Sharing our Stories – **The Exercises**

This is the business end of the Manual. These Exercises will help you work out what you need to do to create better interpretation and give visitors a more memorable time on your site.

The **Manual** gives you background information, principles of good practice and examples from successful heritage attractions. But only you can work out how these apply to your site. These Exercises show you how to do that.

You can use these two resources however you like. You can read the **Manual** first then come back to **the Exercises**, you can read through the **Manual** and do the **Exercises** as you go along, or you can start with the **Exercises** and refer to the **Manual** when you need more help – whatever works for you.

But however you approach these Exercises, spend some time on them and write down thoughtful and detailed answers to the questions. Writing makes you concentrate and can help crystallise your thinking. It also stops your thoughts and insights slipping away – what you have written is there for you to refer to later. And, maybe more importantly, it is there for other people and colleagues to refer to. Recording your analysis of the site and your visitors will help your staff and your successors understand what needs to be done and why.

Each Exercise will take between 10 minutes and one hour to complete. You could work through them all in three half days. You can do this alone or you can involve your staff and volunteer team. We have flagged up some Exercises where involving other people will be particularly helpful.

Exercise 1: **Storyboard of a great site visit**

This Exercise is designed to start your thinking about how visitors could experience your site. It develops your vision for what you want to happen to your visitors. Feel free to use your imagination and don't, at this stage, be constrained by practical realities. (They will come in later.)

You can do this Exercise with your staff team. If working with a group, divide people into pairs or threes to make the storyboards and then compare results.

Copy the template overleaf onto a large sheet of paper. Use this grid to draw a storyboard of 'the best possible visit' to your site for two mature adults, who are holidaying in your area. They are curious and interested in what your site has to offer but do not have specialist knowledge and, at best, only a patchy knowledge of Irish history.

In each box draw what your visitors do. Write notes about how they feel and what they are thinking.

1. **Approach** – what are your visitors thinking as they come to your site? What raises their expectation that this will be a good visit?
2. **Welcome** – what is the best welcome that you can give them?
3. **Orientation** – how do they decide what they are going to do without feeling lost or confused?
4. **Something they will remember**.
5. **Something else they will remember**.
6. **Something unique to your site**.
7. **Something that 'makes their visit'**.
8. **Departure** – what are they saying and feeling as they leave? Will they do anything as a result of the visit?

Repeat the Exercise for a family group of two adults and two children aged 7 and 10 years. These visitors are looking for something interesting to do for a couple of hours. The children in particular require something quite active.

Keep your storyboard with these Exercises. You will need them later.

A great visit to my site – A. Two adults

1. APPROACH	2. WELCOME
How they feel:	How they feel:
What they are thinking:	What they are thinking:
3. ORIENTATION	4. SOMETHING MEMORABLE
How they feel:	How they feel:
What they are thinking:	What they are thinking:
5. SOMETHING ELSE MEMORABLE	6. SOMETHING UNIQUE TO YOUR SITE
How they feel:	How they feel:
What they are thinking:	What they are thinking:
7. SOMETHING THAT 'MAKES THE VISIT'	8. DEPARTURE
How they feel:	How they feel:
What they are thinking:	What they are thinking:

A great visit to my site – B. A family group

1. APPROACH	2. WELCOME
How they feel:	*How they feel:*
What they are thinking:	*What they are thinking:*

3. ORIENTATION	4. SOMETHING MEMORABLE
How they feel:	*How they feel:*
What they are thinking:	*What they are thinking:*

5. SOMETHING ELSE MEMORABLE	6. SOMETHING UNIQUE TO YOUR SITE
How they feel:	*How they feel:*
What they are thinking:	*What they are thinking:*

7. SOMETHING THAT 'MAKES THE VISIT'	8. DEPARTURE
How they feel:	*How they feel:*
What they are thinking:	*What they are thinking:*

Exercise 2: **What do people get from visiting your site?**

This Exercise helps you think about what experiences your site could potentially offer people.

Look at the list of rewards that people want from their leisure visits on *page 10*. Think about which of these rewards your site offers to visitors. You almost certainly won't be able to tick all the boxes and that is not a problem but a site with wide appeal should offer a minimum of three. Which of these does your site do best? Does it have potential to do more?

