities and opportunities that are available for visitors to enjoy when they are there.

### Auditing what your town offers

You can evaluate what your town offers (its 'tourism product') from the visitor's perspective on two different levels:

- the number and range of facilities and attractions, and;
- the quality of those facilities and attractions.

An audit of the tourism product should focus primarily on those facilities most required by visitors. A sample tourism product audit is included at [Appendix 4](#).

The audit should be as stringent as possible and should be viewed as if 'through the eyes of' visitors. It should draw on a number of sources, including:

- the Regional Tourist Board database of accommodation, attractions and events;
- the local authority tourism office, through guide books and listings;
- the Tourist Information Centre's listings and guides;
- local knowledge;
- trade associations;
- the Internet;
- trade directories;
- local surveys.

The availability of facilities in the town and surrounding area should be noted numerically and by type and feature. It may be helpful to colour code a large-scale map of the town and hinterland.

The audit should not simply record numbers, but should also provide an idea of the facilities' quality. For example, any VisitBritain, AA and RAC gradings awarded to accommodation providers should be noted. If few providers have achieved these gradings,

it may be necessary to take action to improve the accommodation offered and/or ensure a 'spread' of accommodation in order to meet market needs and put the town on a better footing with competitors.

You could also assess how easy it is for visitors to find their way to and around the town. This should take into account road and pedestrian signs, tourist information points, Tourist Information Centres and trails. A sample signage and orientation audit is included at [Appendix 5](#).

For towns that have completed the healthcheck, a helpful source of information will be the responses to the healthcheck worksheets on retail and town services (EC2), sport, leisure and open space (S5) and culture and heritage (S6). Although these worksheets will have been completed with the local community in mind, the facilities under consideration may also be available to visitors.

**Step 3 summary: What does your town offer visitors?**

Identify and assess the facilities your town has to offer by using information from a range of sources, including:

- a tourism product audit
- a signage and orientation audit
- the healthcheck worksheets (for those towns that have been through the healthcheck)

Consider the quality and range of facilities and attractions on offer

Proceed to step 4

## Step 4: What do visitors want from your town?

A good understanding of your visitors’ needs and expectations is crucial before you can identify a way forward for tourism in the town.

The visitor experience in any destination is made up of a wide range of factors, all of which can impact on visitor satisfaction. Attractions and events may be prime motivators for visits, but visitors also require a variety of other services and facilities – including parking, places to eat and drink, information so that they can find their way around, toilets and a good mix of shops. They will also look for an attractive and well-maintained environment, a warm welcome and good quality service.

Visitor satisfaction with each of these elements, as well as the overall offer, will determine the likelihood of them returning to the town and recommending it to others. Getting it right can clearly have significant knock-on benefits in terms of attracting new visitors and encouraging people to return.

### Likes and dislikes of visitors to market towns

The destination benchmarking database reveals some of the typical likes and dislikes of visitors to market towns, as well as suggestions for improvements. These are set out in Table 3.

Table 3: What visitors like and dislike about market towns

Visitor likes	Visitor dislikes	Suggested facilities and services that would add to enjoyment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pleasant ambience/ atmosphere</li> <li>• a unique feature of the town (river, harbour, abbey)</li> <li>• individuality &amp; variety of shops</li> <li>• quaint/olde worlde</li> <li>• picturesque/attractive</li> <li>• friendly</li> <li>• peaceful/quiet/compact/ relaxing</li> <li>• food/tea shops/restaurants</li> <li>• market/farmers’ market</li> <li>• buildings/architecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traffic congestion</li> <li>• parking problems</li> <li>• limited range of shops</li> <li>• shop closure (Sundays, early closing)</li> <li>• poor weather</li> <li>• unclean toilets</li> <li>• litter</li> <li>• poor range of eating places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more/better variety of shops</li> <li>• better range and variety of tea shops/eating facilities/unique offers</li> <li>• more parking</li> <li>• pedestrianisation of centre/main street</li> <li>• better toilets</li> <li>• measures to relieve traffic congestion</li> <li>• extended shop opening hours</li> </ul>



