Sustainable Tourism (pages 67-76)
13. Sustainable Tourism

Overview

13.1 There is widespread feeling that Portland’s tourism potential has not been fully tapped. The community recognises its benefits and is supportive of making efforts to attract and accommodate more visitors. Green and sustainable tourism should be the objective. The Island’s natural environment and unique heritage are there to be ‘exploited’ if ways can also be found to safeguard and protect all that is precious to us. There is scope too for much more in the way of activities and events in the village centres that will attract tourists but will also make a difference to the social and community life of the Island. The community accepts that increased tourism is a valuable lever. Many local people would welcome and derive benefit regular evening activities, outdoor events and festivals, more public art installations, and a general uplift in the scale and quality of facilities and services.

13.2 The current constraints on tourism growth are readily identifiable. We are lacking in visitor accommodation. There is insufficient capacity in the road network and parking areas. Many of our public venues fall short on several levels. Moreover, there are currently not enough tourist attractions and specific visitor destinations to increase meaningfully the average visit time and expenditure.

13.3 There are a tourism ‘assets’ that can be taken advantage of. Portland Port has witnessed significant growth over the last five years. And is now regularly expected hosting cruise ships. The tendency however, is for passengers to be taken by coaches off the island to other established destinations during their short stay. The Island also offers significant activity adventure opportunities. The Weymouth & Portland National Sailing Academy hosts world class facilities for sailors and Portland Harbour provides a safe venue with a full range of water sports including diving, paddle boarding and kayaking. The adventure tourism sector continues to grow and the Island’s topography, quarries and wildness are there to be exploited responsibly. Portland needs to establish an identity distinct from Weymouth. The Portland Brand needs to be defined and marketed in consistent way.

13.4 We should be helped significantly by the development of a major tourist attraction such as the proposed ‘MEMO’ project. We need to ensure that we plan to help them succeed and ensure adequate infrastructure is in place, so that we can take full advantage of the benefits that can accrue to Portland and its community. This also means realising what else we have with tourist potential and how it can be sustainably and appropriately developed. Thereby ensuring that, despite its enhanced visitor appeal, the Island continues to provide a pleasant, safe and affordable place for future generations of Portlanders to live, work and play.

### Sustainable Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Accommodate responsible and sustainable tourism development</th>
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| Objectives | • Support sustainable tourism-related development in appropriate locations  
• Support the creation of individual, or a network of, tourist trails  
• Facilitate appropriate new marine developments |

39 An educational charity dedicated to building a monument to species going extinct worldwide, together with a biodiversity education centre
Policy No. Port/ST1  Sustainable Tourism Development

Small scale, low impact sustainable tourism development within the area(s) delineated on Map 13, particularly involving the re-use of redundant sites and buildings, will be supported provided it:

i. does not have an adverse impact on the character and setting of the area;
ii. does not result in a loss of amenity to neighbouring properties;
iii. does not adversely affect the surrounding infrastructure, particularly local road networks and water supply and sewerage;
iv. promotes and complements the unique characteristics of the area
v. provides for an appropriate level of parking for both vehicles and cycling; and
vi. demonstrably benefits the local community and economy.

Any accommodation provided for short-term holiday lets should be restricted for leisure uses only and should not be occupied for residential purposes, including as a second home.

13.5 Sustainable tourism is tourism committed to generating a low impact on the surrounding environment and community by acting responsibly while generating income and employment for the local economy and aiding social cohesion. Rather than a type of product, sustainable tourism is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities and is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management and not just an add-on. The 2014 Community Consultation for the Neighbourhood Plan showed that 91% of respondents recognised tourism and visitors as an important part of our economy. In 2013, the Portland Community Partnership prepared and consulted upon a draft Portland Tourism and Visitor Management Strategy. It reflects the community’s aspirations towards tourism:

13.6 Tourism will be managed on Portland in a way that will:
- Protect the coastal and marine environment including unique natural and heritage assets
- Support visitor safety and enjoyment whilst ensuring a balance between the needs of tourists and the preservation of existing and evolving community values
- Minimise adverse visitor impacts on the social, economic and physical environment
- Add economic, social and environmental benefits to the community

There will also be economic, environmental and social benefits:
- Economic through a reduction in energy use, water use or waste production
- Environmental reinforces Portland’s nature-based brand and natural visitor experiences.
- Social through local jobs for local people

13.7 One of Dorset’s economic strengths and ‘drivers’ is its tourism industry. Many tourist visits are heavily dependent on the appeal of the natural environment. The Dorset Local Nature Partnership claims that the seaside, beaches and coast is the most frequently listed reason for visiting Dorset, and 62% of tourist visits are motivated by coast, scenery or countryside. There is much on Portland that can be exploited but equally there is much on Portland that can be damaged if tourism and its impact is not managed.

