

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper Tourism



Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents. To view this, and other briefing papers, see <http://www.devon.gov.uk/ldf-briefing-papers> For more information or comment contact 01392 382275 or email environment@devon.gov.uk

Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents:

1. **Strategy for Tourism - The Core Strategy should set out a Sustainable Tourism Policy to:**
 - Provide the context for lengthening the season,
 - Improvement in the quality of accommodation
 - Widen range of leisure and recreation facilities
 - Identifying the main locations for tourist accommodation and facilities and
 - Provide guidance about appropriate tourist accommodation in rural areas.
2. **Accommodation Stock /Extending the Season by:**
 - Improve the quality and sustainability of the accommodation on offer,¹
 - Replace, where appropriate, the amount of outdated and poor quality accommodation,
 - Offer a range of accommodation to meet market demand, especially in resort areas.
3. **Location of New Tourist Developments and regeneration of tourist resorts by:**
 - Restrict large scale development [100+ bedspaces] to resorts, principal urban areas, sub regional or area centres.
 - Recognise the need to diversify and restructure the economies of Devon's tourist resorts
4. **Predicting and Managing Visitor Numbers and Impacts/Carrying Capacity by:**
 - Channel visitor activity to places where there is adequate capacity and infrastructure and where it supports regeneration and economic diversification.
 - Promote sustainable development by locating developments where walking, cycling and public transport access can be maximised.
 - Promote the use of travel plans for popular visitor destinations.
5. **Climate Change by:**
 - Locating tourism development where it is not at risk from flooding or where it will not cause or exacerbate flooding in other areas.
 - Encourage design, construction materials and energy efficiency to reduce the carbon footprint of development.
6. **Touring Parks, Caravan and Camping Sites by:**
 - Reducing the over-supply of pitches by restricting the location of new, or expansion to existing sites, to situations where there is proven demand and current saturated occupancy by requiring developers to evidence the need for additional provision.
 - Encouraging the refurbishment of existing sites, using this as an opportunity to raise the quality of provision and make environmental improvements.
7. **Increasing The Link Between Tourism and Sport and Leisure Opportunities by:**
 - Shaping tourism development at sustainable locations which give improved linkage to sport and leisure opportunities [eg walking and cycling trails; fishing lakes; golf courses].
8. **Large Scale Innovative Project/Casinos by:**
 - Direct such development to locations which can easily accommodate an increase in visitor numbers and where there is sustainable transport access.
 - Ensure such projects are fully evaluated for their environmental and transport impacts,
 - Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be involved in any discussion relating to them.

¹ Equality Impact Appraisal Visit Britain [formerly the English Tourism Council] has created guidance notes for adaptation measures specifically for tourist accommodation and other tourist facilities.

1. Introduction

Tourism is vitally important to Devon's economy. In 2004 about 8 million visitors stayed for some 33 million tourist nights and spent about £1,140 million. In addition, on the basis that one third of the region's activity takes place in Devon, it is estimated that 44 million leisure day trips took place within the County in 2004 with an associated spending of £857 million.

In the last ten years available bed spaces in Devon have fallen by 10% from 125,650 in 1994 to 112,740. A previous 16% decrease in number of bed spaces was observed between 1984 and 1994, with the main areas showing a decrease being tourist resorts. The majority of lost bed spaces were from the closure of holiday parks and caravan and camping sites, reflecting the change in demands of tourists visiting the County. Tourism is also highly seasonal with 62% of tourist nights spent in the County from the months of June to September, resulting in poor use of accommodation and attractions throughout the year. (See **Appendix 1 – Tourist Trends in Devon**)

This briefing paper reflects the role of the County Council as a strategic coordinator and a lead organisation in enabling economic development and the marketing of the County as a tourism destination.

2. Visions and Strategic Context

The land-use planning system has a key role in ensuring that tourism related development maximises the economic and employment benefits that tourism can bring in a sustainable manner and protects those qualities in the environment on which tourism depends.

