

SECTION 2.3

TOURISM

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SECTION 2.3 TOURISM

1. Introduction

Tourism is becoming increasingly important to rural areas like South Norfolk, where it can help to diversify the employment base and offset the loss of jobs and incomes in agriculture. Latest figures indicate that tourism is worth nearly £400 million to the Norwich Area (over £80 million to the District) and supports more than 2200 jobs in South Norfolk.

The Norfolk Destination Marketing Study is a public/private sector partnership that includes District and County Councils. The final report evaluated the current marketing and promotional activities undertaken in Norfolk and contains a number of recommendations for future working.

South Norfolk's adopted Tourism Strategy plans that the following achievements will be made:

1. Income from tourism will be further increased.
2. We will encourage more accommodation providers and attractions to meet quality standards with a series of initiatives.
3. The South Norfolk tourism profile will be improved to increase the number of visitors to the District.
4. Responding to the industry's requests, partners will promote schemes to extend the season, retain skills and encourage investment in the industry.
5. We will seek to involve all tourism partnerships and local communities in the marketing of destinations, events and themes in South Norfolk.
6. We will seek to help local tourism businesses to promote and identify themselves to the general public.
7. Development of tourism in South Norfolk will enhance the natural and built environment.

Which by 2008 will be achieved by:

- Improvements resulting in a year on year increase in tourism income to South Norfolk above regional averages and inflation.
- An increase to 50% of accommodation being 'quality assured'.
- An increase of visitor numbers by 10% per year.
- An extended season.

There is a close inter relationship between the environment as a key reason for visiting Norfolk and the role that tourism can play in conserving the environment. There is need to ensure that the significant contribution tourism makes to the local economy and environment is safeguarded and continues to grow. The District Council wishes to take advantage of the growth in tourism in order to benefit the local economy and will ensure that tourism activity is compatible with the need to conserve the rural character of the District, which represents the main attraction for visitors to the area. It is important that support is given to the development of tourism in ways which contribute to, rather than detract from, the quality of the environment.

Policy TOU 1: Promotion of tourism

The District Council will actively promote tourism activity in the Plan Area where such activity is compatible with the Plan policies and the rural character of the area.

Attention: Please note that Local Plan policy **TOU 1** has been **discontinued** since 28th September 2007 as part of the 'saved policy' process. Applicants should now instead refer to Local Plan Strategic Principle 8 (Main objective for tourism).

2. Visitor attractions

Visitor attractions are an integral component of the tourism 'package' and one of the reasons for deciding to visit a particular area. The District Council wishes to strengthen and develop the quality and range of tourist attractions (those that provide leisure and recreational opportunities primarily for visitors as distinct from "leisure development" defined as 'those facilities provided within a building with the primary purpose of meeting the leisure needs of the resident population of the area') in order to attract more visitors and encourage higher spending in line with its corporate tourism strategy. Some tourist attractions, such as recreation facilities, can also provide much needed facilities for local people.

Trends in tourism are constantly changing as new types of activity, new attractions and new destinations become popular. The sequential test in policy TOU 2 will allow the District Council to ensure that new and major tourist developments including those described in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 21 "Tourism" (November 1992) as "large scale and innovative projects" being of regional or sub-regional importance in terms of visitor numbers or catchment area, site area, building demands, employment or traffic generation are sited in appropriate locations. Facilities of regional or sub-regional importance will normally be expected to locate in or close to a major settlement. Where they are not sited in or close to a major settlement it will be necessary to produce evidence of a thorough sequential test or to justify the necessity of such a location. When assessing proposals for new major visitor attractions it is important to provide criteria against which any proposal can be judged. Whilst the District Council is keen to encourage additional tourism development, this will not be at the expense of the quality and attractiveness of the local landscape. The Plan contains policies to protect the character and distinctiveness of the landscape (policies ENV 1 - 5) and to prevent "inappropriate development" (as defined in the glossary) in the Norwich Policy Area. Where development is acceptable in principle other policies in the Plan are concerned with protecting the quality of the local environment e.g. sites of nature conservation, sites of archaeological interest, ensuring high standards of development and safeguarding neighbour amenity (see policies ENV 8, 9, 11 – 15 and IMP 1, 2 & 25).