13.8 Recent research (2016) identified, on Portland, very little serviced accommodation, no provision in terms of touring caravan and camping sites, only one small 5-star holiday park, a small but supply of self-catering accommodation and three hostel/ bunkhouse accommodation operations. The resulting action plan recommended, in particular, redressing the lack of

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40 Portland Tourism and Visitor Management Strategy (draft), Portland Community Partnership, 2013
“suitable accommodation for activity visitors, particularly in terms of a lack of provision for camping, and the potential for camping pods as an accommodation offer that would appeal to this market”\footnote{Western Dorset Growth Corridor Study, Hotel solutions, Jun 2016}.

13.9 The Town Council has agreed\footnote{Marine, Environment and Tourism meeting, Portland Town Council, 6th Sep 2017} that Portland’s natural focus should be on activity-holidays and adventure-seekers. It supports an approach to tourism that makes Portland an activity hub with reference to diving, mountain biking and climbing responding to distinctive offer and making Island a destination. These activities will fit with the major projects as they develop. On Portland this would include activity centres, camping pods, glamping sites and cafes.

13.10 The challenges we face include:

- establishing more effective links with Weymouth
- a closer association with Jurassic Coast
- ensuring tourism growth respects quality of landscape
- managing and improving road access
- identifying appropriate areas for sensitive tourism development

13.11 We have concluded from our own studies that the areas defined (in green) on Map 13 may be suitable for additional tourism activity and facilities including activity centres, activity-friendly accommodation, camp sites, camping pods, hostel/bunkhouse, self-catering accommodation. Included in these areas are quarries with substantial reserves. Any tourism-related development in or adjacent to the quarries should ensure these reserves are safeguarded and conform to policy Port/EN05 and the restoration requirements of the Minerals Strategy (Policy PD5).

13.12 Policy Port/ST1 is specifically designed to encourage small-scale sustainable tourism development proposals that provide for activity and adventure holidays to come forward within those areas of the Island that offer can offer an outdoor, rugged and rural location that is away from the most environmentally sensitive areas. We would expect any such proposal to demonstrate its sustainability credentials and be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment.

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**National Planning Context**

Our policy aligns with current national planning policies and guidance:

NPPF para. 28 - support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments…. which respect the character of the countryside

**West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan**

Our policy relates to the following Local Plan policies:

Policy ECON5 Tourism Attractions and Facilities
Policy No. Port/ST2  Beach Huts

Proposals for replacement beach huts at West Weares, Church Ope Cove and Portland Bill that match the footprint of existing huts, and minor extensions to the rear of beach huts on the Beach Hut fields at Portland Bill (see map 14), will be supported where they:

i. are of a single-storey design which is in keeping with the traditional character and topography of the site;
ii. do not result in a disproportionate increase in the ridge height;
iii. are finished in timber stained the appropriate colour;
iv. have no significant impact on the existing and essential character of the site;
v. are for day-time recreation use with non-permanent residence; and,
vi. avoid any significant negative impact on the biodiversity, landscape and setting of the site and the surrounding area.

Where some impact is unavoidable, it will be satisfactorily mitigated.

Development proposals to provide additional beach huts will not be supported.

13.13 Portland Bill, Church Ope and West Weares are the location of beach huts (former fisherman’s huts) that are a long-established and well-known feature of the landscape. For many years they have been used for recreational purposes. Many are no longer owned by Portlanders. We concur with the Weymouth and Portland Supplementary Planning Guidance on Portland’s Beach Huts43, which says “by their nature, these huts are located on the open coastline in sensitive areas. It is important that future developments are controlled to prevent damage to the open landscape, nature conservation interest and recreational value of these sites, both for the benefit of existing hut owners and for the wider local community and visiting public who enjoy these precious landscapes”.

13.14 Beach huts on Portland are being sold for considerable sums of money. Our concern is that those that can afford to purchase a beach hut may feel inclined to invest further in their asset. We wish to place some control on the development changes that are acceptable. We want to protect the sensitive landscape, with its species-rich grasslands, from damage.

13.15 The approach taken by the Beach Huts SPD seems reasonable and is generally echoed in policy Port/ST2. At West Weares, Church Ope Cove and outside the hut fields at Portland Bill, additional beach huts, extensions to beach huts and the replacement of beach huts with larger structures are considered most unlikely to be appropriate due to the critical landscape, nature conservation and recreational interests in these areas.

13.16 In the hut fields at Portland Bill, south of Coastguard Cottages and the Old Lower Lighthouse, the huts are arranged along the field boundaries, forming nearly complete squares in some cases (see Map 14). Here, minor extensions to beach huts in non-sensitive locations might be acceptable, but “great care is required to preserve this sensitive balance and to avoid the character of the hut fields tipping over into one of consolidated development…. extensions should normally be to the rear of existing huts, towards the nearest field boundary. Extensions to the sides of huts will rarely be acceptable, as they would increase the enclosure of the fields. Likewise, extensions towards the centre of the fields are unlikely to be acceptable, as these would reduce the important openness of the fields.”44. A hut that has previously been extended should not receive permission for further extensions.