The **vision** for sustainable tourism development in Devon is to ensure that the adopted planning framework (see Appendix 2 – Summary of Planning Policy in Devon) ensures that:

- ❖ **Tourism makes a full contribution to the economies of both urban and rural areas;**
- ❖ **The role of tourism in urban and rural regeneration is fully recognised;**
- ❖ **New developments are of high quality and are sustainable, including the need for sustainable transport offering access by a variety of modes of transport; and**
- ❖ **New tourism developments are appropriately located and sensitively designed.**

Devon County Council is engaged in a wide range of interventions to facilitate the positive development of the tourism sector. These include:

1. **Strategic Regional Activities** to ensure that the needs of Devon are recognised and that the county's competitive position is secure.
2. **Stimulating the flow of investment and expenditure** into Devon through tourism by such activities as developing and marketing the Devon brand, encouraging greater professionalism and improved quality standards within the tourism sector, market research and monitoring performance, working in partnership, maximising opportunities for external funding and ICT developments.
3. **As Strategic planning authority** for tourism through the regional and county tourism policies and advice on major tourism development.
4. **As Highway Authority** responsible for public rights of way and development of recreational footpath and bridleway network including South West Coast Path National Trail, increasing cycling opportunities especially off road routes, development of public transport services for tourists; tourism brown signing and roadside information panels.

5. **Sustainable development** through protecting and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, encouraging operators to adopt sustainable practices, providing choices for non-car use for tourists and increasing awareness and understanding of visitors.
6. **Countryside Management Services** through the ownership of two Country Parks and a number of picnic sites as facilities for visitors and partnership arrangements for five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and four estuary projects which include tourism initiatives.
7. **Sustainable Tourism Partnerships** with Discover Devon Naturally, the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site; Dartmoor Partnership, the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site, the Braunton Burrows Biophere Reserve, South Hams Sustainable Tourism Initiative; Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. And working with attractions on the development of leisure travel plans
8. **Libraries and Museums Service** support and complement the work of District Museums Development Officers and work with South West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

3. Key Issues to be addressed

Some of the key issues to be addressed in Devon are identified in:

a) **Devon County Council's Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011** sets out the priorities of the County Council for the next 5 years. The main focus of the plan is to:

- Strengthen Devon's Economy,
- Improve Devon's Environment and
- Celebrate Devon's culture.

With a cross cutting theme of Making Devon Greener

b) **Devon County Council's Tourism Role and Action Plan**, published in March 2003, is a document which outlines the County Council's role in developing and promoting tourism in Devon. Key priority areas for the County Council's work in tourism with relevance to planning include:

- Improve the quality and diversity of attractions
- Ensure accommodation meets market demand
- Encourage high quality throughout the tourism sector
- Encourage rural regeneration through tourism
- Work in partnership towards resort regeneration
- Conservation of the resource
- Encourage good environmental practice

4. Matters to be taken into account in preparing the Local Development Documents

The tourism related matters that need to be taken into account by District Council's in the preparation of their Local Development Documents are:

a) **Sustainable Tourism Strategy/Policy**

The Core Strategy should set out a sustainable tourism policy to provide the context for specific policies for tourism, for example by identifying and justifying the main strategic locations for tourist accommodation and facilities, the approach to the provision of tourist accommodation and facilities in small settlements and rural areas, including provision for camping, caravanning and major recreation facilities, long distance footpaths and cycleway.

b) Accommodation stock / Extending the Season

There is a surplus in some sectors of accommodation in Devon which leads to lack of viability and insufficient income to re-invest in improving quality and facilities. Much of the stock is old-fashioned while there is a continuing demand for modern self-catering facilities. Budget lodge accommodation offering standard accommodation and prices and central booking is significant competition, especially for business trips, for older established hotels in town centres and resorts.

