National Forest celebrates tourism champions leading greener future

Friday 22 May, 2026

Businesses helping shape a more regenerative future for tourism were celebrated as the National Forest unveiled its Transformative Tourism Framework and Champions at Hoar Cross Hall Hotel & Spa on Wednesday 20 May.

Lady Victoria Borwick, Chair of VisitEngland, presented each Champion with a wooden plaque made from sustainably sourced National Forest timber, acknowledging their leadership across the visitor economy.

The new framework has been created to support the National Forest charity's long-term vision of creating a forest for nature, a forest for communities and a forest for enterprise, ensuring tourism plays a positive role in each.

It is built around five practical pathways focused on growing a greener economy, promoting low-carbon travel, creating a welcoming and accessible Forest, improving wellbeing, and restoring and protecting nature.

The inaugural Champions were recognised for already putting those principles into practice across the Forest.

Champions recognised under the low-carbon travel pathway included Sue Jerham at National Forest E-Bike and Walking Holidays, which encourages visitors to explore the Forest sustainably through guided and self-guided cycling and walking experiences, and the National Memorial Arboretum, recognised for improving sustainable visitor access through its dedicated bus link connecting Tamworth railway station with the attraction.

Businesses acknowledged for growing a greener economy included Tollgate Brewery, which champions local supply chains and sustainable brewing practices, Greenwood Days, known for its woodland-based courses and traditional rural skills training, and Hoar Cross Hall, which has invested in sustainability initiatives including a biomass boiler supporting its luxury wellness and hospitality offer.

Those helping create a welcoming and accessible Forest included Hicks Lodge, which provides accessible cycling and outdoor recreation opportunities for families and people of all abilities, Calke Abbey, recognised for widening access to nature and heritage through inclusive trails and creative engagement projects, and Bradgate Park, which continues to improve access and interpretation across one of the region’s best-loved landscapes.

Projects improving visitor and community wellbeing included Whistlewood Common, a community-led permaculture site offering workshops, volunteering, wellbeing activities and low-impact accommodation, and Wild Minds, which uses nature connection and outdoor learning to support mental health, confidence and wellbeing.

Businesses recognised for restoring and protecting nature included Charnwood Forest Wigwams, where the business has been developed from the ground up to create space for trees, with nature forming an integral part of the visitor experience, the Bee Farmer, who supports pollinator habitats and environmental education, and The Deer Park, where more than 15,500 trees have been planted as part of woodland creation and habitat restoration that has helped transform a working farm into a thriving destination built around nature recovery.

The Transformative Tourism Framework invites more businesses and organisations to join the movement and help shape a more regenerative future for tourism across the Forest.

Unlike traditional sustainability or accreditation schemes, the framework is not focused on compliance or perfection. Instead, it encourages shared ownership and collective action, recognising that organisations are at different stages of their journey and that progress is best achieved through collaboration and practical steps.

The launch marks the next phase in the National Forest’s transformation from post-industrial landscape to thriving woodland and nationally recognised visitor destination.

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It comes during a landmark year for the Forest, which recently celebrated the planting of its 10 millionth tree. Since the early 1990s, forest cover across the area has increased from around six per cent to more than 26 per cent, restoring former mining and industrial land into a landscape of woodlands, wetlands, walking routes and wildlife habitats.

This transformation has helped create one of the country's most ambitious environmental success stories and an increasingly popular destination for visitors seeking nature, wellbeing, outdoor adventure and authentic experiences connected to the landscape.

More than 8.5 million visitors now come to the National Forest each year, contributing nearly £620 million annually to the visitor economy and supporting thousands of jobs across tourism, hospitality and the wider rural economy.

Visitors are drawn to experiences ranging from woodland walks and cycling trails to high ropes, bushcraft, forest bathing and immersive stays in cabins and lodges surrounded by nature.

The Forest is also home to major attractions including Conkers, the National Memorial Arboretum, Calke Abbey, Bradgate Park and St George's Park, home to all 23 of the England Football Association's national teams.

More than 200 miles of promoted walking routes now connect communities, attractions and woodland sites across the Forest, including the 75-mile National Forest Way.

Richard Drakeley, tourism development manager at the National Forest, said the Forest has already shown how large-scale environmental transformation can create social, economic and environmental benefits for communities.

"Reaching 10 million trees planted this year is a major milestone and demonstrates what long-term partnership working can achieve," he said.

"As the Forest has grown, so has its reputation as a destination where people can reconnect with nature, improve their wellbeing and experience a landscape transformed within a generation.

"This framework is designed to ensure tourism actively contributes to that transformation. It offers a practical and collaborative approach for businesses that want to play a positive role but may find existing schemes complicated or difficult to access."

The National Forest hopes the initiative will help position the area as a national testbed for regenerative and transformative tourism approaches, influencing tourism practice more widely while encouraging more businesses and organisations to get involved.

FULL LIST OF CHAMPIONS

Derbyshire

Broadleaves Luxury Glamping

National Trust Calke Abbey

Rosliston Forestry Centre

Tollgate Brewery

Whistlewood Common

Leicestershire

Bradgate Park Trust

Cattows Farm

Fire & Stars Woodland Camping

Forestry England in the National Forest

Greenwood Days

Hastings Retreat

National Forest E-Bike Holidays

The Bee Farmer

Wigwam Holidays Charnwood Forest

Wild Minds

Woodland Survival Crafts

YHA National Forest

Staffordshire

Hoar Cross Hall

National Memorial Arboretum

The Deer Park

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