Complete the following table.

REWARD FOR VISITORS	HOW WELL DO YOU DO? (SCORE 1-5)	HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THIS?	COULD YOU IMPROVE? (SCORE 1-5)	HOW COULD YOU IMPROVE?
GROUP BONDING				
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE				
SOCIAL EXPERIENCE				
RELAXATION				
NEW EXPERIENCES				
CHALLENGE				
LEARNING				

Exercise 3: **The consumer targets and your site**

Look at the descriptions of the three broad categories of visitors to heritage sites identified in Fáilte Ireland's Cultural Strategy on *page 11*. This Exercise looks at how these three Fáilte Ireland consumer targets apply to your site.

3a. In broad terms, what proportions of your visitors do you think fall into the Motivated, Inspired and Incidental categories?

	%
MOTIVATED	
INSPIRED	
INCIDENTAL	
ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THOSE PROPORTIONS?	

3b. Now consider what that means for developing your interpretation by answering the following questions.

	MOTIVATED TOURISTS	INSPIRED TOURISTS	INCIDENTAL TOURISTS
WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FORWARD TO FROM THEIR VISIT?			
WHAT ESSENTIALS MUST YOU PROVIDE FOR THEM?			
WHAT DO THEY MOST ENJOY AT YOUR SITE?			
WHAT DO THEY LEAVE YOUR SITE TALKING ABOUT?			
HOW COULD YOU MAKE YOUR SITE BETTER FOR THEM?			

Exercise 4: **Your target audiences**

One of the most important parts of planning good interpretation is to be clear about what your target visitors need and want and what that means for the interpretation. *Pages 11-13* contain information about different categories of visitors and their needs.

Identify three groups of people you want to attract and satisfy. Think about what they need for a good visit and then identify some things you can do (or continue to do) for them at your site.

Take time over this Exercise. Specific and detailed answers here will help you later on (in particular with *Exercise 17*).

TARGET AUDIENCE	WHAT DO THEY NEED?	WHAT MUST YOUR INTERPRETATION DO FOR THEM?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Exercise 5: **How are you doing?**

Look at *'Some things to remember about producing visitor-friendly interpretation'* (*page 15*). Which of these guidelines are most relevant to you and your site?

WRITE DOWN AT LEAST THREE IDEAS ABOUT HOW YOU COULD IMPROVE THE INTERPRETATION ON YOUR SITE, OR ANY PART OF IT, FOR YOUR VISITORS.

1.

2.

3.

Exercise 6: **In your visitors' shoes**

THE MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISE IN THE MANUAL...

Now, with your target audiences and what they want firmly in mind, and, hopefully, growing clarity about what sort of visit you want them to have, it is time to look at the reality of your site. It is difficult for people who know a place really well to see it as first time visitors see it. But putting yourself in your visitors' shoes is vital to understanding their experience. The single most important part of reviewing the experience of your place is to carry out a site walk-through.

Don't do a walk-through alone – you will only have your assumptions and preconceptions for company! Two (or more) heads are better than one for this Exercise. Keep an open mind and listen to your companions; you will almost certainly be surprised, even possibly shocked by some of their comments. This is really the point of the Exercise. Whoever you do the walk-through with, take their responses seriously; it is too easy to reject comments as a minority, eccentric view just because they are inconvenient.

You can do this Exercise in one (or more) of three ways:

a) Walk-through with others

Invite people who do not know the site to walk around it with you. Be careful not to lead the experience – this may include deliberately holding back while they misread directional signage and allowing them to go the wrong way. Make a note of all their questions, whether these are about the history of the site, where the toilets are or whether a footpath will be muddy.

b) Walk-through with visitors

Joining real visitors for part of their journey around the site can be a rich and extremely useful source of information. This is an accompanied visit.

c) Walk-through with staff

This can be a very powerful tool for engaging your team with the visitor experience. However, it has some important limitations in terms of looking at your site as a visitor; your staff are likely to share at least some of your assumptions about how the site works. Prepare carefully by talking about what visitors want. *Section 4* of the Manual will help you with this.

You could maybe do this Exercise for your and your staff's development and then do one of the others to sharpen your awareness of how outsiders and visitors see your site.

