

ALNWICK AND DENWICK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Topic chapter – Tourism

1. Context

1.1 Introduction

Tourism – defined as any trip involving at least one night spent away from home – has been important to Alnwick for a very long time. The Castle has been a high profile visitor attraction, but in recent years has expanded its opening hours, activities and visitor facilities. The success of the Alnwick Garden has increased the visitor numbers to Alnwick and the surrounding area, putting Alnwick on the map nationally as a tourism destination and stimulating the local economy.

Recent plans (notably Alnwick Market Town Destination Management Plan, May 2008) identified a need for youth hostel-type accommodation, a hotel capable of catering for coach tour groups and for a high-end ‘boutique hotel’. The first two of these have since been achieved.

1.2 Market context

The growth of tourism in and around Alnwick reflects demand from several key types of travel:

- Holidaymakers (mainly UK, also international) using commercial accommodation – hotels, B&B, self-catering, camping/caravanning – influenced by awareness/reputation of the area
- Group travel – packaged travel provided by coach and tour operators – influenced by high profile visitor attractions that fit well within a wider itinerary
- Business travel – influenced by the size and health of the local business economy – and probably still an element of stopover traffic on longer journeys
- Visits to friends and relatives – influenced by the size of the locally settled population, also includes family events such as weddings.

Tourism marketers plan promotions in terms of target *market segments*. This is covered in more detail elsewhere, but the main targets identified appear to require an emphasis on quality of product and service, environment and access to heritage and countryside. What matters for the ADNP is how such market demand or potential might influence choices relevant to the plan: demand for certain types or qualities of accommodation, amenities and services; for travel modes, access routes and parking; and for accessibility for visitors with various physical needs.

1.3 Policy Context

Within scope: policies or proposals for cultural and tourism development, tourist attractions, visitor accommodation including hotels, guest accommodation, camping and caravanning, accessibility, movement and ‘legibility’ of the town.

Out of scope: issues to do with branding, promotion, pricing and/or quality of service delivery.

Alnwick Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2007)

Core Strategy Policy Objective 5 is to ‘promote the development of sustainable tourism’. The LDF supporting text and Policy S10 is of continuing relevance to consideration of future tourism

development in Alnwick. As summarised in the Economy and Employment Issues and Options paper:

Tourism is recognised for its positive contribution to the economy accounting for some 13% of the former district's economy. Tourism development such as hotels, health and fitness, restaurants and accommodation are generally directed to the main service centres, including Alnwick. This has the dual effect of protecting sensitive areas such as the coastal AONB, and facilitating sustainability benefits by reducing travel to facilities and supporting the town's services and shops.

LDF POLICY S10 - Tourism development:

*Proposals for new built cultural and tourism development must be in or adjacent to the rural service centres, **(Alnwick for the purposes of this plan)** sustainable village centres and local needs centres in accordance with the development strategy and provide a high quality development, which assists rural regeneration. Large scale tourism proposals must be assessed against the whole range of sustainable development objectives in particular the need to avoid adverse impact on the natural and historic environment and the well-being of communities.*

ADNP consultation responses

Responses to the Alnwick Neighbourhood Plan issues consultation indicate a high level of awareness of the value of tourism, heritage, accessibility and the quality of retail services to the local economy. 'Preserving and improving Alnwick as a tourist destination' was scored 4/5 in importance by 75% of those responding.

1.4 Evidence Base – a brief review

Northumberland Area Tourism Management Plan (ATMaP) 2010-2015

The Visitor Economy is one of Northumberland's most important economic sectors. The Plan notes that there is still scope for growth. A major constraint is that Northumberland's visitor economy remains highly seasonal, with the summer period (July to September) accounting for over a third of all tourist days. As well as limiting employment benefits, the short season impacts on business cash flow and acts as a brake on inward investment.

Market demand indicators: Northumberland Tourism and Visit England report average accommodation occupancy rates of around 55%. Bearing in mind the relatively short season, such levels of occupancy are reasonably good, masking much higher levels during peak months. The best way to improve overall utilisation is to invest in measures to extend the season. Such measures are mainly of a marketing nature, but could also include investment in year-round and all-weather visitor attractions and facilities.

