

Tourism

Introduction

10.1 The tourism industry has shown considerable growth in recent years, reflecting greater affluence, more leisure time and increased mobility. Tourism is now a widespread and highly varied activity which makes a significant contribution to the national economy. All the signs suggest that tourism will continue to increase both in scale and significance, whilst changing in response to the growing numbers of overseas visitors, the continuing trend towards short break holidays, and the increase in day visits.

10.2 Tourism can bring significant economic, social and environmental benefits to the area. It not only contributes towards the local economy in terms of creating jobs and generating income, but often helps to safeguard and support local services and amenities. It has the potential to assist the conservation of the countryside and historic buildings, to stimulate improvements to infrastructure, and to generally enhance the District as a place in which to live, work and invest.

10.3 However, it is also recognised that tourism can have environmental costs as well as benefits. For example, tourist traffic, if not carefully managed, can cause congestion and damage at popular locations, while the needs of visitors sometimes generates pressure for inappropriate development. The quality of Wealden's environment is its greatest tourism asset and it is essential to ensure that the growth of tourism does not erode the very character and appearance of the areas that visitors come to see and enjoy.

STRATEGY

10.4 The Council has adopted a positive stance towards tourism in recognition of the important contribution it can make to the quality of life and economic prosperity of the District. At the same time, the Council recognises that tourism and the environment are mutually dependent and that it is in the long term interest of tourism to protect and enhance the environment that sustains it. Furthermore, the environment has an intrinsic value which outweighs its value as a tourism asset. Its future enjoyment and its long term survival must not be prejudiced by short term considerations. The Council's main objectives in relation to tourism are:

(1) to support the development of tourism, whilst recognising the need for a balance between such development and the protection of the heritage and environment of the area;

(2) to promote environmental quality as the key tourism resource of the District;

(3) to encourage the development of tourism that is compatible with the District's environment and which can help maintain and support it;

(4) to recognise that tourism is a positive activity with the potential to benefit the community and the place as well as the visitor and in any location to seek a balance between their needs;

(5) to ensure that tourism activities and developments respect the scale, nature and character of the place in which they are sited;

(6) to encourage high quality tourism developments, whilst seeking to extend the geographical spread of tourism within the District;

(7) to develop visitor management and education especially targeted at sensitive and fragile areas.

10.5 These objectives have evolved within the framework provided by the Council's overall Economic Development Strategy for the District, the County Structure Plan, the County Tourism Strategy and the South East England Tourist Board Tourism Strategy, and endorse the 'Principles for Sustainable Tourism' set out in the recent Government Task Force report on Tourism and the Environment. The objectives also take account of the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note on Tourism (PPG21).

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND FACILITIES

10.6 In Wealden, the high quality of the natural and built environment is the principal attraction for visitors. The Downs, the Weald, the coastline, historic properties and gardens, the country lanes, villages and farms offer an attractive and accessible resource of immense diversity and appeal. At the same time, it is recognised that tourism developments which provide a range of things to see and do can be important in encouraging longer stays, providing somewhere of interest in wet weather and catering for different interests. However, public enjoyment of the District ultimately depends upon its conservation. The Council therefore attaches a high priority to maintaining the quality of Wealden's environment, particularly its countryside, and to ensuring that the standard of tourist facilities are of a similar high quality.

10.7 The scale and nature of appropriate tourism development will vary according to the nature of the area under consideration. The further promotion of tourist enjoyment of the countryside should be primarily aimed at small-scale enterprises that draw on the character of the countryside itself: its beauty, culture, history and wildlife. Tourist facilities which assist the purposes of conservation and recreation, for example by bringing appropriate new uses to historic buildings or opening up new opportunities for access to the countryside, will be encouraged. The planning, design, siting and management of all new tourism developments should be in keeping with the landscape and, wherever possible, seek to enhance it.

10.8 In the countryside, small-scale, locally run enterprises to service the needs of visitors will be encouraged, provided that the development is in accordance with other policies in this Plan and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape, woodland and wildlife. Within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Ashdown Forest, new tourism and leisure-related development outside of the village development boundaries will be restricted to the conversion of existing buildings and informal recreation in association with the quiet enjoyment of the area.

TM1 Outside the areas identified in Policy TM2, proposals for new or extended tourist attractions and facilities will be permitted where the following criteria are met:

(1) the proposed development would respect, and where possible, enhance the character, heritage and environmental quality of the area;

(2) the proposed development would make an important contribution to diversifying and upgrading the tourist attractions and facilities in the District in keeping with changing demands;

(3) within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particular care is given to siting, design and appearance in accordance with Policy EN6.