WHEN YOU HAVE GATHERED INFORMATION FROM YOUR WALK-THROUGH YOU CAN COMPARE THE REALITY OF WHAT YOU FOUND ON THE GROUND WITH THE ASPIRATIONAL 'BEST POSSIBLE VISIT' THAT YOU IMAGINED IN *EXERCISE 1*.

HOW SIMILAR ARE THEY?

WHEN YOU HAVE GATHERED INFORMATION FROM YOUR WALK-THROUGH YOU CAN COMPARE THE REALITY OF WHAT YOU FOUND ON THE GROUND WITH THE ASPIRATIONAL 'BEST POSSIBLE VISIT' THAT YOU IMAGINED IN *EXERCISE 1*.

WHICH ELEMENTS OF THE 'BEST POSSIBLE VISIT' ARE IN PLACE?

COULD YOU CREATE ANY ELEMENTS OF THE 'BEST POSSIBLE VISIT' THAT ARE MISSING IN REALITY? HOW COULD YOU DO THAT?

WHAT DO YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE CHANGED TO IMPROVE THE VISITOR'S TIME AT YOUR SITE?

Exercise 7: **Business objectives for your interpretation**

This Exercise helps you make sure that your interpretation fits with your other strategic plans, including your business plan if you have one.

Look at the example of Carlow's Trails of the Saints on *page 16*. Then work through this process for your site using up to three business objectives.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR INTERPRETATION WILL MEET YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES
1. STRATEGIC DIRECTION OR BUSINESS OBJECTIVE A
2. WHAT DOES THE INTERPRETATION NEED TO DO TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THIS?
3. HOW WILL YOU RECOGNISE SUCCESS?
4. HOW WILL YOU MEASURE THIS?

THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR INTERPRETATION WILL MEET YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

1. STRATEGIC DIRECTION OR BUSINESS OBJECTIVE B

2. WHAT DOES THE INTERPRETATION NEED TO DO TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THIS?

3. HOW WILL YOU RECOGNISE SUCCESS?

4. HOW WILL YOU MEASURE THIS?

THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR INTERPRETATION WILL MEET YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

1. STRATEGIC DIRECTION OR BUSINESS OBJECTIVE C

2. WHAT DOES THE INTERPRETATION NEED TO DO TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THIS?

3. HOW WILL YOU RECOGNISE SUCCESS?

4. HOW WILL YOU MEASURE THIS?

Exercise 8: **Your main message**

This Exercise is about focusing on your message. You need to identify what you want people to be thinking and talking about when they leave your site. *Section 6* explains the importance of this.

This can be a good Exercise to do with your staff team.

Think about the stories your site has to tell. Ask people who know the place well which stories or information about it they find most powerful, moving and important. Which ones do face-to-face staff find make the biggest impact on visitors? Write the stories on pieces of paper that you can move about (Post-it notes are particularly good for this).

When you have all your stories, try to group them together. You can do this in any way that makes sense to you. Aim for no more than five groups of stories. When you have your groups write a headline for each group. Try to make these as interesting and attention-grabbing as possible.

THESE HEADLINES ARE YOUR MESSAGES. WRITE THEM HERE:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Now, look at these headlines. Is there one that is most important? Is there one that visitors need first, or that would act as a good introduction to everything else?

Write an introductory message in one or two sentences that is simple, and includes the most significant, relevant and exciting aspects of your site. Use the example of the Ros Tapestry on *page 19* to help you.

WRITE YOUR INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE HERE:

Exercise 9: **Putting your message to work**

This Exercise helps you identify what your message means for your interpretation.

Read *Messages and managing new interpretation projects* on *page 21*.

Using that as an example, look at your message(s) from the previous Exercise. What do they mean you must include in your interpretation?

IDENTIFY UP TO FIVE MESSAGE-BASED CRITERIA THAT YOU WILL LOOK FOR IN YOUR NEW INTERPRETATION PROJECTS
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Exercise 10: **Site experience mapping**

This Exercise identifies how your site can best tell its story to visitors.

Look at *Making the most of your site* on *page 22*.

Where are the best experiences that your site offers? Imagine you were taking your best friend round the site after closing time. What would you show them? Include things you can't do for all visitors.