## Key success factors

There are a number of elements that appear to be critical to the success of market towns as visitor destinations. Towns that are performing well, and those that seek to meet the aspirations of visitors, will possess many of the following:

- a distinctive product offer that differentiates the town from the everyday shopping and leisure experience;
- ideally, though not necessarily, a unique attraction, environmental features, event or festival;
- a positive, welcoming atmosphere and ambience that promotes a sense of well being and relaxation;
- easy parking and traffic-free areas that allow the visitor to amble and browse in safe, uncongested surroundings;
- a quality environment that is clearly managed and cared for, reflected in the maintenance of buildings, street cleanliness, planting and floral displays, and clean public toilets;
- an attractive built fabric, with vernacular architecture and historic buildings adding to the town's distinctiveness and charm;
- a distinctive retail offer, with individual and unusual shops, possibly developing particular themes such as antiques, books, arts and crafts. This will help you to be able to promote leisure shopping visits from a distance, particularly if a number of similar speciality outlets are on offer in the town;
- a distinctive food and drink offer, promoting local produce, traditional pubs, attractive tea rooms and coffee shops that will encourage the visitor to stop off, linger and stay longer in the destination;
- extended opening hours to reflect the needs of visitors (to include, for example, Sunday opening, no half-day closing and early evening opening for food and drink outlets);
- a significant local catchment, whether from the resident population within an hour or so by car from the town, or from proximity to major attractions and visitor destinations.

You will need to form a realistic view about the strength of the current and potential offer in your town in relation to these elements.

## Measuring visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction with the town's tourism product is an ideal measure of the quality of that product and how well it is meeting visitor needs. In addition to visitor surveys, there are a number of other ways to assess the product.

### Destination benchmarking

Benchmarking is a useful technique for measuring visitor satisfaction and comparing performance to improve the delivery of services and facilities to visitors.

Information collected through the Regional Tourist Board destination benchmarking programme identifies which aspects of market towns visitors are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with. Visitors are asked to show their satisfaction with the town's facilities and services by scoring them from 'very good' (score 5) to 'very poor' (score 1). In all, 37 indicators of visitor satisfaction are recorded, such as 'ease of finding your way around'. The score results for each are compared with data that shows the average achieved by other market towns. The answers highlight where the town is competitive and where it does not achieve its potential compared to the national average. This information can then be fed into the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis (see Step 5).

**Appendix 6** sets out sample indicators of visitor satisfaction that you could use. You could ask visitors to score their satisfaction against the different elements on a similar scale of 1 to 5.

### Local qualitative audit

A sample local qualitative audit is included at **Appendix 7**. This has been designed around the key success factors discussed above, and will therefore focus on those aspects of market towns that are most important to visitor satisfaction.

### Mystery visitor town audit

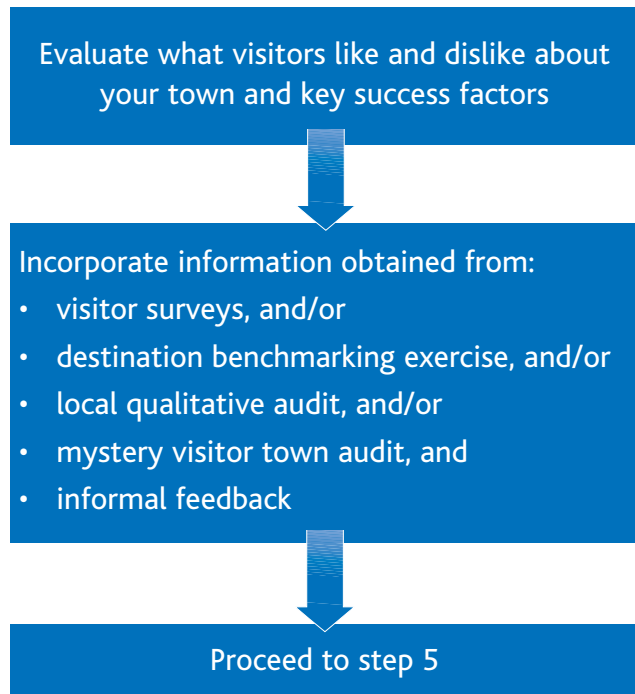
An alternative to a visitor survey is a mystery visitor town audit. This is another benchmarking tool which can be commissioned from your Regional Tourist Board. This involves appraising the town using a specially designed evaluation document. It produces results that can be compared with other market towns that have completed the evaluation.