TM2 Within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Ashdown Forest (defined as the area enclosed by the boundary of the Medieval Pale of 1372), proposals for new small-scale tourist attractions and facilities outside of the village development boundaries will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated that the proposed development:

(1) represents the use of an existing agricultural or other rural building in accordance with Policy DC7;

(2) is compatible with the character of the Downland or the Ashdown Forest;

(3) complements, and is consistent with, the quiet informal enjoyment of the countryside.

10.9 The Council is examining the accessibility of existing tourist attractions and facilities for wheelchair users and other groups with impaired mobility. The needs of these groups will be taken into account in the consideration of new development proposals, in accordance with Policy EN28, and the Council will support measures to improve accessibility for such groups whenever possible.

HISTORIC VILLAGES

10.10 Wealden has a wealth of attractive and historic villages, many of which benefit from the employment and income generated by tourist expenditure and also from the support that visitors give to local services and facilities. However, small communities can feel overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of visitors and a careful balance therefore needs to be struck in all villages between the needs of the visitor and the resident population. New visitor attractions should enhance the unique appeal of an individual village, relate to its heritage or contribute towards environmental conservation and enhancement. Tourism proposals which are unsympathetic or out of scale or character with their surroundings will be firmly resisted.

THE COAST

10.11 Wealden's coastline is a valuable tourism resource, combining good weather, attractive beaches, the dramatic and famous feature of the Seven Sisters, and proximity to well known resorts and marina developments. It comprises two contrasting stretches either side of Eastbourne: the largely undeveloped cliffs and downland between Cuckmere Haven and Belle Tout to the west, and the resort of Pevensey Bay to the east. Although only six miles in total, these stretches of coastline represent important areas for tourism and recreation.

Birling Gap

10.12 Birling Gap is one of only two places between Cuckmere Haven and Eastbourne which offers access to the beach. The National Trust supported by this Council and others has undertaken improvements to

enhance the general appearance and to provide appropriate facilities for visitors to the area. The District Council has replaced the steps to the beach and has produced a Beach Management Plan. It will continue to provide and encourage the improvement and sensitive management of this prominent location within the Sussex Heritage Coast area.

Pevensey Bay

10.13 Pevensey Bay is a small but popular seaside resort which receives a large influx of holidaymakers during the summer. Most overnight visitors stay either on the large caravan sites along the A259 to the west of the resort or in rented holiday homes. In order to improve the seafront environment and public access to the beach, the Council will promote and encourage appropriate enhancements, including the consideration of relevant development proposals.

Water Quality

10.14 The public's growing awareness of and increased expectations with regard to the cleanliness of beaches means that a significant improvement in the water quality of Wealden's bathing beaches is essential, particularly if the quality theme of the tourism strategy is to be realised.

ACCOMMODATION

10.15 A successful tourist industry is clearly dependent upon the availability of a high quality and wide range of visitor accommodation. Generally, therefore, the Council will view favourably additions and improvements to the range and quality of tourist accommodation in the District, provided there is no conflict with policies for the conservation of the countryside. The following section outlines the current levels of provision for all types of accommodation and establishes policies for controlling and managing provision in the future.

Hotels and Serviced Accommodation

10.16 There are over 120 hotels and guest houses in the District providing around 1,850 bedspaces. However, an accommodation survey carried out by the Council in 1991 identified scope for an improvement in the type and range of accommodation offered. In particular, there is a need for further purpose-built budget or mid-range hotels if suitable sites can be found. Proposals for this type of accommodation on primary routes in the countryside will be considered against Policy TR7.

Self-Catering Accommodation

10.17 Within the countryside there is a growing demand for good quality self-catering accommodation. The provision of this type of accommodation through the conversion of farm buildings is often possible, and this would be a particularly appropriate means of meeting the need for simple hostel or bunkhouse accommodation accessible from the South Downs Way. In the latter case, provision should be made for stabling or pasture for horses where bridleway access exists and such provision would not conflict with other policies in the Plan.

TM3 The Council will support proposals to convert farm buildings to a hostel or similar facility to provide overnight accommodation to serve those walking or cycling in the District. This applies particularly to locations where there is no access for ordinary vehicles, although access for emergency vehicles must be available.

10.18 The extensive storm damage to the District's woodland in 1987, together with the changing financial arrangements affecting woodland cultivation and planting, has resulted in some woodland areas being investigated for the development of holiday village or chalet accommodation. Such developments are virtually synonymous with low-density residential development, though with more scope for sympathetic design and screening, and, in view of the significant landscape quality of the District, require very careful consideration. It is considered important for environmental reasons to resist new holiday village or chalet park proposals within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Coastal Levels, and elsewhere such proposals will only be considered where both a specific holiday need can be demonstrated and an environmental planning gain can be achieved.