Walk through your site looking at all the experiences and messages, implicit and explicit, deliberate and accidental. Mark these on a map.

In particular look for:

- **Prospect points** – places which offer views can be good for expansive, visionary ideas and setting your site into its wider context.
- **Refuge points** – more enclosed areas are good for quieter, more focused or reflective activities, including storytelling.
- **Places or objects that best illustrate the key parts of your message**.
- **Places or objects associated with people or human interest stories**.
- **Sensory experiences, especially non-visual ones**.
- **Places with atmosphere**.
- **Places that offer some level of physical challenge, adventure or mystery** (e.g. spiral stairs, a priest's hole, a cave).
- **Places where visitors should not go, either because of risk to themselves or to the site**.

Keep your map with these notes. You will need it later.

If possible ask other members of your staff to create their own site experience maps and compare results.

Exercise 11: **What resources do you have?**

LIST YOUR TOP TEN AUTHENTIC HERITAGE RESOURCES THAT COULD HELP YOU SHARE THE STORY OF YOUR SITE. (READ *MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR RESOURCES* **IN** *SECTION 7* **FOR IDEAS.)**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

LIST YOUR TOP TEN SKILLS OR ATTRIBUTES IN YOUR STAFF TEAM THAT COULD HELP YOU SHARE THE STORY OF YOUR SITE.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Exercise 12: **The context of interpretation on your site**

12a) SWOT analysis

Having thought about the different facets of your heritage site, this is a good time to bring all that together into a convenient form.

Fill in the grid *below*.

Strengths and weaknesses

These two boxes look at your present situation.

Strengths
List what you have now, being sure to include what works well for your visitors, your successes and achievements and your resources.

Weaknesses
List what is not going so well for you, what visitors complain about or ask for, what you think is missing, and what your competitors are doing better than you.

Opportunities and threats

These two boxes look at what could change.

Opportunities
List all your potential future strengths, the opportunities that exist in the future – these include things that you could do on site, and things outside your site (and possibly outside your control) that will affect your business.

Threats
List all your potential future weaknesses, the threats that exist in the future – these include both on-site setbacks and changes to the context of your business.

S-W-O-T: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

12b) Plan of action

Review your SWOT matrix from 12a). Identify two actions arising from each segment. These should:

- build on or maintain Strengths
- limit, remedy or stop Weaknesses
- prioritise and develop Opportunities
- minimise or counter Threats

Actions

STRENGTHS: WE WILL
1.
2.

WEAKNESSES: WE WILL
1.
2.

OPPORTUNITIES: WE WILL
1.
2.

THREATS: WE WILL
1.
2.

Exercise 13: **What's happening beyond your fence?**

This Exercise looks at the wider context of your site and its area. Visitors will see your site as one possible visit amongst a range of local attractions so you should too.

Look back at your target audiences from *Exercise 4*. For each audience write down six other places in your area that they might visit.

TARGET AUDIENCE A (WRITE NAME HERE)	MIGHT VISIT:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

1A. LOOKING AT THIS LIST, HOW DOES YOUR SITE STAND OUT? WHAT DOES IT OFFER THAT OTHERS DON'T?

1B. HOW COULD YOUR INTERPRETATION AND PROMOTION ENHANCE THAT?

2A. ARE THERE ANY NEARBY SITES THAT WOULD COMPLEMENT THE EXPERIENCE YOU OFFER FOR THIS AUDIENCE?

2B. IF YES, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THEM?

3A. WHAT STRENGTHS DO THE OTHER SITES HAVE FOR THIS AUDIENCE THAT YOU DON'T?

3B. CAN YOU STRENGTHEN YOUR PERFORMANCE IN THIS AREA?

TARGET AUDIENCE B (WRITE NAME HERE)   **MIGHT VISIT:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

1A. LOOKING AT THIS LIST, HOW DOES YOUR SITE STAND OUT? WHAT DOES IT OFFER THAT OTHERS DON'T?

1B. HOW COULD YOUR INTERPRETATION AND PROMOTION ENHANCE THAT?

2A. ARE THERE ANY NEARBY SITES THAT WOULD COMPLEMENT THE EXPERIENCE YOU OFFER FOR THIS AUDIENCE?

