

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY****23 APRIL 2002****TRAFFIC SIGNS TO TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND FACILITIES IN ENGLAND –  
GUIDANCE FOR TOURIST SIGNING. CONSULTATION BY DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS****Report of the Team Leader of Recreation and Tourism****Purpose of Report:**

To inform Members of the Authority of the proposed national guidelines for signing tourist destinations (white on brown signs) and to recommend a response on the consultation by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

**Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:**

No legal implications for the National Park Authority as a consultee in the process of determining applications for tourism signs which is the responsibility of the County Highway Authorities.

No Human Rights Act 1998 implications

**Financial Implications:**

No financial implications for the National Park Authority.

**National Park Purposes:**

Tourism signing policy will have implications for the first and second National Park purposes and for the duty to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of the local community.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Authority is asked to ENDORSE the comments made in this report as the basis for responding to the consultation by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions on “Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England”.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Department of Transport, Local Government and the regions has issued draft guidelines for consultation on proposed changes to the policy and procedures relating to highway signing of tourist destinations.

**2 COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT GUIDANCE**

- 2.1 There are no trunk roads within the National Park and therefore the draft guidance applies only to “local roads”. The guidance does have implications for signing tourism destinations from trunk roads by imposing stricter criteria and reducing the number of eligible locations. Devon and Somerset County Councils have commented on these proposals. Tourism signs may be provided to geographic areas such as National Parks from both local and trunk roads.
- 2.2 The new guidelines are intended “to provide guidance on signs appropriate to meet the local and strategic needs of the tourism industry and road users in general and which is consistent with safe and efficient traffic management and with minimal impact on the environment.” It will be taken

into account by the local highway authorities in updating their current signing strategies. Both Devon and Somerset County Councils will be introducing revised tourism signing policies once the new national guidance is in operation. The new draft guidance states that tourism signing strategies should be developed after consulting adjoining local authorities (including national park authorities) and local and regional tourist organisations.

Comment:

There is considerable scope for the Highway Authorities to impose additional restrictions on eligibility for signing and it will be important for the National Park Authority to scrutinise carefully Devon and Somerset County Councils' revised policies when consultation takes place. It will also be important to ensure harmony between the two sets of policies. An element of flexibility in interpreting the policies should also be provided.

The current County Council tourism signing policies have been in operation for a number of years and have proved difficult to implement consistently. The National Park Authority is a consultee in the process of determining applications for tourism signs. Clearly there is a need to strike a balance between the benefits to the tourism business and the local community of signing which will direct road users to tourism destinations, and the need to keep the number of signs within the National Park to a minimum in the interests of preserving its character and special qualities.

- 2.3 As it applies to signing from local (i.e. not trunk) roads, the new guidance is not significantly different to the current guidance on which the policies operated by the County Councils are based. The consultation document makes it clear that "the main purpose of white on brown signs is to guide visitors to a tourist destination along the most appropriate route during the latter stage of their journey, particularly where the destination may be difficult to find. While it is recognised that white on brown signs are perceived by tourist businesses as useful marketing tools, this is not the primary purpose for which they are provided. They should not be used as a means of circumventing planning control of advertisements, nor as a substitute for good promotional material. White on brown tourist signs (like other directional signs) should only be used where they will benefit road users (i.e. as an aid to navigation and for safety or traffic management reasons) in addition to any ancillary benefits to the destination signed. Tourist signs should only be approved where existing directional signs are not sufficient."

Comment:

The principles set out above are generally accepted, but National Park Authorities have a duty to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the area to visitors and this must be reflected in interpreting the guidance at the local level. Definitions of "tourism destinations" are given in the appendix to this report.

Comment:

The definitions are broadly appropriate in the context of the National Park

- 2.4 The signing policy criteria recommend that all signed tourist destinations should be required to:
- (a) have adequate parking on site or close by. The signs should direct road users to the parking facilities rather than the destination itself;
  - (b) have adequate toilets on the site (including for people with disabilities);
  - (c) be publicised, for example, within tourist guide books, leaflets, on a web site and at Tourist Information Centres; and
  - (d) be generally of good quality, well maintained and suitable for people with disabilities.

Comment:

The need for such criteria is accepted.

- 2.5 The guidance indicates that quality is an important factor in determining whether a destination should be signed. There is now a voluntary “Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Service” (VAQAS) run by the English Tourism Council (ETC) and it is recommended that any tourist attraction signed using brown signs should normally be accredited by this scheme. Tourist facilities should normally be recognised by the Harmonised Quality Assurance Scheme (ETC, AA and RAC). There are similar criteria for caravan and camping locations.

Comment:

The requirement to demonstrate quality is supported.

- 2.6 The guidance emphasises that the accumulation of new signs can have an adverse impact on the local environment and that, in environmentally sensitive areas such as National Parks, the impact of any new signing requires special consideration.

Comment:

Supported.

- 2.7 Tourist Information Centres can be signed by white on brown signs and are to be distinguished from roadside information panels by means of different symbols.

Comment:

There may be instances where it would be appropriate to sign the National Park Local Information Points in the villages from the road network (e.g. Withypool from the B3223) to assist the visitor. Some flexibility in interpreting the national guidance is required, therefore, and the issue will need to be addressed when the County Highway Authorities are reviewing and updating their signing policies.

- 2.8 Applications for tourism signs are made to the Highway Authorities who will liaise with other Traffic Authorities. Applicants will be expected to provide evidence that they advertise or promote their establishment in various ways. There is no right of appeal, but applicants should be given full reasons if an application is refused.

Comment:

There is no apparent requirement to liaise with or seek comments from other authorities, particularly National Park Authorities, and this should be addressed. The guidance lays emphasis on the need for the Highway Authority and applicant to discuss any proposed signing in advance of an application being made. Where an application is unlikely to succeed, or has been approved, a business owner can apply to the National Park Authority for consent to display an advance advertisement instead. The Authority provides information about eligibility and other matters, including acceptable design in a leaflet. It will be necessary to review the advice and information given in the leaflet when the County Councils are reviewing their policies on tourism signing.

**Martin Evans**  
**Team Leader, Recreation and Tourism**  
**16 April 2002**

**Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:-**

Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England, Department of transport, Local Government and the Regions

### **Definitions of Tourist Destinations**

A **tourist destination** is a permanently established attraction or facility which:

- (a) attracts or is used by visitors to an area; and
- (b) is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours.

**Tourist attractions** include visitor centres, theme parks, historic buildings, museums, zoos, parks and gardens, natural attractions (such as nature reserves, beaches and viewpoints), areas of special interest, country tours, tourist routes, sports centres, concert venues, theatres and cinemas.

**Tourist facilities** include hotels, guesthouses, bed and breakfast establishments, public houses, restaurants, holiday parks, touring and camping parks, picnic sites and Tourist Information Centres.

These are not exhaustive lists.