### Obtain a 'proxy' view

If you do not have the resources to commission or undertake the above, you can gain a 'proxy' view of the town from those who have direct contact with visitors, or from members of the market town partnership. They will be able to give you anecdotal feedback on visitor satisfaction. Contacts include:

- staff from the Tourist Information Centre;
- retail, attraction and service business staff;
- public service employees, including car park attendants, traffic wardens and bus drivers;
- accommodation providers; and
- your Regional Tourist Board – they may be able to provide an independent professional view of the tourism product.

Step 4 summary: What do visitors want from your town?



# Step 5: Appraise your town’s strengths and weaknesses

During this stage, you can use information gathered during steps 2, 3 and 4 to determine where the town and surrounding countryside meets visitor expectations and needs, and where there are gaps.

## A tourism SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis – identifying and ranking key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats – is a widely used strategic planning technique. It represents a focused way to distil the key issues emerging from the information that has been gathered, and helps to shape the subsequent visioning and action planning processes.

You may wish to involve a wide group of stakeholders in completing your tourism SWOT analysis, for example by holding a public meeting. Undertaking a tourism SWOT should help ensure that the visitor perspective is considered alongside the wider needs of the market town so that tourism benefits can be maximised while costs and negative impacts are minimised. This is a fundamental principle of good destination management.

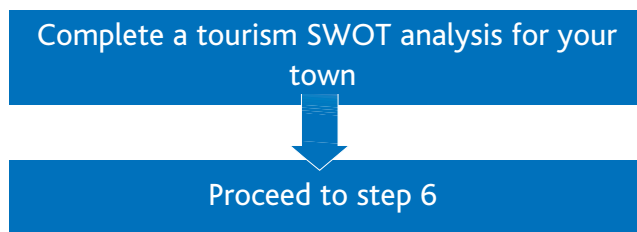
We suggest that the tourism SWOT considers aspects such as:

- organisations and resources,
- markets and marketing activity,
- product and development activity.

A sample SWOT analysis is shown below.

Having completed your SWOT analysis, you will need to draw conclusions about how to maximise the town’s strengths and opportunities and to minimise its weaknesses and threats.

### Step 5 summary: Appraise your town’s strengths and weaknesses



Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• popular destination for day visits</li> <li>• several heritage sites within the town</li> <li>• variety of shops selling a wide range of goods for visitors</li> <li>• covered market for produce sales</li> <li>• regionally renowned restaurant</li> <li>• river runs through the town</li> <li>• easy access to attractive countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• occupancy levels in serviced accommodation low at weekends</li> <li>• only two star accommodation</li> <li>• public transport limited to peak commuter times</li> <li>• the only cafe closes before lunchtime</li> <li>• only one bank</li> <li>• early closing on Wednesday</li> <li>• no footpath from long stay car park to town centre</li> <li>• car parks full on market days, visitors drive away without stopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new business opportunities including restaurants with wider market appeal</li> <li>• lunchtime trade for pubs and cafes</li> <li>• automatic cash dispenser in shop</li> <li>• cycle hire near river tow path</li> <li>• meeting with traders to encourage all-day opening on Wednesday</li> <li>• creating a heritage trail between the various sites</li> <li>• increased promotion and signposting, especially if by-pass created</li> <li>• using the market hall for an antiques market (possibly Wednesday)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possible by-pass</li> <li>• several high street shop leases shortly up for renewal and increased cost likely</li> <li>• new car park pricing policy that will deter long stay visits</li> <li>• further traffic congestion anticipated when water services are upgraded</li> <li>• reduced train timetable during the day and at weekends</li> <li>• independent pharmacy closed</li> <li>• country house hotel seeking planning permission for private house</li> </ul>

## Step 6: Understand how tourism is managed, resourced and promoted in your town

### The key stakeholders

This guide has already highlighted that the visitor experience is made up of a number of elements, the delivery of which is under the control of various key players. All have a stake in the success of the market town as a visitor destination, and a role to play in its future.