2B. IF YES, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THEM?

3A. WHAT STRENGTHS DO THE OTHER SITES HAVE FOR THIS AUDIENCE THAT YOU DON'T?

3B. CAN YOU STRENGTHEN YOUR PERFORMANCE IN THIS AREA?

TARGET AUDIENCE C (WRITE NAME HERE)	MIGHT VISIT:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

1A. LOOKING AT THIS LIST, HOW DOES YOUR SITE STAND OUT? WHAT DOES IT OFFER THAT OTHERS DON'T?

1B. HOW COULD YOUR INTERPRETATION AND PROMOTION ENHANCE THAT?

2A. ARE THERE ANY NEARBY SITES THAT WOULD COMPLEMENT THE EXPERIENCE YOU OFFER FOR THIS AUDIENCE?

2B. IF YES, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THEM?

3A. WHAT STRENGTHS DO THE OTHER SITES HAVE FOR THIS AUDIENCE THAT YOU DON'T?

3B. CAN YOU STRENGTHEN YOUR PERFORMANCE IN THIS AREA?

Note

If you want to analyse the business aspects of your site, including your relationships with competitors, business development, marketing, customer care and others, you will find the business tools available on the Fáilte Ireland website www.businesstools.failteireland.ie very helpful. This contains advice and Exercises that will help any tourism business to improve.

Exercise 14: **New ideas for interpretation**

This is the time to be imaginative and creative.

Look back over all your notes on the Exercises. Talk to your staff, chat to your friends, watch and listen to your visitors, visit other sites, go for a long walk … do anything in fact that helps you come up with new ideas for interpreting your site.

WRITE ALL YOUR IDEAS – NOT ONLY THE ONES YOU THINK ARE GOOD OR ACHIEVABLE OR YOU HAVE SEEN SOMEWHERE ELSE – ON THIS PAGE.

Exercise 15: **Identifying your best ideas for new interpretation**

This Exercise helps you to look critically at the ideas you generated in *Exercise 14*. You will consider them in the light of:

- appropriateness to your target audiences and their needs (see *Exercise 4*).
- your objectives (see *Exercise 7*).
- your messages (see *Exercise 9*).

It is probably sensible to do this Exercise for the three or four ideas that you are most attracted to, rather than for all of them.

Not all projects will score highly in each category and that does not matter. It is more important that each idea meets one of your priorities really well and complements your other interpretation. All the interpretation elements on the site in combination should address all your priorities.

The most important thing before you implement any idea is to be absolutely clear about why you have embarked on it and how it supports your priorities.

Exercise 15a. Target audiences

Look back at *Exercises 4 and 13*, where you considered your target audiences and what your interpretation should do for them. How well does each of your ideas help with this? Complete the following table, scoring between 0 (not at all) to 5 (very important) for each idea.

	IDEA 1	IDEA 2	IDEA 3
SUITABILITY FOR TARGET AUDIENCE 1 **i.e.**			
SUITABILITY FOR TARGET AUDIENCE 2 **i.e.**			
SUITABILITY FOR TARGET AUDIENCE 3 **i.e.**			
TOTAL			

15b. Achieving your objectives

In *Exercise 7* you identified what your interpretation needs to do to help your business develop and meet its objectives. How well does each of your ideas help with this? Complete the following table, scoring between 0 (not at all) to 5 (very important) for each of your ideas.

	IDEA 1	IDEA 2	IDEA 3
CONTRIBUTION TO OBJECTIVE 1 i.e.			
CONTRIBUTION TO OBJECTIVE 2 i.e.			
CONTRIBUTION TO OBJECTIVE 3 i.e.			
TOTAL			

15c. Delivering your message

In *Exercise 9* you identified what your interpretation needs to do to deliver your message. How well does each of your ideas contribute to this? Complete the following table, scoring between 0 (not at all) to 5 (very important) for each of your ideas.

	IDEA 1	IDEA 2	IDEA 3
RELEVANCE TO MESSAGE CRITERION 1 i.e.			
RELEVANCE TO MESSAGE CRITERION 2 i.e.			
RELEVANCE TO MESSAGE CRITERION 3 i.e.			
RELEVANCE TO MESSAGE CRITERION 4 i.e.			
RELEVANCE TO MESSAGE CRITERION 5 i.e.			
TOTAL			

Totalling the totals

Now add up the totals to see which of your ideas score best over all.

