

South Derbyshire (30th July 2011)

Visiting the National Forest just north of Birmingham in July, reminds me of the lost opportunities our area has lost out on. It has a canal, it has trunk roads running alongside, it has history ranging from the Romans to the nectar of the breweries (potteries if you must) and that is just within 10 miles of where we are camped.

What really struck me was the villages with sympathetic new housing dotted around coupled with industrial units to assist in providing employment for both the workers whose jobs have been moved to the other side of the world and the newcomers, even though it has good links to major employment in Birmingham and the likes of Nottingham.

Being a visitor, I looked particularly at how they attract tourists as we don't have much else to provide local employment. The first thing you notice is the parking provision. Many places provide free parking to encourage people to actually visit. None of this 'please come and spend your money - but don't bring a car' attitude. Yes, public transport is promoted, but accept the fact that people come by car and it does take a while to discover the number 23 bus will actually take you where you want to go and with a family, the car is easier and cheaper.

Signposting is just as bad as round our way - that's the trouble with actually knowing the area (or maybe not and just relying on a map), but the locals are very helpful. One place we found, I thought was ideal as a project for our town.

Imagine if you will, somewhere fairly level, had the canal running alongside a river which runs alongside a main road just outside a town. It has parking, visitor centre, toilets, a walk around a man-made water area, 48 hour 'parking' for boats, picnic areas and includes the usual fishing and model boat facilities (model boat? - yep, radio-controlled yachts) and a short footpath to the nearest town and facilities, all provided by the local Borough Council.

I was thinking how the land between Bank Mill and Bullbeggars Lane fitted the profile so neatly. Just a little imagination and what a neat solution to a perceived problem.