Tourism

Background

Tourism plays an important role in the economy of Herefordshire, accounting for over 5000 jobs in the county. A challenge for the planning system is how development proposals in this industry sector can be best supported in the new Local Plan without adverse impacts upon Herefordshire's natural and historic assets, that are in themselves central to the county's visitor appeal.

The following sets out how supporting tourism is addressed through the County Plan and the Local Plan's draft vision and objectives.

Herefordshire County Plan

Supporting sustainable tourism in Herefordshire has been set out in Herefordshire Council's County Plan (2020-2024)

'*We will… Protect and promote our heritage, culture and natural beauty to enhance quality of life and support tourism…*

… We are convinced that there continues to be a significant role for the council to play in enabling growth in the number of visitors to the county, especially for those encouraged to stay for more than a day.'

The Local Plan will have a role to play in enabling the establishment and expansion of businesses that will increase the number of leisure visitors to the county.

Local Plan Draft Vision

The draft Local Plan 2021-2041 has an economically themed countywide vision, which states:

'*The county will be economically prosperous, with its farming heritage and sustainable tourism continuing to play an important role. It will be well known as the place where innovative, green and creative businesses can thrive. Good quality housing and inclusive infrastructure will be provided to ensure that people are able to live active and healthy lives.*'

Planning policy that proactively enables sustainable tourism based proposals recognises the importance of this sector to help carry forward this vision.

Local Plan Draft Objectives

The need to support the growth of Herefordshire's economy and support the growth of its tourist sector is supported in the economic objectives of the Local Plan. In particular, policy in this topic area should deliver on objective 7:

To encourage and support responsible tourism that contributes to county's economic diversity, whilst respecting its historic and natural character.

National Guidance

National planning policy recognises the role tourism plays in the rural economy by stating planning policies and decisions should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside

Local Considerations

There is an increasing proliferation of proposals for less ‘traditional’ forms of visitor accommodation coming forward, such as glamping sites and woodland cabin parks in the county.

There is also a tension between the desire for tourist-based proposals to be in sustainable locations, ie. directed towards the larger settlements, whilst also recognising that many proposals will come forward in the rural areas, as these are the areas that form the attraction of the county to most visitors.

It has also been highlighted that there is a need to define exactly what ‘Sustainable Tourism’ means.

Sustainable Tourism Definition

The Travel Foundation has provided a comprehensive definition of Sustainable Tourism:

- Protecting natural environments, wildlife and natural resources when developing and managing tourism activities
- Providing authentic tourist experiences that celebrate and conserve heritage and culture
- Creating socio-economic benefits for communities through employment and income earning opportunities

With regards to land-use planning, policy has a role to play (to varying degrees) in ensuring that proposals secured deliver on all 3 of those outlined benefits.

Existing Policies

The Core Strategy has only one policy directly concerning the development of tourist accommodation and attractions, Policy E4. It sets out some detailed criteria for the types of tourist based proposals it seeks, and infrastructure that enhances the overall tourist offering of the county.

The policy broadly remains compliant with national policy and guidance. However, it has not proven to be effective in assessing the many recent proposals for new tourist accommodation innovations, such as glamping and woodland cabin sites that have come forward in the county.

There is a clear policy gap in that little guidance or definition is provided on the permanence of tourist accommodation structures. For instance, should permanent structures of this type (that could become dwellings subsequently) in the countryside be restricted in the same way as the policies for rural housing developments? This needs to be clarified in any updated policy.

A gap has also been identified in that there also needs to be a rule or metric for measuring the sustainability of a proposal in terms of its location, such as proximity to a settlement, or related to the scale of a given proposal.

Also to be considered is how the new Local Plan can continue to support the long term restoration of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal over the next plan period.

Neighbourhood Planning

Many Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) across the county have successfully produced their own localised policies to positively enable and regulate tourism-based proposals in their respective areas. Some of the most successful among these could have a role to play in providing some basis to help formulate policy direction as the new Local Plan is developed.

Toursim Policy Options

Option TM1- Enabling new accommodation types

- Including an enabling and flexible criterion in the tourism based policy, specifically applying to glamping/holiday park sites in the countryside.

OR

- Introduce a standalone policy that applies to these accommodation types, with more detailed criteria for defining the locations in which these may be permitted.

Option TM2- Defining a 'sustainable location' for tourist accommodation and attractions

- Develop a policy to strictly focus significant new tourism development for accommodation and facilities in Hereford and the market towns to maximise sustainable transport opportunities and to protect environmental amenity.

OR

- Develop a more flexible policy, that defines clear parameters for what constitutes a sustainable location, for instance by setting scale thresholds on proposals, or restricting proposals to those defined as sustainable settlements under the revised Rural Settlement Hierarchy.

Option TM3 - The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal corridor

- Continue to safeguard through the tourism based policy(ies) the designated route corridor, as is defined in existing policy and defining the route on the policies map.

OR

- Do not include in the tourism policy chapter, and instead seek to support through designating the canal route as a green infrastructure corridor.