Policy TOU 2: Tourism development – sequential test

Planning permission for new tourism development, and for the extension of existing tourism development, will be granted within the Central Business Areas of the District's main towns and villages, as defined on the Proposals Map, subject to the provisions of policy TOU 3.

If suitable sites cannot be found within the defined Central Business Areas, consideration will be given to edge-of-centre locations where pedestrian access to and from the centre is easy and attractive.

Only where no suitable Central Business Area site or edge-of-centre site is available, will consideration be given to out-of-centre locations. In out-of-centre locations, the following criteria must also be satisfied:

(Continued...)

(Policy TOU 2 continued)

- i) The site is not designated for an alternative use; and**
- ii) The site is easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport from the surrounding catchment area; and**
- iii) The site is close enough to other leisure, employment or retail facilities to encourage linked trips; and**
- iv) The proposals would result in a net reduction in total private motor vehicle trip length.**

Policy TOU 3: Tourism development – impact test

New tourism development on sites within the Central Business Areas, as identified on the Proposals Map, of the District’s main towns and villages, or on edge-of-centre sites, or on out-of-centre sites will only be permitted if the nature and scale of the proposed development would be in keeping with the size and function of the settlement concerned, and there would be no demonstrable harm (either individually or cumulatively with other proposed development) to:

- i) The vitality and viability of the identified Central Business Areas; and**
- ii) Proposals to enhance these Central Business Areas or their fringes; and**
- iii) The quality of the local environment; and**
- iv) The transport network.**

There is a major tourist attraction in the Plan Area at Bressingham Steam Museum and gardens, which has over 120,000 visitors a year. Other places of interest include the Roman Town at Caistor St Edmund, fishing lakes at Tasburgh, Burston Museum, Wymondham Historic Railway Station, Thorpe Abbots Air Museum, Forncett Steam Museum, the Otter Trust at Earsham and the Norfolk Broads, which offer a range of water based facilities. The District Council will encourage the establishment of new attractions in the Plan Area, and the expansion of existing attractions in order to encourage greater tourism activity, but at the same time will seek to respect the underlying rural character of the Plan Area.

The Plan Area is well placed to offer enjoyment of the countryside, with its attractive villages, churches, commons and river valleys, as a main tourist attraction. The District Council will seek to encourage increased sustainable use of the countryside by promoting self guided walks and the use of public or permissive footpaths to increase access to the countryside.

The Plan Area offers an attractive environment for the pursuit of recreational cycling. The District Council recognises the benefit for tourism of such an activity and therefore wishes to improve conditions for cyclists. It is important that increasing public access is consistent with nature conservation and landscape objectives and policies, and a balance is achieved (see policies ENV 1 - 9, 12 - 15, 21 & EMP 8).

3. Visitor accommodation

Existing serviced tourist accommodation in the Plan Area is concentrated mainly in guesthouses, small hotels, bed and breakfast and farmhouse accommodation. The Barnham Broom Hotel and Dunston Hall in the Plan Area are the only establishments in South Norfolk offering over 50 bedrooms. These sites, together with the Park Farm Hotel and Leisure Complex in Hethersett

have together made substantial investment in the District, totalling over £9 million. There is a need to improve standards of service in all types of accommodation in order to meet the increased expectations of the tourist industry. There are three types of accommodation which could be located within the Plan Area.

a) Hotel development

There are many different types of operation within the hotel market. The District Council does not intend to identify specific sites for new hotels as the particular locational requirements of such developments are a matter for individual operators according to which sector of the hotel market they operate within. Instead, the District Council will assess applications for new build hotel development against a number of criteria, with particular regard to policies ENV 1 - 6 and whether the proposal constitutes "inappropriate development" in the Norwich Policy Area as defined in policy N.6 of the 1999 Structure Plan and the glossary to this Plan. Hotels are a specialist form of development whose amenities can benefit residents as well as tourists. Care needs to be taken to ensure compatibility with neighbouring uses.

Hotel development can be diverse, ranging from boarding houses and small residential hotels in residential areas to major development with conference and banqueting facilities.

Where facilities will be available to non-residents an element of parking facilities, including coach parking and loading and unloading facilities plus a proportion of the normal hotel parking must be reserved for their use in accordance with the requirements contained in the County Councils 'Standards for parking in Norfolk' (1998).