TM4 Proposals for new holiday villages or chalet parks will be strongly resisted in the Sussex Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Coastal Levels. Outside of these areas, such proposals will only be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- (1) a specific holiday need can be demonstrated;**
- (2) the proposal would restore a damaged or derelict site or offer some other form of environmental enhancement;**
- (3) the size and scale of the proposal would be compatible in terms of appearance and intensity of use with its location;**
- (4) the proposal would not be visually intrusive in the landscape and would be well screened by**

existing vegetation, particularly in locations adjacent to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

(5) the proposal would be adequately landscaped both within and around the site.

Caravan and Camping Sites

10.19 Pevensey Bay has the highest concentration of holiday caravans in Wealden, reflecting its role as the major resort in the District and the high demand for holiday accommodation along the South Coast generally. There are currently around 500 static caravans and 200 touring pitches, representing about 37% of the total District provision. The Low Weald area contains a similar number of pitches, probably reflecting its easy access to the coast and policy constraints on the provision of caravan and camping sites within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Coastal Levels. By contrast, the High Weald has only 200 pitches, or 10% of the total provision. The average size of sites in this area is much smaller than elsewhere, reflecting the high proportion of certificated sites and the landscape quality of the area.

10.20 Whilst the Council wishes to ensure that there are adequate facilities for caravanning and camping in the District to meet future demands, this objective must be balanced with the need to protect and conserve the environment that attracts holidaymakers in the first place. Holiday caravan sites can be very intrusive in the landscape, especially on the coast, and static caravan sites can have a particularly damaging impact. Touring caravan and camping sites generally have a lesser impact due to their lower density, seasonal use (mainly during the summer when vegetation cover is greatest). The Council will encourage the improvement of landscaping on existing caravan and camping sites, particularly along the coastline. The South East England Tourist Board sees little scope for the further development of static caravan parks; the main emphasis should be placed on the upgrading and improvement of existing facilities to satisfy an increasingly sophisticated and discerning market, rather than any additional provision of sites. However, a growing demand for touring caravan and camping facilities is anticipated.

10.21 In view of the above considerations, proposals for new static caravan sites or for a change of use from touring pitches to static pitches will not be permitted. However, the Council will seek to encourage improvements to existing static caravan sites by allowing their expansion where this would enable improved layouts or better landscaping to be implemented.

TM5 Proposals for new static caravan sites for holiday purposes, or the change of use of touring pitches to static pitches, will not be permitted. Proposals for extensions to such sites may be permitted if this would result in better layouts and landscaping.

10.22 The high quality of the landscape in Wealden limits the number of locations where the further provision of touring caravan and camping facilities might be permitted, and careful consideration needs to be given to proposals for new sites, especially in designated areas. On the Ashdown Forest, it is considered that new caravan or camping sites would be unacceptably damaging to the open, unspoilt quality of the landscape and its sense of remoteness and seclusion. Proposals for such facilities will therefore be strongly resisted in this location.

TM6 Within the Ashdown Forest (defined as the area enclosed by the boundary of the Medieval Pale of 1372) proposals for touring caravan and camping facilities will be strongly resisted.

10.23 The Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty similarly has a landscape of exceptional sensitivity where caravan or camping parks would inevitably be visually intrusive or otherwise damaging to its unspoilt, rural character. The Coastal Levels, including the Pevensey Bay area where demand for caravan and camping facilities is highest, comprise a flat, open and visually exposed landscape, which forms the setting for Pevensey Castle and the historic villages of Pevensey and Westham. It is not considered that the further provision of such facilities can be sustained in this location without unacceptable damage to its landscape character. However, extensions to existing sites may be permitted where the proposals would result in improved layouts and landscaping. Within both the Sussex Downs and the Coastal Levels, small sites for lightweight tents may be permitted in appropriate locations.

TM7 Within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Coastal Levels, proposals for touring caravan and camping facilities will be strongly resisted, with the exception of small sites for lightweight tents. Extensions to existing sites may be permitted if this would result in better layouts and landscaping.

10.24 The demand for touring caravan and camping facilities has been and can continue to be partly met by providing new sites in the Low Weald area, where the gently undulating nature of the landscape is more suited to accommodating such facilities than the adjoining areas. However, in recognition of the need to disperse tourism around the District and away from the

areas most under pressure from visitors, it is considered that some further limited provision for touring sites can also be made within the High Weald Area, outside of the Ashdown Forest, particularly in view of its heavily wooded character and pronounced valleys. Any sites in this area should be small-scale, well dispersed throughout the area, and have good local access. Extensions to existing sites may provide a valuable opportunity for improved layouts or better landscaping to be implemented.

