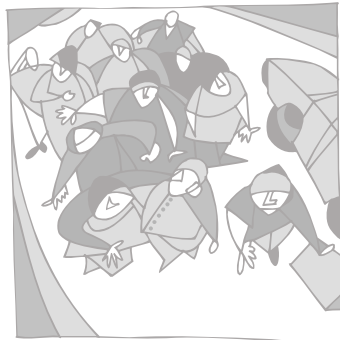


Theme 14: Tourism

A Sustainable Future
for the South West



**The Regional Sustainable Development Framework
for the South West of England**



Theme 14: Tourism

Headline Indicator

% of tourist trips to the South West by car
(1998 = 81%)

Setting the scene

Around 80% of tourists come to the South West specifically because of the region's environment and heritage. (Ref: "Valuing our Environment" 1998. National Trust/WCTB/Tourist Associates.) They are estimated to support at least 70,000 jobs directly, and contribute around £2.3 billion per year to the economy. The total tourism spend including day visits and business trips is estimated at over £5 billion' and tourism provides around 10% of the region's total employment and of its GDP. Protection of this special environment is therefore fundamental.

The South West is the most important English region in terms of numbers of visitors, and accounts for a sixth of all tourism spending. Impacts are not just the obvious ones like jobs and traffic, but include demand on water and sewerage infrastructure, energy use, health facilities and the landscape. Some tourists eventually become residents, so there is even an impact on housing and the population structure. Though the impact of tourism is most noticeable in rural areas and on the coast, tourism is a big influence in urban areas like Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth - as well as the World Heritage Site city of Bath. Tourism significance to the economy tends to increase as one travels west in the region.

South West Tourism (formerly the West County Tourist Board) has produced a strategy for the region - "Towards 2020" - setting out the main challenges and opportunities. It is recognised that all sectors of a quite fragmented industry need to work together more to maintain viability in the long term. The strategy notes that the sustainable development of tourism to 2020 will involve ensuring:

- The economic prosperity of businesses, so they can invest in quality facilities and staff training
- Conservation of the superb quality of the local environment, and
- Acceptability to local communities.

South West Tourism and the RDA are currently working up a Tourism Strategy to take forward "Towards 2020" within the approach suggested in this Framework.

The South West has been in the forefront of moves towards sustainable tourism. The 'Green Audit Kit' for tourism businesses was piloted in this region. Several districts including South Hams, Caradon and Bath/Wessex have sustainable tourism projects ongoing, and the regional Local Agenda 21 group, LSGSW, is also active in promoting it. The South West Peninsula Coast Path is a 500 mile long sustainable tourism attraction, because it helps

support local businesses and enables visitors to experience the environment in a non-damaging way, often outside the peak season.

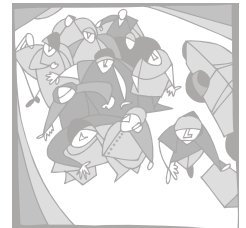
Our unique natural and historic and cultural environment provides the bedrock of the region's tourism (including day visit) industry. It includes a very long and largely unspoilt coastline, superb countryside, a wealth of wildlife habitats, thousands of sites of historic importance, historic cities, beautiful market towns, and 'picture postcard' villages. We also have a growing range of arts and cultural places and events and recreational opportunities which add to the range of visitor attractions.

South West Tourism estimate that, if current trends in the population, and trends in interests, habits and expenditure were projected, the number of tourism trips could grow by as much as 80% by 2020, with a 50% increase in real value of visitor spending. However there is a serious concern about this prospect because such an increase would be unsustainable - particularly in the impacts of transport and water use - unless the nature of tourism changes. The challenge is to ensure that development of the industry is compatible with proper safeguarding of our special environment, and is acceptable to local people. A clearer understanding of the costs and benefits of tourism is needed. Some costs have to be borne almost entirely by local communities. More co-operation is needed for mutual benefit, for instance on branding and marketing, so that individual businesses in the same area offer compatible services or facilities.

We must aim for a prosperous and high quality tourism industry, which contributes to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region. It should meet the needs and interests of both the visitor and the host community, without compromising the region's environment - either now or the future.

What are the opportunities for improving sustainability in the region?

Continuing to show that the economy depends on high quality environment. The special environment is the motivation behind most trips. People do not come here primarily for theme parks or fast food outlets. More than in any other region the South West stands to benefit from the increased awareness of, and interest in, the environment. This manifests itself in a vast range of visitor attractions - Wildscreen at Bristol, the Eden Project at St. Austell, bird watching cruises on the Exe estuary, and guided walks in National Parks and AONBs. Visitors need to be made aware of their impacts, and how they can contribute positively. The issue of an extra contribution from visitors (payback scheme) needs further consideration.



Tackling the biggest issue - Transport.

Any improvement in sustainable transport, be it better public transport, new ferry services, better cycling and walking networks, or 'cleaner' vehicles; will benefit tourists as well as residents. Currently the vast majority of tourists get to the South West by car, and use it a great deal whilst staying here. Improvement of the rail or coach services into the region may help a little, but much more effort is needed in improving and publicising non-car options once tourists have arrived.

Extending the season.

Seasonality remains a big problem for businesses, though the trend is already towards more short breaks throughout the year. Many businesses and jobs simply cannot be sustained on a summer season takings. A further increase in special interest and short break holidays at any time of year, centred around the growing interest areas of wildlife, walking, riding and cycling, heritage, arts, sport and gardening, could be a big opportunity for increasing sustainability. These breaks could be in areas not currently under strong tourism pressure, to spread the load, though care needs to be taken to avoid simply extending the 'costs' of tourism - like transport impacts - to more of the peninsula, as well as the 'benefits'. The potential impact of climate change has not been fully considered.