Policy TOU 4: Hotel development

Proposals for new hotels and extensions to existing hotels will be permitted if:

- i) The site is within the Development Limit of a town or village defined on the Proposals Map; or**
- ii) The site forms part of an established recreational, leisure or tourism complex based mainly on open air activities, to which the proposed development would be proportionate in scale and ancillary in function, and is located where it would be easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.**

Provision of signs should be considered while the detailed plans for the proposal are being prepared (see policies IMP 19 – 25).

In addition to new hotel development, opportunities may also arise for the conversion of large houses and halls to hotel use. Such premises can provide high quality accommodation, often in an attractive landscape setting and help to widen the choice of accommodation available to tourists. Such proposals may well arise in historic parks where the buildings become redundant. In these instances the District Council will give particular consideration to safeguarding the character of the buildings and their landscape setting (see policy ENV 5).

Where new buildings are proposed in historic settings the District Council does not consider the granting of outline permission appropriate. Detailed plans will be required to ensure such development does not adversely affect the area's historic fabric or character and that the design, access, materials and illumination are in sympathy with neighbouring buildings and are acceptable in accordance with Annex A to PPG 21.

Policy TOU 5: Conversion of large houses to hotel uses

The District Council will give favourable consideration to proposals for the conversion of large houses and halls to hotel use, provided that the proposal is sympathetic to the character and form of the building and its landscape setting, and other normal planning requirements are met.

b) Self-catering accommodation

In connection with property used primarily for the purposes of holiday and seasonal letting, the District Council will use its existing standard occupancy conditions to prevent permanent residential use. In general the District accepts the potential 12 month holiday year though in some instances it may seek more restrictive limitations where environmental considerations warrant it e.g. where a building or land is liable to flood, or where it may be appropriate to protect the local environment, for example, where the site is near a fragile habitat which requires peace and quiet to allow seasonal breeding or winter feeding to take place.

Through conversions or changes of use, self-catering accommodation may be located in areas that are contrary to national and Local Plan policies on development in the countryside. However as set out in Annex C of PPG 21, different locational considerations apply between permanent housing and temporary holiday accommodation. The District Council when granting permission for temporary holiday accommodation may also attach a condition withdrawing permitted development rights. This is necessary to allow the District Council to retain control over ancillary 'domestic' development that would be detrimental to the character of the building and the surrounding landscape whilst ensuring that the building remains available for tourism use and does not undermine the Plan's housing strategy.

Policy TOU 6: Self-catering holiday accommodation

Proposals for the construction or extension of self-catering holiday accommodation will be permitted if:

- i) The site is within the Development Limit or Village Boundary of a town or village defined on the Proposals Map; or**
- ii) The development comprises the replacement, on the same site, of an existing permanent and lawful dwelling or dwellings, without increasing the scale or visual impact of the existing development; or**
- iii) The site forms part of an established recreational, leisure or tourism complex based mainly on open air activities, to which the proposed development would be proportionate in scale and ancillary in function, and is located where it would be easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport**

In all cases, conditions may be imposed to limit the duration of occupancy and to withdraw householder permitted development rights.

The Plan Area has a stock of rural buildings of which some could be used for serviced and unserviced farm accommodation units. This means that there are often opportunities for re-use or adaptation which can help reduce demands for new buildings in the countryside. The standard of such accommodation is becoming increasingly important to tourists, and contributes to the tourism 'package', but there is a need to protect the appearance and amenity of the countryside.

Policy TOU 7: Conversion of buildings in the open countryside to self-catering holiday accommodation

Proposals for the conversion or change of use of buildings to self catering holiday accommodation use, outside the development boundaries of the towns and villages in this plan will be favourably considered if the District Council is satisfied that:

- i) The building is soundly built, and suitable for conversion or change of use without extensive alteration, rebuilding, and/or substantial extensions, including outbuildings,**
- ii) Where the existing building has little architectural, historic or landscape value the applicant should make a significant improvement in its external appearance, or its setting in the landscape commensurate with the use proposed and the practicability of achieving those improvements,**
- iii) Where the existing building has significant architectural, historic or landscape value the proposals will not have detrimental effects on the appearance, fabric or character of the building,**
- iv) There is reasonable access to local highways and satisfactory provision of basic services including surface water and foul drainage,**
- v) They would not be detrimental to agricultural interests, residential amenity or to landscape and environmental considerations,**
- vi) The proposed development of the site respects the form and character of this surrounding area and will not be detrimental to its amenities,**
- vii) The proposed development complies with policy ENV 15.**