Clearly it will be important to ensure that the activities of stakeholders are mutually supportive rather than cutting across one another. Working together in this way will ensure the most efficient and effective use of available resources, as well as maximising tourism benefits to the local area.

### Auditing stakeholder activities and resources

Auditing stakeholder activities and resources at this stage will provide a useful input to the action planning process. For each organisation that has an involvement in tourism in your town, it would be helpful to gather the following information:

- the visitor-related activities they carry out,
- how much they spend on each activity,
- any additional resources available,
- specialist skills within the organisation.

You should also try to obtain a copy of the organisation's formal constitution, if it has one, so that you are aware of its key objectives.

This process will help identify particular strengths as well as any overlapping activities. It may also show areas of activity where organisations or individuals could take a lead on potential projects emerging through the action plan.

Mechanisms for joint working that are currently in place should also be identified.

### Reviewing how your town is currently promoted

A number of the organisations that you will have identified above will be involved to some degree in promoting the town to visitors. This might include one or more of the following:

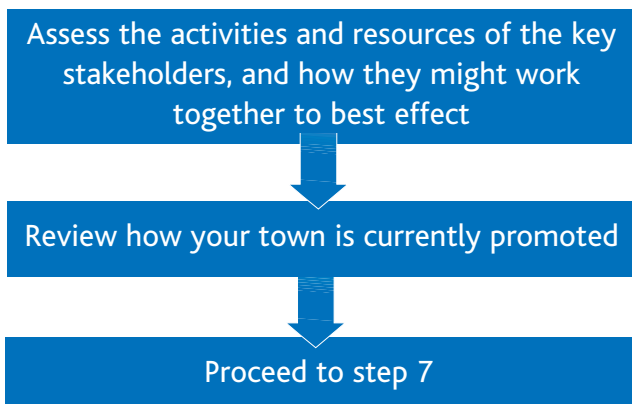
- leaflet production,
- leaflet distribution,
- direct mail (including email),
- advertising,
- website,
- special promotions,
- press coverage.

In addition, tourist information points, the Tourist Information Centre, and signposting all have a role to play in informing the visitor at various stages in their trip.

Carrying out a more detailed review of these marketing activities would give you a better understanding of what they are trying to achieve. For each piece of print or other promotional tool, the following information should be collected:

- current marketing activity/name of piece of print/website/other campaign;
- organisation responsible for it;
- who it is aimed at and what it is seeking to achieve;
- a brief description of content;
- how it is distributed, how much is distributed and how often it is updated;
- how effective it is;
- what it cost;
- how it is funded.

**Step 6 summary: Understand how tourism is managed, resourced and promoted in your town**



## Step 7: Develop a tourism vision for your town

Articulating a tourism vision for your town requires a wide range of views and data to be drawn together. The vision should deliver a future for the destination that reflects the aspirations of all those who use the town, whether as a place to live, to work, or to visit. This stage requires consultation with the local community.

The **healthcheck handbook** provides further general guidance about developing a vision and visioning events.

### A tourism visioning workshop

It is important that your town's existing and potential tourism role is given adequate consideration in the visioning process. The best vehicle for this is some form of tourism visioning event.

At this event, the data and views of all those consulted can be considered by key stakeholders, and a direction for future tourism activity agreed. The SWOT analysis (see Step 5) is a good starting point for this.

The stakeholders listed on page 5 should be involved in this event, as they are likely to have a role to play in delivering and resourcing the future tourism vision. You should also give individual operators the opportunity to get involved.

