

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**27 April 2004****PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPING THE TOURISM ECONOMY ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST REGION – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT FROM SOUTH WEST TOURISM****Report of the Head of Recreation and Tourism****Purpose of Report:** To recommend a response from the Exmoor National Park Authority to the consultation document “Towards 2015 - Shaping Tomorrow’s Tourism” published by South West Tourism**Legal Implications:**

None

Financial Implications:

The National Park Authority provides financial support for tourism through the QUEST Project and tourism support grants

National Park Purposes:

The promotion of sustainable tourism is an integral part of the National Park Authority’s second purpose: “To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park”.

RECOMMENDATION:

To recommend that the Authority WELCOMES the opportunity to comment on the consultation document “Towards 2015 – Shaping Tomorrow’s Tourism” published by South West Tourism, and RESPONDS to it on the basis of Section 2 of the Report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tourism is worth over £8 billion each year to the South West economy, employing over 300,000 people and attracting over 26 million visitors a year. It accounts for 10% of the total gross domestic product of the region. South West Tourism and the South West of England Regional Development Agency have been working with specialists, partners and tourism businesses to develop a new strategic approach to tourism in the region to meet the challenges of the coming years and to develop an enduring and sustainable competitive edge. South West Tourism is now consulting on the outcome of its research and policy development which is set out in a consultation document, “Towards 2015 - Shaping Tomorrow’s Tourism”.

1.2 The three key strategic aims are:

- Driving up quality and the competitiveness of businesses to increase value and respond to the changing demands of existing and new customers.
- Delivering truly sustainable tourism in order that tourism can continue to be a key sector of the South West economy for decades to come.

- Creating superior destination management arrangements that are second to none for effective marketing and tourism development, in order to deliver the maximum benefit for the industry and the region.
- 1.2 The fundamental basis of “Towards 2015” is the focus on exceeding customers’ needs, emphasising developing and promoting the “customer experience” rather than the traditional approach of promoting tourism destinations. People are increasingly choosing their holidays according to the experience they want rather than its location. “Towards 2015” identifies “brand clusters” such as “close to nature”, “discovery” and “It’s adventure” to reach new markets. Tourism businesses and their local authority partners will be encouraged to work together to promote the “brand clusters” most suitable for their areas which will be the focus of investment to develop products and packages to attract visitors from specific market sectors.
- 1.3 There is a new prioritisation of quality over quantity, growing the value of tourism and creating quality jobs that are better valued with more career prospects for local people. The emphasis is to be on increasing the value of tourism, rather than increasing the numbers of visitors. This approach will bring benefits for local communities and the environment.
- 1.4 Perhaps the most far-reaching and important proposal in “Towards 2015” is the development of a new approach to the way the tourism industry is organised, suggesting a more streamlined and customer-oriented approach to the way destinations are managed by focussing on key destinations across the region which are recognised by new customers. It is suggested that the new structure should consist of ten major destinations managed by Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs). These include Devon (including specific plans for Dartmoor, English Riviera and Plymouth) and Somerset (with specific plans for Weston Super Mare and Exmoor).
- 1.5 Destination Management Partnerships will be “real” partnerships between all key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, with all partners signed up to a shared plan. These partnerships can be delivered in two ways – by forming a single Destination Management Organisation (DMO), or by delivery through a true partnership with one single strategy and delivery plan, which is developed by the partners, but that also defines and limits the partners’ activities and holds them to account.

2. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

- 2.1 The approach to promoting sustainable tourism in the South West region set out in “Towards 2015” mirrors the approach adopted on Exmoor, as expressed in the Strategic Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Greater Exmoor Area co-ordinated by the QUEST Project, and reflects current thinking generally about the direction in which tourism promotion should go. The role of tourism as an economic activity creating jobs and providing income in the South West becomes even more important in the Exmoor context of declining farm incomes and limited potential for economic growth. The proposals set out in the Strategic Action Plan are wholly consistent with “Towards 2015”.
- 2.2 Essentially, the consultation document will have three major implications for the Authority, set out below.
- 2.3 **“Brand Clusters”:** The development of “brand clusters” will require a fundamental shift in the approach of some tourism businesses to the way that tourism in the Exmoor area is marketed. However, there is already substantial evidence that businesses recognise that visitors are increasingly looking primarily at the experiences available when planning holidays and short breaks before considering the places in which those experiences can be obtained, and are co-operating in marketing activities and experiences rather than just Exmoor as the destination. It is important that appropriate “brand clusters” are identified for the Exmoor area. Most

relevant will be those which emphasise the National Park's special qualities including its relative tranquillity, beautiful landscape, cultural heritage and the opportunities for active recreation.

- 2.4 **Developing the Exmoor Tourism Product:** Developing the Exmoor tourism “product” within appropriate “brand clusters” will require sensitivity to ensure that the kinds of tourism on offer have no adverse effects on the environment of, and the communities within, the National Park and that the economic benefits they bring to the local community are maximised. This is already a central theme in the Strategic Action Plan.
- 2.5 **Establishing a New Organisational Structure:** Exmoor National Park Authority has been instrumental in the creation of “Visit Exmoor”, a partnership between the ENPA, West Somerset District Council and the Greater Exmoor Tourism Consortium to provide leadership and co-ordination in developing and promoting sustainable tourism in the area. There are clear advantages, in terms of the availability and use of resources and more effective working, in integrating the work and resources of key stakeholders. The partners in Visit Exmoor have adopted the Strategic Action Plan as the basis for policy decision-making and action for the next five years and the partnership has pledged to work with other stakeholders in the area including Somerset County Council, the Somerset Tourism Partnership, Devon County Council and the North Devon Marketing Bureau wherever there are advantages to the Exmoor tourism industry in doing so.
- 2.6 Changing the organisational structure of the South West to improve the delivery of resources for promoting sustainable tourism is the most controversial issue for Exmoor. The greater Exmoor area sits astride the Devon/Somerset county boundary and therefore falls within two major destinations which will form the basis for destination management partnerships. The area could be disadvantaged in this situation, particularly in relation to the allocation of resources from SWERDA to the County organisations for promoting tourism. South West Tourism is proposing that a separate plan is prepared for Exmoor, and the recognition that Exmoor should be given this status is welcomed, but there is no indication in “Towards 2015” of what such a plan will do, what geographical area it will cover and how it will fit into the strategic context, particularly the relationship with the Devon and Somerset destination management partnerships. Clarification is required on this issue.
- 2.7 There is merit in considering the Exmoor area as a separate entity for tourism marketing and promotion purposes. Exmoor is a recognised tourism “brand” in its own right which underpins marketing efforts in a wide area and deserves to be promoted fully. However, it has been recognised in two studies of tourism on Exmoor that the area lacks the necessary “critical mass” to support an effective marketing organisation independent of external funding. The possibilities for further integrating tourism delivery in the Exmoor area should be explored with South West Tourism, SWERDA and other sub-regional and regional partners. This will mean looking at all options, including integration of tourism marketing, promotion and other activities in the West Somerset and North Devon areas.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 “Towards 2015” provides an approach to planning for the future of tourism in the South West which is carefully thought through and robust. It is largely consistent with the Strategic Action Plan for Exmoor and the Authority.

**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:-
Towards 2015 – Shaping Tomorrow's Tourism published by South West Tourism**