Market Town Welcome Destination Management Plan (DMP, 2008)

The DMP vision for Alnwick was for the town to be 'one of the UK's top heritage towns', using the high profiles of Alnwick Castle and the Alnwick Garden, supported by other attractions to sustain a thriving visitor economy. Aspirations for improving the tourism appeal of Alnwick included:

- New, design-led town centre hotel
- Improved food, drink and evening time offer
- Greater accessibility through enhanced heritage interpretation, town trail and signage.
- A revitalised Northumberland Hall and Market Place.
- A full cultural programme of festivals, markets and shows.

- New cycling and walking routes to the coast and westwards towards the Cheviots.

Is this vision still relevant and appropriate to the ADNP?

2. Objectives

Alnwick appears to have many of the relevant attractions, amenities and visitor-related services needed to function as an attractive and sustainable visitor destination, but has under-utilised off-peak capacity, and needs to address quality and accessibility if it is to realise its full potential.

Suggested tourism objectives:

- To establish Alnwick as a high quality and accessible year-round tourism destination
- To improve the range and quality of accommodation and other visitor-related services
- To encourage investment that will enhance the appeal of visitor attractions and activities
- To encourage visitors to spend more time in Alnwick Town Centre
- To encourage more visitors to walk, cycle and use public transport

3. Issues and Options

3.1 What role should tourism play in the economy?

3.1.1 The Issue

As stated in the Economy & Employment Paper:

The thrust of National and County policy is to encourage tourism. The issue is particularly relevant for Alnwick as a key tourist destination in North Northumberland, and it is likely that demands for tourism will continue to grow within the town.

However it is equally important that tourism is not promoted to an extent that has negative effects due to over-reliance on one sector for economic growth, or that it drives out other sectors which contribute to the vitality of Alnwick as a market town and service sector.

The economic impact of tourism applies not only to businesses directly serving visitors, but also to the local supply chain and secondary economic impact (tourism earnings spent locally on all kinds of goods and services). This is known as the *Tourism Multiplier*. Studies elsewhere (sources available) indicate that each pound spent by a visitor is worth around £1.50 in local economic impact. Northumberland Estates estimates that for Alnwick Garden the multiplier impact is 1.85. Studies have also shown that where local business networks are strong, with good levels of local purchasing etc, this multiplier effect is higher than in areas where this is weaker.

Further indirect benefits: tourism helps to support a wider range of shops, cafes, theatre, social facilities and services befitting local people than might otherwise be sustainable for a town of this size.

3.1.2 Policy options:

- ***Should the Plan continue support for tourism as set out in the Alnwick LDF?***
- ***Should the Plan make provision for additional or accelerated growth of the tourism sector?***

3.2 Is there anything the Plan can do to address the challenge of Seasonality?

3.2.1 The Issue

As referred to in the Economy & Employment paper:

Bearing in mind the importance of tourism to the future wellbeing of the town, one question for the Plan is whether support for growth in the tourism sector should be maintained in line with National and County policy.

Initiatives to extend the length of the tourism season could be promoted with little environmental or land use impact upon the town.

Expanding capacity without addressing the seasonality issue will not help overall sustainability of the tourism sector: put simply, the short season makes it harder to achieve break-even and the generation of sufficient revenue to re-invest in improvements to facilities, quality of service etc.

3.2.2 Policy options:

- ***How might the Plan address the challenge of Seasonality?***

3.3 Should the Plan identify locations for tourism development?

3.3.1 The Issue

Tourism development, both attractions and accommodation in permanent buildings should be encouraged, and in the first instance, to be located within or adjacent to Alnwick, as one of the county's recognised service centres.

According to the Economy & Employment paper:

Another issue is whether the Plan should seek to specifically provide new sites for tourism development (potential allocations would exclude the more sensitive locations, such as to the north of the town), or alternatively use a criteria based policy approach which would allow development subject to certain tests, such as environmental impact and effects upon the town centre.