It may well be desirable to ask an independent tourism professional to facilitate the tourism visioning event. This may be someone from the Regional Tourist Board, or an independent consultant. Some Regional Tourist Boards employ Rural Tourism Officers with particular expertise in this field; all have Development Teams that are familiar with tourism market and product assessments and with the action planning process. Their experience will be invaluable in helping you to sift the information collected and identify real areas of potential from which action plan priorities can be developed. They should also be able to provide a market context for the tourism visioning, in terms of the wider regional tourism view and future market prospects.

The objective in terms of outputs from this workshop should be:

- **Vision** – an overview of where the market town, as a visitor destination, wants to be in 10 years time, and what the group wants tourism to do for them. Bear in mind that this should be a dynamic statement which should be continuously reviewed and updated. You should also make sure that your tourism vision does not conflict with the overall vision of the town which may have been developed through the market towns healthcheck process.
- **Positioning** – a summary of the competitive positioning of the market town as a visitor destination, identifying its unique selling points and particular strengths compared with other destinations.
- **Market focus** – identification of priority visitor markets for the town, together with routes to these markets.
- **Product development needs** – identification of key development projects required to meet the needs of these priority markets. In other words, consider any projects that might fill existing gaps between what is currently offered to visitors and what they might want. This would include, for example, a project that encourages B & B accommodation where there is sufficient demand.
- **Resource potential** – an indication of potential structures, people and funding to lead and deliver a programme of action.

In essence, the tourism visioning workshop should produce the basic outline of the tourism action plan. The finer detail of the action plan can be added as projects are worked up and support for them tested with key partners.

### A sample vision statement:

**“That by 2007, Sandown be a vibrant, prosperous, and safe all-year-round resort for both residents and visitors to enjoy.”**  
(Sandown, Isle of Wight Market Towns Initiative Vision Statement 2002)

Step 7 summary: Develop a tourism vision for your town



## Step 8: Develop an action plan for tourism in your town

The tourism action plan is essentially a series of integrated and mutually supportive projects relating to tourism marketing and development. A means to deliver and resource each project should also be included in the plan. You may decide that a small group should draw up proposals for the tourism action plan first, and then circulate these for wider consultation amongst stakeholders.

The **healthcheck handbook** gives general guidance about action plans. The tourism action plan will be a subset of any wider action plan developed for the town as a whole.

### Structure of the tourism action plan

Your tourism action plan should be focused around visitor needs. Some of the identified requirements will be specific to particular market segments (eg walking and cycling routes and facilities); others will cut across different market segments (eg quality of accommodation, attraction and facility opening hours). You will need to prioritise projects over the period of the action plan, taking into account visitor needs and benefits, potential costs and funding availability, and project feasibility/ease of implementation.

You can see some completed action plans by registering on the Countryside Agency's market towns learning network:

<http://mt.net.countryside.gov.uk>

The action plan should include the following details:

- The most appropriate mechanism/body for delivering these projects and co-ordinating activity locally.
- Potential sources of funding and who will be responsible for sourcing these funds.
- The required people resource eg whether this can be delivered through a Market Town Co-ordinator and/or the agreement of partners to lead or at least put time into progressing projects.
- The potential for partnership with key organisations – for funding, expertise, joint initiatives, and access to other sources of help.

These might include:

- Regional Tourist Board
- Regional Development Agency
- Defra
- County Council
- District Council
- Business Link
- Small Business Service
- Area Museums Service
- Countryside Agency
- When the projects/activities will take place.
- Any requirements for business support and training to help deliver the programme.
- Procedures for monitoring and reviewing progress. This will help ensure that the strategic objectives of the vision are being met and that targets are being achieved on time.

### The marketing element of your tourism action plan

It is then a good idea to consider the best way to market your product. You will need to:

- refine the information you have about the town's current markets – this may involve using professional input at the tourism visioning workshop to shape the segmentation that emerged from Step 2;
- then use this assessment to prioritise target markets and to identify those that should be the focus of future marketing activity.

Having identified your target markets, you should be able to draw up an outline of the marketing plan. First assess the most effective way to reach each of these markets, then identify specific actions.

The key steps in this process are to:

- match markets to marketing and information initiatives (see example at [Appendix 8](#));
- then add details of promotional initiatives into your tourism action plan, with identified leads for each, approximate costings, and potential sources of funding (see example at [Appendix 9](#)).