	IDEA 1	IDEA 2	IDEA 3
TOTAL FROM 15A			
TOTAL FROM 15B			
TOTAL FROM 15C			
GRAND TOTAL			

This gives you a good indication of which ideas will work best for you. This is a very broad brush approach. However, even so it is worth looking more closely at exactly where each idea scored high and low. You may want to give more weight to some of the criteria.

WRITE YOUR REACTIONS AND RESPONSE TO THE OUTCOMES OF THIS EXERCISE HERE:
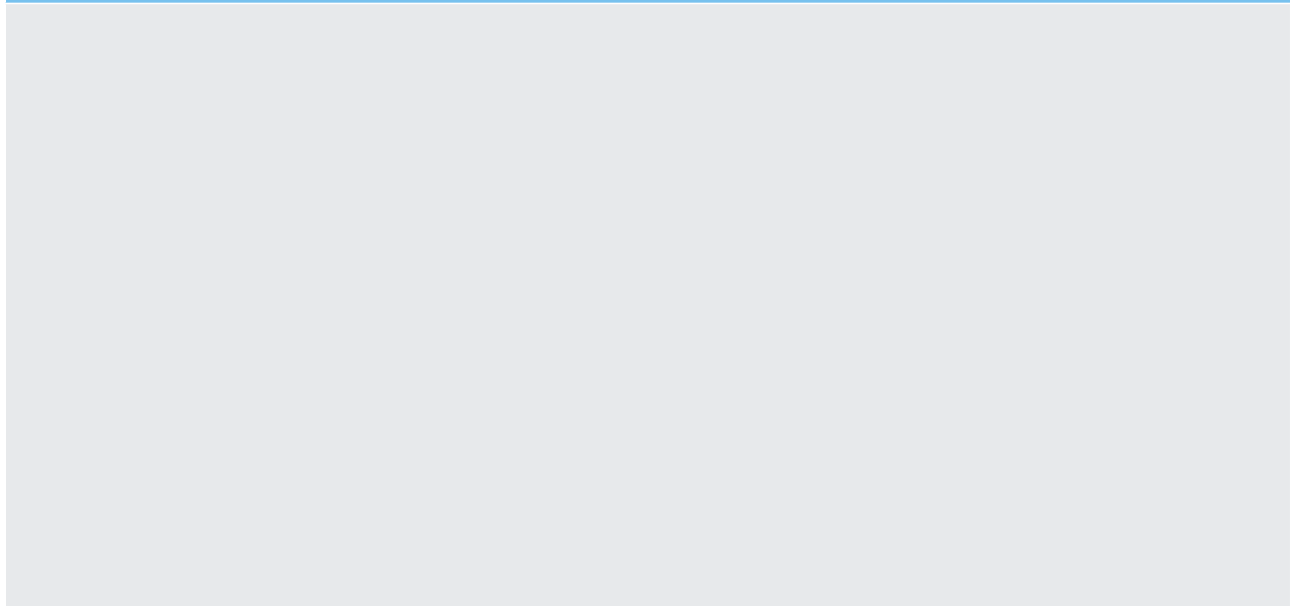
Exercise 16: **Strengthening your interpretive ideas**

This Exercise takes your best ideas and strengthens them by building in the elements that you have identified in *Exercises 14 and 15*.