The objectives with regard to accommodation are:

- To improve the quality of the accommodation sector;
- To replace, where appropriate, the amount of outdated and poor quality accommodation especially in resorts with modern sustainable accommodation; and
- To offer a range of accommodation to meet market demand.

Seasonality remains a big problem and many businesses and jobs cannot be sustained on a summer season basis. Continued increase in special interest and short-break holidays throughout the year, centred around wildlife, walking, riding, and cycling, heritage, arts, sport and gardening, is an opportunity to increase sustainability. These breaks are traditionally taken in parts of the County not currently under heavy tourism pressure and so can help spread the load. The potential impact of climate change may also become a consideration.

LDFs should therefore, enable a quality, sustainable accommodation stock which meets the market demand and needs of the locality. New accommodation stock should be modern, energy efficient and sympathetically designed to be in-keeping with the local environment. A range of accommodation in line with market demand should be on offer, especially in resort areas.

c) Location of new tourist developments and diversification of tourist economies

Location of new tourist developments - Placing restrictions on the locations available for tourism development in Devon is essential for two main reasons – conserving the environment and maintaining the viability of Devon's resorts. The quality and character of Devon's natural and built environment is its greatest tourism asset and this must be protected. The National Trust's "Valuing our Environment" report estimates that in 1998 the spectacular landscape of Devon is worth £800 million to the economy of the County. Over 20 million visitor nights (78% of total) spent in Devon are motivated by the conserved landscapes of the area which directly support 16,000 FTE jobs and indirectly a further 7,900. It must, therefore, be the primary goal for Devon's planners to safeguard this unique resource.

LDFs should therefore should include a policy to indicate that any large-scale development, a development of over 100 bedspaces, should only be considered in resorts, principal urban areas, sub-regional or area centres.

Diversification of tourist economies - Devon's tourist resorts account for over half of the accommodation stock in Devon. Torbay is the most popular destination attracting one third of the tourist nights, however, this share is declining in Torbay and many other resorts. There is a need to diversify and restructure the economies of Devon's tourist resorts, and address some significant deprivation issues through regeneration measures. The recent trend of conversion of hotels to non-tourist uses (particularly residential flats, nursing and retirement homes) undermines the character and viability of these resorts, affecting the large number of people living and working in resort communities.

LDFs should recognise the need to diversify and restructure the economies of Devon's tourist resorts and address some significant deprivation issues through regeneration to support the viability of these resorts.

d) Predicting and managing visitor numbers and impacts / carrying capacity

Tourism can deliver both environmental and community benefits but can also cause problems if it exceeds the capacity of the area to absorb it. There are increasing concerns about congestion and over development in Devon and a loss of distinctiveness and character. This can lead to erosion, disturbance to wildlife or local communities, congestion and other local difficulties, and also detract from the quality of the visitor experience.

The majority of tourists to Devon arrive by car and travel by car a great deal during their stay. Improvement of the rail and coach services into the region may help a little, but more could be done to improve and publicise non-car options once tourists are in the County. Additional congestion is also caused by visitors travelling through Devon on their way to Cornwall and ways to encourage these visitors to stop and spend additional time in Devon need to be examined so that the County gains further economic benefit.

LDF policies and proposals should promote sustainable development, encourage non-car use and carefully manage access to sensitive areas. This will mean accepting restraint on tourism growth and development in certain areas and channelling visitor activity into places where there is adequate capacity and infrastructure and where it can support regeneration. Areas where tourist development should be restricted include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Landscape Protection Areas. LDF policies should promote sustainable development, encourage non-car use and carefully manage access to sensitive areas.

Large numbers of tourists can create pressures on the infrastructure such as water demand outstripping supply, traffic pressure at honeypot sites, the landscape impact of large caravan parks, damage to fragile habitats, loss of local shops and services to tourist uses, erosion at viewpoints, or increased volumes of waste and litter. These need to be resolved through a sustainable approach.