## Implementing your tourism action plan

Implementation of the tourism action plan will clearly need to be integrated with any delivery mechanisms and overall structures established for the market town as a whole. However, there may well be a need for a more focused sub-group to oversee the tourism programme. This group might also provide an on-going forum for key stakeholders who might lead and fund tourism projects.

It may be necessary to review your tourism vision and action plan. Community events should be held to gain commitment from the local community to any changes.

Step 8 summary: Develop an action plan for tourism in your town



# Conclusions

By following the steps contained in this guide, you should have the information and tools you need to make the most of your tourism assets. This guidance covers the basic processes, and you may well wish to adapt these to suit your local circumstances.

You might also find helpful the examples of good practice that have been put together by the Regional Tourist Boards through the destination benchmarking programme. These case studies provide examples where weaknesses in the product offer were identified through benchmarking research, and subsequent action taken to secure resources and tackle the problem. Case studies produced to date include: the retail offer, car parking, signposting and rural destination management. You should contact your Regional Tourist Board for further information about these.

Other best practice case studies will be added to the Countryside Agency's market towns website during 2004-05.

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## Appendix 1: Operator survey

Name and location of business:

Contact name and telephone number:

Email address:

### Your facility

#### 1 - Accommodation

Please provide details of the facilities you offer.

<input type="text"/>	Number of rooms/units	<input type="text"/>	Total bedspaces
<input type="text"/>	Standard	<input type="text"/>	Tariff (single/double/weekly etc)
<input type="text"/>	Months of opening		

Additional facilities

#### 2 - Attractions

Please provide details of:

<input type="text"/>	Months of opening	<input type="text"/>	Admission charges
----------------------	-------------------	----------------------	-------------------

### Your business

3 - How long have you operated a tourism business and what was your principal motivation in setting up a tourism business in/around **Anytown**?

4 - For **accommodation providers**, what has been your average room/unit occupancy % over the past 3 years (rooms/units sold, by rooms/units available). Is the trend stable, increasing or decreasing?

5 - For **attractions**, what were your visitor numbers for the past 3 years?

6 - What has been the trend in your profitability in the past 3 years?

7 - Would you like additional business, and when (weekdays, weekends, particular months)?

8 - Do you have any physical development plans for your business? (Please give details)

### Your visitors

9 - Why are the people who stay with you visiting **Anytown** and the surrounding area?

10 - What are they doing while they are in the area?

11 - Where have they been before visiting you, and where are they heading for when they leave?

12 - What is your main guest/visitor market? i.e. domestic/overseas, leisure/business

13 - What do they like and dislike most about **Anytown** and the surrounding area?

14 - Can you list your most important sources of business (eg business visits, short breaks, overseas visitors, visits from local schools, coach groups, special interest visitors, main/second holidays etc).

**Promoting your business**

15 - Which are your most successful ways to advertise/secure bookings? (eg local authority guide, Internet, tourist board guide, direct mail).

16 - How much benefit do you get from the TICs at **xxx and yyy** (estimate number of direct bookings, and indirect bookings if possible). How could this be improved?

17 - Do you have any comments on the way **Anytown** and the surrounding area are currently promoted, and suggestions for future promotion?

**Business support**

18 - What support, from the Borough Council or other organisations, would be of greatest benefit to you in the development of your business?

19 - Are there any specific training needs (eg customer care, Internet marketing, website development) which would benefit your own business or other operators in the wider **Anytown** area?

20 - Are there any aspects of the tourism product and support infrastructure in **Anytown** and the surrounding area which require improvement, or provide opportunities for future development and enhancement of the destination?

21 - Any other comments you would like to make.

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.*

Please return by .....

to .....

To discuss any of these issues further, please contact **[insert details of MARKET TOWN PARTNERSHIP]**.