TM8 Outside of the areas identified in Policies TM6 and TM7, proposals for new or extended touring caravan and camping facilities will be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- (1) there is good accessibility from the primary or secondary route network, but preferably no direct access onto a primary or trunk road;**
- (2) the size and scale of the proposal would be compatible in terms of appearance and intensity of use with its location;**
- (3) the proposal would not be visually intrusive in the landscape and would be well screened by existing vegetation, particularly in locations within or adjacent to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;**
- (4) the proposal would be adequately landscaped, both within and around the site;**
- (5) on large sites, adequate provision would be made for the recreational needs of site users;**
- (6) the proposal would not result in an unacceptable concentration of caravan or camping sites;**
- (7) in the case of extensions, the proposals should result in an improved layout and landscaping.**

Within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particular care will be taken to ensure that proposals respect and maintain the landscape character in accordance with Policy EN6.

Caravan Storage

10.25 There is a demand for storage facilities for touring caravans in the countryside where sites are perceived by caravan owners to be more secure and less expensive than elsewhere. However, it must be recognised that the storage of caravans can, by its very nature, be visually intrusive in a rural or other sensitive

landscape setting. Typically, caravans are stored outdoors in close proximity to one another and are normally only removed for short periods during the summer. The resulting visual impact can be as harmful as that of a static caravan site or other forms of outside storage and will rarely be compatible with policies which seek to maintain the character and appearance of the countryside.

10.26 Generally, therefore, the outdoor storage of caravans in the countryside will be resisted by the Council and such proposals will be expected to locate on appropriate business areas in accordance with the criteria set down for storage uses in Policy BS13 of Chapter 7. Small-scale proposals for the storage of caravans within existing buildings in the countryside may also be permitted, provided that the criteria in Policy DC7 of Chapter 5 are met.

TM9 Proposals for the outdoor storage of touring caravans will not be permitted in the countryside (outside the development boundaries as defined on the Proposals Map).

VISITOR MANAGEMENT

10.27 The quality of the visitor experience is based, in large part, on the quality of the local environment. However, there are a number of locations in the District where the inherent quality of the place is in danger of being lost or damaged by mounting pressures on the site. These pressures can be caused by a combination of too many visitors, limited capacity or fragility of the site, and concentrated periods of use dictated by visitor demand. The results are overcrowding, physical wear and tear and, occasionally, conflict with the local community.

10.28 Where these problems do exist, they are often concentrated at particular points and specific times and many, although not all, can be resolved by better management of visitors. Information and interpretation can give people a greater understanding and appreciation of a locality and site which, in the long term, can make for responsible visitors who have a greater awareness of the sensitivity of the environment. The Council will therefore support and encourage the development of information and interpretive facilities to increase visitors' understanding and enjoyment of the District's natural and built heritage, provided that these are sensitively designed and sited and comply with the policies of this Plan.

TM10 Proposals for interpretative facilities for the natural and built environment should be sensitively designed and sited, and should comply with other policies in the Plan.

10.29 Other measures which can be taken to alleviate visitor pressures include controlling the volume of visitors through traffic management and alternative marketing strategies or adapting the site to cope. A number of bodies are involved in a range of visitor management initiatives at sensitive sites and locations around the District, for example the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and the Ashdown Forest Conservators. Such initiatives, whilst important, lie beyond the scope of the Local Plan but the Council will support and encourage them and, where possible, introduce its own schemes and projects.

10.30 The Council recognises that well-positioned and effective tourist information can broaden the visitor's awareness of what the District has to offer, make it easier for the visitor to locate what they are seeking and help to disperse tourism around the area. The Council is responsible for existing tourism information centres and points, and is promoting the provision of a new centre within the proposed roadside facility at Polegate. It will also seek to identify deficiencies in tourist information points in the District and promote further provision in appropriate schemes.

10.31 Given that the vast majority of visitors arrive by road, primarily by car, the Council will also support and encourage traffic management initiatives, such as the positive routing of visitor traffic to avoid areas of congestion and sensitive sites as well as the investigation of traffic restrictions, traffic calming measures and pedestrian priority schemes in areas under pressure from large numbers of visitors. It will also seek to identify, provide and ensure the effective management of off-street car parks in such locations.

Implementation

10.32 Policies TM1 to TM10 inclusive will be implemented by the Council primarily through its development control function.

Monitoring

10.33 The key areas to be monitored will include:-

- (1) the provision of new tourism attractions and facilities;
- (2) tourist accommodation in converted rural buildings;
- (3) touring caravan and tent pitches;
- (4) information and interpretative facilities in the District.