A balance is likely to be needed which protects the most sensitive environments, but allows growth within and adjacent to the town, in line with emerging LDF policy.

The recent completion of the Hog's Head Inn has added significantly to Alnwick's stock of hotel capacity. Any further new hotel development will need to be:

- Well positioned to maximise links with other local visitor attractions, services and facilities (to support year-round sustainability of tourism in Alnwick as a whole, etc)
- Well positioned and equipped to meet the needs and expectations of business markets as well as holiday travel.

Business tourism includes individual travellers, conferences and meetings. Hotels in England almost always need significant business traffic as well as leisure visitors to be sustainable year-round. Hotels with high reliance on leisure visits will find it more difficult to achieve good year-round occupancy, and this will reduce capacity for re-investing in renewals, improvements etc.

Arguably a criteria-based approach may be best for the Plan. For tourism related development proposals, whether for accommodation or visitor attractions and whether within the town or on the edge of town, the case should be assessed in terms of:

- Quality of design and fitness for purpose, taking into account evolving market expectations
- Contribution to the overall attractiveness of Alnwick as a tourism destination
- Ease of access to other visitor facilities and services in the town
- Contribution to extending the season and helping to build a sustainable year-round tourism economy for Alnwick.

3.3.2 Policy options

- *Should the Plan allocate specific land around Alnwick for tourism development, or*
- *Adopt a criteria based approach to tourism development?*

3.4 How might the Plan address issues of accessibility?

3.4.1 The Issue

Catering for the needs of visitors/potential visitors with mobility restrictions applies to a wide cross-section of society, across all market segments. Visit England advises that the core market for accessible tourism is disabled people, such as those with hearing impairment, visual impairment and wheelchair users. However, many people have access needs including those who are older and less mobile, learning impaired, temporary impairments, people with pushchairs, etc.

Growth in the older age market is set to be the most dramatic shift in society. This will inevitably impact upon tourism. By 2025, more than a third of the UK's population will be over the age of 55 (source: Office of National Statistics). Disability is strongly related to age with 2.1% of 16-19 year olds recorded as disabled; 31% for those between the ages of 50-59 years; and 78% of people aged 85 or over (source: Disability in the United Kingdom).

Disabled people tend to prefer to travel at off-peak times, so this might present an opportunity to address Alnwick's seasonality issue. People with impairments also tend to be accompanied by partners (50%), children (20%) or companions (20-25%) which increases the number of visitors and creates extra revenue.

Addressing accessibility will shape Alnwick's long-term reputation and economic benefits derived from tourism. It will of course also play a big part in making the town attractive to live and work in.

3.4.2 Policy options:

- *How must Alnwick change if it is to be a welcoming, delightful place for all? How might the Plan influence this?*

3.5 Signposting and interpretation

3.5.1 The Issue

The Discussion Forum feedback also highlights a number of requirements related to the ease with which both visitors and local people are able to navigate their way around the town, find places of interest, car parks and other facilities. For visitors this starts with the external approaches, especially from the A1.

Linked to this is a desire to strengthen local links between retail and leisure facilities, local services and amenities, and to ensure that the Castle/Gardens connects strongly with the core of the town.

Interpretation of the historical and architectural features of the town is also desirable. This would help to orientate visitors and enhance their enjoyment. 'Delighting' the visitor will help to encourage repeat visits and recommendations. Achieving this would also benefit the local people as being around the town would be a more pleasurable experience and a hopeful outcome would be more money spent in town.

3.5.2 Policy options:

- *How might the Plan address the need to improve signposting and interpretation of Alnwick?*

4. Links to other ADNP topics:

- Economy
- Retail /Town Centre
- Heritage and Culture
- Transport – including pedestrian and cycle links
- Arts and culture

5. Evidence Base

Documents consulted

Northumberland Area Tourism Management Plan (ATMaP) 2010-2015

Market Town Welcome Destination Management Plan (DMP, 2008)

Alnwick District Core Strategy 2007

Partners Consulted

A Tourism Discussion Event was held on the 26th of November 2012 with key partners involved in tourism invited to participate . The outputs from this session have been incorporated into this paper.

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