## Appendix 2: Tourist Information Centre survey

Name and location of Tourist Information Centre:

Contact name & telephone no:

Email address:

### 1. Visitor enquiry numbers

	Total number of enquiries:		
	2001	2002	2003
<b>Enquiry type</b>			
Counter			
Postal			
Telephone			
Fax			
Accommodation booking			
<b>Enquiry origin</b>			
Local resident			
UK visitor			
Overseas visitor			

### 2. Visitor motivations

Why do visitors come to **Anytown**?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

### 3. Visitor activities

What do visitors do when they visit **Anytown** and the surrounding area?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

### 4. Visitor information needs

What are the most frequent information requests that you receive from visitors and potential visitors to **Anytown**?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

### 5. Print and information

**What print and other information sources do you use to service these most frequent information needs?**

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

**What other print and information is required to better meet these needs?**

### 6. Product needs

**How well does [Anytown](#) meet the needs of its visitors in terms of the facilities and environment it provides?**

Attractions	
Accommodation	
Food and drink	
Parking	
Toilets	
Retail offer	
Events	
Signposting	
Public transport	

**What improvements would you suggest to better meet the requirements of visitors to [Anytown](#)?**

Please return to:



## Appendix 3: Market segmentation analysis

Example:

Market segment	Attraction of <b>Anytown</b>	Facilities required
Domestic staying visitors		
Overseas visitors		
Day visitors by car		
Day visitors by coach/ public transport		
Visitors in transit		
Special interest groups		
Visiting friends & relatives		
Local residents		

## Appendix 4: Tourism product audit

Accommodation	No. of units	No. of bed spaces	Total inspected
Hotels			
Guest houses/B&Bs			
Inns			
Self-catering			
Caravan & camping			
Hostels			

Attractions	Name	Entrance fee	Opening (Days/months)
Historic houses/castles			
Museums/heritage centres			
Churches			
Animal/wildlife attractions			
Farm attractions			
Gardens (& garden centres)			
Railway/transport attractions			
Water attractions			
Country parks/woodlands			
Craft centres			
Other			

<b>Retail</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Sunday opening</b>	<b>Half day closing</b>	<b>Early evening opening</b>
Speciality food				
Antiques				
Books				
Art/crafts				
Gift				
Outdoor/leisure				
Market - Outdoor - Indoor - Speciality				
Other speciality				

<b>Food and drink</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Sunday opening</b>	<b>Half day closing</b>	<b>Early evening opening</b>
Restaurants				
Cafes/tea shops				
Pubs				
Other				

<b>Events name</b>	<b>Time of year</b>	<b>Approximate numbers attending</b>

<b>Sports/activities</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Details</b>
Leisure centre		
Indoor pool		
Golf		
Long distance footpath		
Other walks		
Cycle routes		
Riding		
Fishing		
Sailing		
Other		

<b>Entertainments</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Details</b>
Theatre		
Cinema		
Other		

<b>Support facilities</b>	
Car parking - No. car parks - No. spaces - On street	
Coach parking - Location - Capacity	
Public toilets - Location	

## Appendix 5: Signage and orientation audit

### Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

Networked	Yes/No*
Location	
Opening	Days/Months

\* Delete as appropriate

### Tourist Information Point (TIP)

Number	
Location	List and mark on map
Content	
Maintenance	Responsibility

### Visitor road signing

From each main route into the town are there signs:

	Route 1	Route 2	Route 3	Route 4
Indicating this is a market town of interest to visitors?				
Any brown tourist signs?				
Signposting the TIC?				
Signposting main attractions?				
Signposting visitor car parks?				
Signposting public toilets?				
Is there an out-of-town TIP on the main A road before entering/turning off to the town?				
<b>Mark sign locations on area map</b>				

**Visitor pedestrian signposting**

From each car park (or likely dropping off point or other transport point) and the subsequent walk to the market town centre, is/are there:

	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Location 4
A TIP showing where you are in relation to the town centre?				
Signs to the TIC?				
Signs to public toilets?				
Signs to main attractions?				
<b>Mark sign locations on area map</b>				

Interpretation	Yes/No	Details
Is there any other interpretation around the town? - At key sites - On key buildings of interest		
Are there any signed tours or trails around the town?		
Are guided tours available?		