LDF's should ensure that sustainable tourist developments are situated and purposefully designed to maximise public transport, walking and cycling access to tourist and recreational facilities. Areas with good access by sustainable modes of transport could be identified within LDFs in order to guide potential developers. Planning conditions should be strictly upheld with regard to any proposed developments in protected areas including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Landscape Protection Areas.

The opportunities to promote local food and drink to tourists helps support the local economy, reduces 'food miles' pollution and excess packaging and supports local distinctiveness. Other local crafts and products should also be promoted to tourists.

It is important to minimise the environmental impact that the many tourism businesses have on the environment. The message that reducing energy, water and waste consumption will not only save money but give them a marketing edge, needs to be promoted more widely.

It is the local residents of Devon who bear the consequences of too much tourism like congestion and pollution. There needs to be local consensus with regard to development of tourism in their areas and this should be addressed through the Community Strategy process.

e) Climate change

The potential effects of climate change on tourism, both positive (e.g. longer, more reliable summers and warmer winters; increased outdoor activities) and negative (e.g. more severe gales; flooding and sea level rise) need to be addressed through the planning framework. Both mitigation and adaptation measures should be encouraged in order to create a sustainable and responsible industry.

LDFs should ensure that all proposed developments should be designed with climate change mitigation in mind and located in areas which are not at risk of flooding or in areas which could exacerbate flooding in other areas. This includes ensuring that buildings are architecturally designed to maximise energy efficiency and maximise the opportunities for the use of renewable technologies. The materials used in buildings should also be locally sourced which reduces the need for transporting materials from other sources, reducing mileage and the associated carbon emissions.

f) Touring parks, caravan and camping sites

Parks for chalets, static and touring caravans and camping pitches, make an important contribution to the overall provision of tourist accommodation in Devon and have a significant contribution to the local economy. Chalets and static caravans do however, have a year-round impact on the landscape. Latest occupancy figures indicate that there is currently significant unused capacity on touring parks. In recognition of this important accommodation sector, new planning frameworks should restrict the location of new, or expansion of existing sites, and only consider applications where there is a proven demand and with current saturated occupancy. Robust research should be

undertaken by potential developers in cases where it is believed that there is a demand for new sites. Refurbishment of existing sites should be encouraged and used as an opportunity to raise the quality of a site and also to make environmental improvements.

g) Increasing the link between tourism and sport and leisure opportunities

Tourists are now choosing to take more activity led holidays than ever before. Research by SWT suggests that more and more holidays are experience or activity led rather than driven by the desire to visit a particular destination. This has led to the development of SWT's brand clusters – a new marketing initiative based on experiences such as discovery, adventure, indulgence or being close to nature. The planning framework has the opportunity to shape tourism development around existing leisure and recreation facilities such as areas with good opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding or nature watching. Planning applications which demonstrate an improved linkage to sport and leisure opportunities (e.g. walking and cycling trails, fishing lakes, golf courses) should be viewed as an opportunity to improve resources for tourists in the county. However, applications should always satisfy the location and quality policies. (Also see LDF Briefing Paper on Recreational Routes).

h) Large scale innovative projects - Casino

Large scale innovative projects can boost tourism and offer considerable wide-reaching benefits. Developments such as major holiday parks and visitor centres can significantly increase visitor numbers and be an effective way of improving the image and reputation of a tourist destination. It is important to recognise that not all areas can accommodate an increase in visitor numbers or have adequate sustainable transport access. LDF's should identify potential development areas for such projects in areas which can easily accommodate an increase in visitor numbers and with established sustainable transport access. It is also advisable that local authority officers are involved during the early stages of planning for any new large-scale projects in order to give initial help and guidance.

