



## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY TOURISM?

Tourism often has a poor reputation as it conjures images of coach loads of nosy people spilling into our towns and villages. Whilst this stereotype can exist, it is a very small sector of the visitor market, even more so in the context of rural tourism in the UK.

Rather we should consider that a visitor is simply someone coming from outside the town or village, who spends some time and money there. This could apply equally to someone from London on a daytrip, an overseas visitor staying for a weekend, or even someone from a mile or two down the road who's using the local shops or showing some friends and family around.



## WHY SHOULD WE CONSIDER TOURISM?

Tourism can be economically and socially important for many rural towns and villages. It is worthy of considering in the community planning process because, if managed well, it can bring significant community benefits. If it is not managed it may bring some problems and annoyances, which you will want to avoid.

The potential benefits rural communities can gain from visitors are:

- Income to businesses, helping to keep the town or village vibrant and keep local shops and businesses open – also benefiting residents
- Additional customers for infrastructure and services that also benefit the community such as:
  - public transport,
  - public toilets,
  - more attractive surroundings (public seating, flower displays etc),
  - events and activities such as local produce markets or countryside walks
- Helping to value and protect community assets (history, architecture, landscape etc), for example through information materials produced for visitors, funds for local museums, interpretation boards, guided walks etc





- It requires groups and businesses to work together to present an attractive, unified image of their place, bringing community members together.
- It encourages people to think about why their community is special, and this can promote pride in and engagement with their community.

So, focussing on bringing in visitors and making sure they enjoy their visit isn't only about helping a few individual businesses to increase their profits, but can make a difference to the whole community.

There are also a few negative issues to think about and plan for:

- increased traffic and need for parking, especially for special events
- invasion of privacy – are there attractive buildings that are also people's homes?
- lack of community consensus on the need for tourism, causing resentment of their presence by some community members
- possible strain on inadequate infrastructure, such as toilets

You can manage these issues by considering them in any plans you make, for example, before promoting an event you need to consider how many cars can park and think about providing alternative transport.

Building consensus is also important and is another reason why it is useful to include discussions about tourism in the CLP process. Since you will be consulting widely with the community, it is an opportunity to consult on tourism and get a wide variety of views on what, if anything, you should do to encourage visitors.

## ARE WE A VISITOR DESTINATION?

For most rural towns and villages, tourism does not mean people coming from overseas and staying for a 2 week holiday. The majority of your visitors are likely to come for a day, or part of it, and live within your region. For towns and villages that have or are close to a major attraction, there are clearly likely to be more visitors from further afield, but if you do not have a major attraction or much accommodation, it does not mean you cannot be a visitor destination.





## UNITY LED PLANS



As already stated, a visitor is simply someone coming from outside the town or village, who spends some time and money there. Whilst they come in many different guises, they also come for many reasons, such as to:

- walk or cycle in the local countryside,
- shop in independent shops or markets,
- attend a festival or other event,
- visit family and friends,
- have a drink or meal,
- find out about their family history,
- discover local heritage,
- experience rural life.

Most places have something to offer visitors; the key is in identifying what that is and packaging it to make it attractive to visitors. Many visitors simply want to do something different: if information on your town or village is well presented and they can find the information easily they may well choose to visit.

### HOW TO INCLUDE TOURISM IN COMMUNITY PLANS

The community planning process is a good time to think about whether planning for tourism is important in your community. It is a time when you have the ear of much of the community, through the consultation process. This helps you to learn about community views and ideas and inform as many people as possible about ideas and plans for tourism.

You can also use the process of consultation and research to gather useful information that will inform any future work you decide to do on tourism. The main ways to include tourism in community planning are:

- Consult with the community on what they want from tourism and build consensus. Just as you aim to gather as many views as possible, inform community members and aim for consensus on all the other areas covered by your plan, you can do the same for tourism. This will give you a great starting point for planning activities and, hopefully, an informed and keen group of people willing to get involved.

## TOURISM & COMMUNITY LED PLANS

- Gather essential information about visitors to your community. Before deciding to develop a new tourism product and/or market your town or village as a visitor destination, you will need some background information on who already visits, who is likely to visit, their likes and dislikes and so on. One way to collect some of this information is to survey existing visitors. If you are already doing surveys of the community as part of your consultation process, you could include questions for visitors. Questionnaires that are administered around town, via businesses or via local publications and websites could all reach visitors as well as residents, and therefore gather some very useful information on which to base your tourism project.
- Think about the relevance to visitors of activities planned for the community. These might include health walks, community transport and infrastructure initiatives. If you develop a leaflet detailing countryside walks aimed at getting residents to be more active, they could also be distributed to potential visitors, encouraging them to come and enjoy the surrounding countryside. By making the leaflets relevant to both audiences you can save resources.
- Use the opportunity to bring local businesses into the community plan. Increasing visitor numbers may be an incentive for them to get involved even if they are otherwise reticent about community activities.

### MORE INFORMATION

Information and help is available on planning for community tourism projects. It varies from place to place, but some good places to start are:

- **Hidden Britain South East** can help rural communities in the South East of England with advice on planning, funding and implementing a community tourism project. The website also has guides to marketing your destination and evaluating your tourism project, which apply to community tourism ventures throughout the country.  
[www.hiddenbritainse.org.uk](http://www.hiddenbritainse.org.uk)
- Your **Local Authority** may have a tourism officer who should be able to help with information and advice. If not, the Economic Development Officer often has responsibility for tourism within their remit
- Your **Regional Tourist Board** can often help by providing research that has already been carried out on tourism in your area and with other practical information and training.
- **AONB units**. If you are within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), it is worth approaching them for advice and possible collaboration on tourism projects, especially those that focus on sustainable tourism.