Minimising visitor impacts.

There are parts of the region where pressures are being placed on the infrastructure. Examples include water demand outstripping supply in 'dry' years in the far south west, traffic pressure at honeypot sites, the landscape impact of large caravan parks, damage to fragile habitats like dune systems, the loss of local shops and services for tourism-related activity, erosion at viewpoints, or the volume of waste and litter from food outlets. All these problems need to be resolved. A genuinely sustainable approach means ensuring resources and the environment are not compromised.

Local produce, tourism and the local economy.

An important element of sustainability is meeting demand from local supply where possible. Promoting locally grown (or caught) food to tourists supports the local economy, reduces 'food miles' pollution and is likely to reduce waste packaging and supports local distinctiveness. People on holiday tend to be prepared to pay more for good quality and this also helps organic produce, in which the South West is well endowed. Sea food is also particularly relevant in this region and needs stronger promotion to visitors. Much needs to be done also in promoting locally made products to visitors, for instance crafts and souvenirs.

'Greening' accommodation and attractions - business and environmental benefits.

There are around 20,000 tourism businesses in the South West. There is enormous scope for reducing the environmental impact they have, as well as making them more economic, by reducing their energy and water bills, etc. Pilot schemes suggest that free expert advice can be successful in moving businesses towards a more sustainable approach, but these schemes need public sector funding. It is expected that an accreditation/grading scheme for environmental performance, currently being trialled in South Devon, will become established regionally, and possibly nationally, within a few years. An increasing number of visitors are looking for high environmental standards in accommodation and facilities that they choose to use, so there is a clear advantage in tourism businesses addressing these sustainability issues.

Involving the community.

Tourism proposals should not be imposed against the majority wishes of local people, particularly if they have to bear the consequences, like congestion or pollution. New methods need to be found of seeing what the local consensus is with regard to development of tourism in their area. In some places parish appraisals ask residents questions about tourism. Community strategies will offer a new opportunity for testing local opinion. 'Sustainable tourism project officers' could help establish what the views are and build a consensus.

Improving information.

There is a pressing need to establish a clearer understanding of trends within tourism. In many areas there is a lack of reliable data. A 'sustainable tourism information unit' could monitor change and provide data to help inform better decision making.

Example - RSPB 'Avocet cruises'

Since 1980 the RSPB have organised bird watching cruises each winter enabling people to view the avocets and other waders that winter on the Exe estuary in Devon. In the 20 years the cruises have been running nearly 18,000 visitors have been accommodated in 160 cruises. This is a good example of a sustainable tourism initiative because:

It is based on a distinctive element of the region's environment. Awareness and education are an important part of the cruises. Press and media coverage increases awareness of conservation issues further.

There is no evidence that the cruises affect the avocets or other waders, since numbers are thriving. Organised cruises minimises the disturbance that might otherwise occur.

Continued over

There is a big contribution to the local economy at a time of year when trade is slow, in operating the boats, and in supply of food and drink, booking, etc. Local suppliers and produce are used. There is an estimated annual benefit to local accommodation and catering businesses of £30,000 p.a.

The RSPB promotes public transport options to visitors to reduce unnecessary car journeys. The cruises leave from Exmouth which has good cycle, bus and train links close to the meeting point.

All profits (approx £4,000 p.a.) go to conservation management of the Exe estuary.

As far as we know, the local community support the cruises. Free trips for local school children are planned as part of the RSPB's environmental education programme.

Visitor numbers are strictly limited to a level that does not jeopardise the local environment - i.e. quality is given priority over numbers of visitors.

What are the objectives for improving sustainability in the South West?

Objective	Examples of how it might be achieved	Links to potential partners and processes
Promotion of sustainable tourism, which conserves and enhances the environment and has the support of local communities:	1 Using a 'Sustainability Checklist' to test all tourism proposals against.	Local authorities. Process = development control.
	2 Establish sustainable tourism project officers in discrete areas, to advise business on good practice, and to establish and develop a community view on tourism.	South West Tourism, RDA and local authorities, chambers of trade. Process = area-based sustainable tourism projects.
	3 Promotion of 'non-car' options for travel to and from, and within, the region; including wildlife walks, rides, boat trips, train 'specials', coach trips.	Local authorities, with public transport providers and private businesses. Process = area-based sus. t. projects.
	4 Visitor education on importance of environment and local distinctiveness.	Local authorities, voluntary sector. Process = tourism businesses and LA21.
	5 Promotions to tourists of local, home-grown and organic produce.	Tourism businesses Process = shops, farmers markets, etc.
Enhancing the resource and promoting quality:	1 Improving the image of tourism employment with better training and pay.	Local economic partnerships, TECs. Process = training, workshops, etc.
	2 Eyesore clearance programmes and regular litter removal, and good management at sites under pressure.	Local authorities, land owners. Process = specific site-based projects and ongoing maintenance.
	3 Promoting tourism within the Coastal and Market Towns Initiative.	RDA, local authorities, chambers, etc. Process = Coastal & Marine Towns Initiative.
Extending the tourism season and promoting the historic and cultural environment:	1 Promote the varied beauty of all four seasons.	Local authorities and SW Tourism. Process = publications, advertising.
	2 Develop more 'special interest breaks' which are environment-based.	Private and voluntary sectors. Process = new projects



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