A large-scale casino could potentially offer a high profile visitor experience to certain markets and go some way to support the development an area's tourism product. However, Devon's tourism product is based primarily upon the quality of the county's natural and historic environment, a principle which is not immediately recognised to be compatible with the development of a super casino. Both positive and negative impacts of such facilities are identified in the RSS which recommends that a super casino should only be considered in an area identified by a thorough assessment with full understanding of the potential impacts on the settlement and local community. It is recommended that the development of a super casino would be inappropriate across the majority of the county with the potential exception of Torbay. In addition, any large-scale casino should only be considered in locations that:

- support and extend the range of facilities on offer in an existing major recreational tourism destination;
- assist regeneration without threatening the economic viability of established tourist resorts in the immediate catchments;
- have an adequate labour supply; and
- offer large-scale and appropriate public transport access.

5. Partnership Working

It is important to stress that Devon County Council is only one of a number of organisations with an interest in tourism in Devon. Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be involved in any discussion relating to them.

Tourism Trends in Devon

Devon's tourism industry has traditionally been centred on its coastal resorts ranging from Torbay (Torquay, Paignton and Brixham), one of Britain's leading resort centres, to a variety of medium and smaller resorts like Ilfracombe, Exmouth, Sidmouth, Westward Ho! and Salcombe, each of which has its own distinct character. The resorts contain the bulk of Devon's tourist accommodation stock including hotels, guest houses, self-catering flats, and holiday parks. Many of the resorts have been adversely affected by the long-term decline of the UK long holiday market but have made considerable efforts to enhance their environment and facilities and to attract new markets.

Growth in tourism in rural areas is being maintained and compensates for the decreasing market share in traditional resorts. There is also a range of historic market towns and cities such as Exeter, Barnstaple and Totnes which have great charm and character and are important centres in their own right, particularly for day visits for shopping, cultural, business and leisure opportunities.

The capacity of Devon's tourist accommodation is measured in bedspaces for all types of accommodation (including caravans and tents) and is currently around 203,260. This does however, exclude bedspaces in private houses with casual bed and breakfast or visiting friends and relatives.

In the last ten years available bedspaces in Devon have fallen by 10% from 125,650 in 1994 to 112,740. A previous 16% decrease in number of bedspaces was observed between 1984 and 1994, with the main areas showing a decrease being tourist resorts. The majority of lost bed spaces was from the closure of holiday parks and camping and caravan sites, reflecting the change in demands of tourists visiting the County.

Other trends in Devon's tourism industry include:

- Increased number of tourist nights spent each year in Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks and the countryside in general, see Figure 2.1.
- Increased weekend bookings and short break holidays compensating for reduction in long-stay holidays, especially at holiday parks and touring sites.
- General increase in demand from middle-aged couples and people of retirement age, and less from families and young couples.
- Significant increases have been observed across most accommodation types during the winter period, see Figure 2.2.
- Rising expectations and a demand for higher quality.
- Environmental quality and distinctiveness becoming more and more important.

Evidence of these trends is published in many documents including the Discover Devon Naturally Green Paper (2005), Tourism Trends in Devon 2004 (2005) and statistics published on the regional tourist board's website (www.swtourism.com)

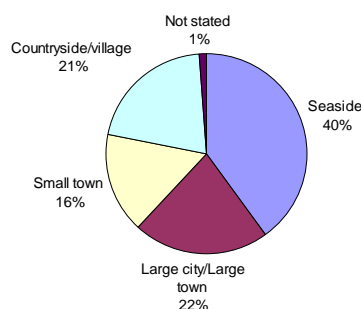


Figure 2.1 Location Stayed at in the South West 2004 as % of trips

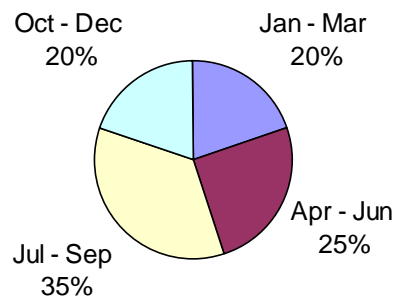


Figure 2.2 Seasonality of Tourism in the South West 2004 as % of trips

Summary of Planning Policy in Devon

Government Policy

The **Government's strategy for tourism is set out in 'Tomorrow's Tourism'** published in 1999 with the subsequent action plan 'Tomorrow's Tourism Today' published in 2004. The strategy identifies the potential for rapid tourism growth within the UK and identifies local authorities as important bodies in the delivery of an improved tourist resource.