16a. Site experience

Look at the site experience map you produced in *Exercise 10*. This shows the locations on your site that have strong interpretive potential. Do your new ideas for interpretation fit particularly well with any of these? Consider whether you can improve your ideas to make better use of these locations.
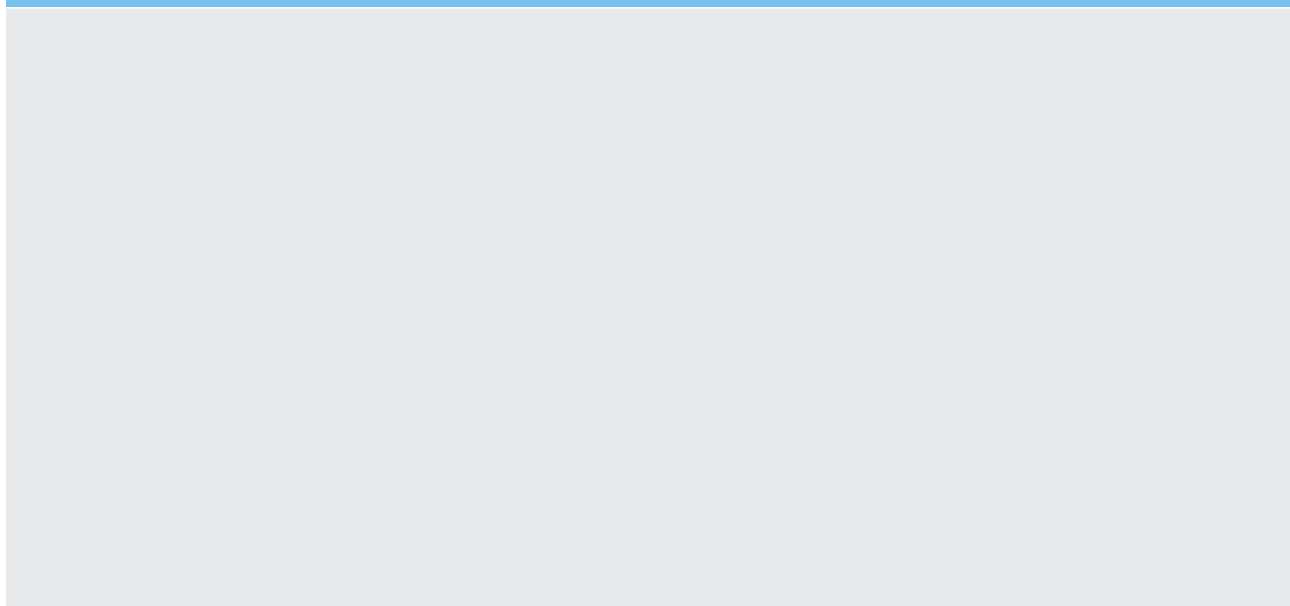
WRITE DOWN THE BEST LOCATIONS FOR YOUR NEW INTERPRETATION, WITH REASONS.

16b. Using authentic objects

Look at the list of authentic resources you produced in *Exercise 11*. Do your new ideas for interpretation fit particularly well with any of these? Consider whether you can improve your ideas by using any of these resources.

WRITE DOWN HOW YOU COULD USE ORIGINAL RESOURCES TO MAKE THIS NEW INTERPRETATION MORE POWERFUL:

Exercise 17: **How your visitors behave**

It is always helpful to spend time watching what visitors do on site. It is notoriously difficult for site managers to find time to do this, but it always pays dividends.

Carry out at least two of the following. Record the data and repeat after six months, or when new interpretation is in place, to measure any changes in how visitors behave.

17a. How long visitors spend on site

This is a simple counting Exercise. If you have a welcome desk your meet and greet staff can do this by recording arrival and departure times. Collect data on group composition too so you can compare how long families, single visitors, and adults in groups spend with you. Coach parties and school parties should be excluded from this Exercise because they usually have a fixed timetable.

17b. Length of time spent in different areas and total duration of visit

This is an observation Exercise that involves tracking people around the site. Draw the route people take on a site map and note where they stop and for how long. Do this for at least 50 groups. Are there any clear trends in where people go first or in the route they take around the site?

17c. Attraction power of objects/installations

If you have a number of possible stops (e.g. locations on a self guided trail or panels) you can record 'attraction power'. Watch 100 people and count how many of them stop (no matter how briefly) at each location.

17d. Engagement and behaviour of guided tour participants

You can gain useful information about the effectiveness of your guided tours both by talking to visitors and by observation. Look out for specific behaviours that can tell you how well the visitors are engaging with the guide and the subject of the tour. Note where and when these happen, and how many of the group behave in this way. The behaviours you record will depend on the tour but could include:

- Asking questions
- Answering questions
- Looking at/touching items mentioned by guide
- Talking to companions about topic of tour
- Inattention, e.g. falling behind group, leaving group, talking to companions (not about the tour).

RECORD THE DATA

AFTER SIX MONTHS