

Chapter 11

Tourism

Context

11.1 Tourism is a widespread and highly varied activity which makes a significant contribution to the national and local 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.

11.2 The Council's Tourism Strategy takes a positive stance towards tourism in recognition of the significant economic, social and environmental benefits it brings 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.

11.3 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

11.4 In the context of the above considerations, the Plan's objectives for 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 and management of sustainable 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, and provide realistic choice of access by public transport, walking and cycling;

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

Tourist Attractions and Facilities

11.5 There are many features within Wealden that are an integral part of its character and which attract visitors. The Downs, the Weald, the coastline, historic properties and gardens, the country lanes, villages and farms offer an attractive and accessible resource which also contributes to the tourist appeal of the District. 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 is of a similar high quality.

11.6 In this context it is considered that new large scale tourist facilities would normally be inappropriate in rural areas. Instead the promotion of further tourist facilities in rural areas should primarily be aimed at small scale enterprises that draw on the character of the countryside itself, its natural beauty, culture, history and wildlife. Sustainable tourist facilities will be encouraged where they 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 by foot and cycle, such as the "Tourism Without Traffic" project in the South Downs which promotes car-free tourism.

11.7 Within the towns and villages, a careful balance needs to be struck between the needs of the visitor and the resident population, particularly in historic villages. Proposals which are unsympathetic or out of scale or character with the village and its surroundings will be firmly resisted.

11.8 An increasing number of tourism activities flow from farm diversification schemes such as farm trails, farm shops and the conversion of rural buildings for accommodation. The latter can be undertaken within Policy DC7 which normally seeks to resist extensions or new buildings. However, where environmental considerations can be met, small scale new development in association with a scheme for conversion could exceptionally be permitted in the interests of farm diversification and the promotion of tourism facilities.

Policy TM1

Proposals for new or extended tourist attractions and facilities outside the development boundaries as defined on the Proposals Map, will be permitted, provided that 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 not be detrimental to the amenities of nearby residents;**
- (3) the proposed development would not create or exacerbate traffic problems in the surrounding area.**
- (4) new floorspace is created through the conversion of appropriate existing buildings (see Policy DC7). Exceptionally, an element of new build may be permitted to support tourism related activities when the above criteria can be met.**
- (5) the proposed development is small in scale. Exceptionally, large scale proposals may be permitted provided**

that the environmental impact and associated visitor management problems are minimal and criteria (1) to (4) are met.

Proposals for new or extended tourist attractions and facilities within the development boundaries as defined on the Proposals Map will be permitted when they meet criteria (1) – (3) above.

11.9 Many tourism activities are undertaken in the countryside by tourists and residents alike including golf, horse-riding, fishing, motor and gun sports. The relevant policies for such developments are put forward in Chapter 6, Development in the Countryside.

Accommodation

11.10 The availability of a wide range of high quality visitor accommodation is clearly necessary for a successful tourist industry. It is therefore important to resist the loss of such accommodation whenever possible and to facilitate additions and improvements where there is no conflict with the conservation of the environment.

Hotels & Serviced Accommodation

11.11 Provision has already been made for overnight accommodation in hotel/motels on primary routes in accordance with the County Council's strategy for roadside facilities including a proposal at the new A27/A22 Polegate roundabout.

11.12 Elsewhere in the District, including alongside non-primary roads, new hotel accommodation will be resisted unless it falls within the urban areas as defined by the development boundaries. This is in order to support such facilities in a sustainable manner in towns and villages, in accordance with Structure Plan policies and Policy TR4.

11.13 In view of the demand for overnight accommodation in hotels, particularly budget hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfast establishments, and the importance of the industry to the economy of the District, the loss of such accommodation will be resisted unless a

sound economic case is made and demonstrated through factors including effective marketing.

better landscaping to be implemented, and where it meets the criteria of Policy TM1.

Policy TM2

Existing overnight accommodation in hotels, motels, guest houses and bed and breakfast establishments will be safeguarded and their change of use to other purposes will not be permitted except where: -

- (1) it is satisfactorily demonstrated that the premises, with or without adaptation, are no longer capable of viable economic use for overnight accommodation;**
- (2) it is demonstrated that there is no demand at present or likely to arise in the foreseeable future to justify continuation of the existing use.**

Policy TM3

Proposals for the change of use of touring pitches to static pitches, will not be permitted.

11.16 The South-East England Tourist Board advises that there is still a demand for sites for touring caravans, particularly closer to coastal areas. The Structure Plan also highlights the demand for good quality caravan and camping sites, particularly in the eastern Low Weald area. However, 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.

11.17 The Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Ashdown Forest have landscapes of exceptional quality and sensitivity where caravan or camping parks would inevitably be visually intrusive or otherwise damaging to the unspoilt, often remote, rural character. Proposals for such facilities will therefore be firmly resisted. The Coastal Levels, including the Pevensy Bay area where demand for caravan and camping facilities is highest, comprise a flat, open and visually exposed landscape, which forms the setting for Pevensy Castle and the historic villages of Pevensy 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.

11.18 The demand for touring caravan and camping facilities has been and can continue to be partly met by providing new small 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. It is also considered that some further limited provision for small touring sites could also be made within the High Weald Area, outside of the Ashdown Forest, particularly in view of its heavily wooded character and pronounced valleys. However, any proposal within this area

Caravan and Camping Sites

11.14 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). As there is still a demand for such sites, proposals for the change of use of touring pitches to static pitches will generally be resisted. 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 rather than any additional provision of sites. The Council will encourage the improvement of landscaping on existing caravan and camping sites, particularly along the coastline.

11.15 In view of the above considerations, proposals for new static caravan sites are unlikely to be permitted, but proposals will be considered under policy TM1. However, the Council will seek to encourage improvements to existing caravan sites by allowing their expansion where this would enable improved layouts or

must respect and conserve the high quality character and appearance of the High Weald landscape.

Policy TM4

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 the proposal would not create a new direct access or intensify use of an existing access onto a trunk road, nor preferably onto a primary 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;**
- (8) within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Coastal Levels, only proposals for small sites for lightweight tents will be permitted, in appropriate locations;**

Within the Ashdown Forest (as defined on the Proposals Map), proposals for touring caravan and camping facilities will not be permitted.

Residential Mobile Homes

11.19 Residential mobile homes can have a greater impact than static holiday caravans on the character and appearance of the countryside, with pressure for ancillary development such as extensions, outbuildings, or pressure for their replacement with permanent buildings or dwellings. They can also place more pressures on local community services and may not be in sustainable locations. The change of use from static holiday caravans to residential mobile homes could also lead to a loss of self-catering accommodation, of which there is considered to be a shortage by South East England Tourist Board. For these reasons such change of use will be resisted.

Policy TM5

The change of use of static holiday caravans to residential mobile homes will not be permitted.

Caravan Storage

11.20 There is a demand for storage facilities for touring caravans in the countryside. 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.

11.21 Proposals for such facilities will be expected to locate on appropriate business areas in accordance with the criteria set down for storage uses in Policy BS1. However, the storage of caravans inside barns or agricultural buildings may not be intrusive on the landscape and may therefore be acceptable when it complies with Policy DC7 and aids farm diversification. Particular attention will be paid to access considerations.

Policy TM6

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), unless they can be visually contained within an existing complex of agricultural buildings, would not detract from the appearance and character of the countryside, and would not create traffic problems in the surrounding area.