## Appendix 6: Indicators of visitor satisfaction

<b>Accommodation</b>	Quality of service Quality of accommodation Value for money
<b>Parking</b>	Ease of parking Cost of parking
<b>The market</b>	Range of stalls Presentation of stalls Quality of goods Quality of service
<b>Shops</b>	Range of shops Quality of goods Quality of service
<b>Places to eat and drink</b>	Range of places to eat and drink Quality of food Quality of service Value for money
<b>Attractions/museums</b>	Range Level of interest Quality of service Value for money
<b>Ease of finding your way around</b>	Road signs Pedestrian signs Display maps and information boards Cleanliness of streets
<b>Public toilets</b>	Availability Cleanliness
<b>Ambience</b>	General atmosphere Feeling of welcome General appearance
<b>Feeling of safety</b>	From crime From traffic Ease of getting around by car
<b>Tourist Information Centre</b>	Ease of finding Quality of service Usefulness of information
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	Overall enjoyment of visit Likelihood of recommending



## Appendix 7: Local qualitative audit/key success factor checklist

Key success factor	Very good 5	Good 4	Average 3	Poor 2	Very poor 1
Unique/memorable attraction or feature					
Character/distinctive buildings					
Welcoming atmosphere					
Ease of parking					
Traffic free areas					
Quality environment - Cleanliness of streets - Planting - Good/clean public toilets					
Retail offer - Good range - Individual/speciality shops					
Food and drink - Locally distinctive offer - Home produced fayre - Traditional pubs - Attractive tea rooms					
Market - Good size/range of stalls - Quality goods - Speciality markets					
Extended facility opening - Facilities open on a Sunday - Facilities not half day closing - Early evening opening for food & drink					
Strong catchment - Local residents - Major visitor activity/attraction nearby					

Success factors scoring **5 - 4** = Strengths with which to sell the town to existing and potential visitors.

Success factors scoring **3 - 1** = Some improvement needed.

## Appendix 8: Matching markets to marketing initiatives

### Example: Anytown

Market	Leaflet production	Distribution	Direct mail (including email)	Website	Advertising	Special interest promotions
Domestic staying visitors	***	***	*	**	***	*
Overseas visitors	***	***		***	***	
Day visitors – car	**	***	*	***	**	
Day visitors – coach/ public transport			***		*	**
Visitors in transit	***	***		***	*	*
Special interest groups	**	*	**		**	***
Visiting friends & relatives	*	*	*	*	*	
Local residents	**	**		*		*

**Scoring system**      \*\*\* High priority      \*\* Medium priority      \* Low priority

## Appendix 9: Marketing element of the tourism action plan

### Example: Anytown

Marketing tool	Action planned	Lead body	Cost & funding	When
<b>Leaflet production</b>	Continue to produce town leaflet, with added emphasis on visitor attractions in the wider area. Promote town as the ideal place to stay with an accommodation hotline. Increase print run by 10,000.	MTI tourism sub-group	£750, funded by district council, town council & paid advertising from local businesses	Print by March 2004
<b>Distribution</b>	Enhance the existing distribution to include tourist attractions and accommodation establishments in the surrounding area.	MTI tourism sub-group	£200	Distribute by May 2004
<b>Direct mail</b>	Joint mailing (preferably via email) to coach and tour operators offering key attraction/market town day excursion package. Develop incentives/hospitality for coach drivers in the town and promote via district council and Regional Tourist Board.	District & town council	£600	Mail by February 2004
<b>Website</b>	Develop existing site to become more visitor focused with addition of new pages. Introduce new page(s) with details of facilities for groups. Liaise with partners to ensure all appropriate links are in place.	MTI tourism sub-group	£350	Develop website by July 2004
<b>Signposting</b>	Ensure attractive sign-posting at key junctions in the vicinity of the town. Signing to places to visit within the town.	Town council	£1,500	Erect signing by end 2004
<b>Special interest tours</b>	Feature prominently within district council's themed promotions (garden lovers, antique lovers, and others) as they become available.	District council/private sector operators		Ongoing