A **regional context is provided through 'Towards 2015 – Shaping Tomorrow's Tourism'**, published in 2005 by South West Tourism. This document promotes and encourages sustainable tourism development by supporting the improvement of the quality and range of attractions and accommodation by encouraging a strategic approach to destination management.

The **Government's 'Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism'** published by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in May 2006 (will replace the current national planning guidance, PPG21 on 1st September 2006) requires the planning system to take a proactive roll in facilitating good quality development and aims to ensure that the benefits are achieved in the most sustainable way.

The **Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)** published for consultation in June 2006 sets out policies through to 2026. The policies for tourism:

- a) **To promote the development of tourism** by improving the quality and diversity of existing facilities and accommodation, particularly where this would reduce seasonality, maintain and enhancing the role of existing resorts, realising the potential of environmental, cultural and heritage assets, and identifying opportunities for development of new facilities and accommodation related to recreational cycle and footpath networks (RSS Policy TO1).
- b) **Safeguarding and investing in Tourism Destinations** by allocation specific sites for tourist development, setting out the nature and mix of new investment required and the necessary infrastructure. (RSS Policy TO2)
- c) **Provision for major new tourism attractions** within or close to Strategically Significant Cities and Towns to enhance the overall quality of the tourism offer, develop new tourist markets complementary to those in established tourism areas, be readily assessable by public transport, cycle and pedestrian networks, and help to extend the holiday season (RSS Policy TO3).
- d) **Setting out the criteria to be taken into account for the provision of regional and large Casinos** (RSS Policy CA1)

South West RDA Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2015 indicates that tourism is a key economic sector in the South West, reflecting the environmental quality of the region. It recognises that tension exists between further growth in the tourism industry and the potential damage this may cause to the environment. How to build sustainability into tourism at all levels with a focus on quality over quantity is a key concern together with changing tourism trends resulting in loss of employment and services in many smaller coastal settlements, a need for regeneration and economic diversification, and rationalisation of the tourism infrastructure and urban enhancement. The range of tourism facilities and attractions should be considered as does their impact on the environment. Ensuring the appropriate location for new tourism development is a major challenge.

Structure Plan Policy

The 'Devon Structure Plan First Review 2001 to 2016' (adopted Oct 2004) approach to tourism, leisure and recreation is that the development of the tourism industry should be related to:

- i. the promotion of a longer tourist season,*
- ii. improvements in the quality of accommodation and*
- iii. a wider range of leisure and recreation facilities for both residents and tourists.*

The Structure Plan policies seek to maximise the benefits from tourism, especially those of increasing income and improving employment opportunities. At the same time they seek to minimise the environmental impacts which can result from tourism development. They also have regard to the need to make further provision for walking and cycling. The Structure Plan also contains important landscape and conservation policies which contribute to the attraction of Devon for tourists. In spatial terms the policies seek to:

- a) **Sustain tourism in established coastal resorts** (Policy TO1)
- b) **Locate large scale accommodation and tourist facilities within Principal Urban Areas, Sub Regional Centres and Area Centres** where they would be in keeping with the scale and character of settlement (Policy TO2)
- c) **Indicate the types of tourist development that may be appropriate villages and rural areas** (i.e. outside the larger settlements and resorts) having regard Landscape and Coastal Preservation policies (Policy TO3)
- d) **Guide proposals for Touring Parks and Camping Sites** to locations where there is a proven need outside National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Coastal Preservation areas (Policy TO4)
- e) **Makes provision for the development of major recreation facilities** (and golf courses) close to the main areas of demand (Policy TO5)
- f) **The maintenance and extension of long distance footpaths, cycleways and bridleway networks** (Policy TO6)

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