Where permission is granted, the District Council may in appropriate circumstances attach a condition to that permission withdrawing permitted development rights for the converted building and its curtilage and similarly impose a limitation excluding from the permission the right to stand a caravan or portable cabin within the curtilage. In addition, in the case of conversion of farm buildings, the Council will normally require to be satisfied that the granting of permission is not likely to result in the need for provision of other buildings on the agricultural unit or holding. Where the proliferation of farm buildings could have a seriously detrimental effect on the landscape, the Council may attach a condition to that permission withdrawing permitted development rights for the particular agricultural unit or holding.

c) Caravan and camping sites

Caravan and camping sites can be particularly intrusive in the countryside if they are not carefully located and landscaped. Static caravan sites are particularly difficult to integrate into the landscape and new sites and extensions to existing sites will not normally be permitted. Planning consent is not required for touring caravan and camping sites in certain circumstances, in particular for caravan and camping clubs. Where planning consent is required, the impact on the landscape will be a very important consideration. New proposals for camping and caravan sites will be expected to include any incidental ancillary buildings which may be required. A high standard of design and landscaping will be expected.

Policy TOU 8: Caravan sites

New static caravan sites and extensions to existing sites will not be permitted. Where planning consent is required for touring caravan and camping sites, such proposals may be favourably considered, provided:

- i) There is a proven local shortfall in provision**
- ii) Adequate access and services can be made available**
- iii) Proposals effectively integrate into the landscape**
- iv) Proposals are in scale with nearby settlements**
- v) Sites of nature conservation and archaeological value are not adversely affected**
- vi) Good quality agricultural land (Grades 1, 2, or 3a) is not being taken out of production.**

There are existing touring caravan and camping sites in the Plan Area at the Royal Norfolk Showground, Flordon, Scole, Wortwell and Marlingford and a static site at Stoke Holy Cross. There is a need for a new touring caravan and camping site to serve the city of Norwich.

A site has been identified in the Bawburgh/Colney Recreation Area for a touring caravan and camping site and the site is allocated in the Plan. Much of the former mineral extraction pits and surrounding areas at Bawburgh/Colney have been identified as a County Wildlife Site because of their nature conservation value (see Proposals Map). Further details are given in the Bawburgh/Colney Planning Guidelines (see policies BAW 1 and 2).

In addition, opportunities may exist in the longer term within the Whitlingham Recreation Area, which is close to the City and would provide an attractive location for this type of accommodation.

4. Information/interpretation

Publicity and information is essential for the enjoyment of the visitor whose spending contributes to the local economy. Information is required at all stages of a visit to any area and takes many forms such as signposting, literature, interpretation points and Tourist Information Centres. The District Council supports the establishment of outlets for tourist information and currently has two Tourist Information Centres, one at Diss and one at Wymondham.

Policy TOU 9: ~~Tourist information points~~

~~The District Council will seek to establish with the East Anglia Tourist Board sites for permanent tourist information points on the A47, A11, A140, A146 and A143.~~

Attention: Please note that Local Plan policy TOU 9 has been discontinued since 28th September 2007 as part of the 'saved policy' process. Applicants should now instead refer to Local Plan Strategic Principle 8 (Main objective for tourism).

The District Council is producing literature to promote tourism in the District and so far has produced a Visitor's Guide, an Accommodation Guide, 'Church Trail' guides, a District-wide 'Attractions' leaflet and is currently preparing footpath leaflets, town trails and market town visitor guides. It is hoped that these publications will help to raise the level of tourism activity in the

District whilst the Council will encourage and aid individual operators to promote their own activities. Initiatives underway in the County as a whole include the signposting of visitor attractions with the brown and white signs introduced by the Department of Transport in 1986,

which the Council wishes to encourage as long as they are of a scale compatible with the rural character of the area and are sensitively located to avoid clutter and proliferation. This will become increasingly important given the new more relaxed 1995 regulations relating to these signs. Consideration of new signs will be made in accordance with IMP 19 – 22. Outside the limits of development of the built-up area, policies IMP 23 & 24 will apply.