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43 Revised Supplementary Planning Guidance Portland Beach Huts, Weymouth & Portland BC, Feb 2006
44 Revised Supplementary Planning Guidance Portland Beach Huts Weymouth & Portland BC Feb 2006
Policy No. Port/ST3  Tourist Trails

Proposals that further the creation of a network of tourist and leisure trails will be supported provided:

i. the construction and appearance of new paths, tracks or links are appropriate in scale and sensitive to the character of the locality;

ii. they avoid sensitive ecological areas and habitats; and

iii. they provide for improved accessibility for wheelchairs and those with impaired mobility.

Signage and interpretation facilities should be in keeping with the established standards for local tourist trails; and, where appropriate, they further links to the strategic cycle network of the area.

13.17 Portland is criss-crossed by a network of designated footpaths. In addition to these there are many undesignated footpaths which are used regularly. There is also one bridleway on the Island.

13.18 Most significant, perhaps, is the Legacy Trail45, that runs from Littlemoor on the mainland to Portland Bill (about 20km), with information 'way points', it links all the heritage sites, nature reserves and interpretation centre (see Map 15). This local long-distance path running from Littlemoor to Portland Bill was established to celebrate the Olympics. At the same time there was linked improvement work to Merchants Railway gulleys in the Tilleycombe, Waycroft, Tout and King Barrow area. A lot of this work however has fallen into disrepair.

13.19 There are opportunities to establish similar legacy or themed trails, using established routes across the Island, and thereby manage the pressure on existing footpaths and open access land, including the South West Coastal Path National Trail. The following routes indicate the potential for further enhanced walking and/or cycling opportunities on the Island (also shown on Map 15):

- **Merchants Railway** - was a horse drawn and cable operated incline railway, built for the stone trade on the island. It was the earliest railway on Portland and in Dorset, opening in 1826 (one year after the Stockton and Darlington railway). The railway ran two miles from many working quarries at the north of Tophill, such as Tout, King Barrow and Waycroft Quarries, along the edge of Verne Hill (where the Verne Citadel is located), to a pier at Castletown, from where the Portland stone was shipped around the world. It was operational from 1826 to 1939. Since becoming disused the original path of the railway has become a popular public footpath. The remaining earthworks of the main line, amongst other remains, can still be traced today.

- **Merchants Incline** – a section of the Merchants Railway Network of about 550m which serves as footpath to and from Castletown, which is included in the Castletown Conservation Area.

- **Belle Vue Terrace/Higher Lane** - these characterful step pathways are an integral part of any heritage pathway in Underhill

- **Cemetery Rd and East Weares Heritage** – is a route of some 1.5 km, if fully open and repaired would open up East side of Island and improve the SW Coast Path offer. The road up to the Cemetery is in reasonable condition but the old army road beyond this is badly overgrown and in poor condition.

- **Old Hill** – is the original pathway between Underhill and Tophill. Horses were separated from foot traffic by fencing. Old Hill is in a poor condition and needs development funding. If improved the path could be a significant heritage route.

Church Ope – to access the beach there are two paths. The main path follows the road past Portland Museum and leads under the arch bridge of Rufus Castle, then down concrete steps to the cove. These were laid out by the Portland Urban District Council in 1906 at a time when the beach was becoming increasingly popular as a recreational area. The other path runs through a small area of woodland around the outside of Pennsylvania Castle, and passes through the ruins of St Andrew's Church (close to John Penn's Bath), before linking up over midway down the concrete steps to the cove.

Railway Line – whilst much of the old railway line has now been developed on, Sections could still be used as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways but need management, conservation and interpretation.

Southwell Ancient Cart Tracks – are an indication of rural setting and farming history. The Cart Tracks with sensitive management could serve as cycleways and bridle-paths. Those that have been lost could be restored and used in a similar manner.

Quarry Haul roads – are a network of routes that connect the quarries. Some could provide the basis to an Island distributor road network, but the surface materials would have to be appropriate to the setting and heritage

Verne Hill - according to the historic map of early 1700s Verne Hill was the basis to the main path to the East Coast. This linkage could prove an effective route to interpret and act as a basis for conservation.

13.20 Local Plan Policy COM7 ‘Creating A Safe and Efficient Transport Network’ promotes the delivery of a strategic cycle network and supports improvements to the public rights of way network. Development, it states, should not result in the severance or degradation of existing or proposed routes. It requires links within the rights of way network to be improved, if possible, through new developments.

13.21 Policy Port/ST2 supports the creation of new tourist routes that will encourage visitors to walk and cycle and enjoy what the Island had to offer by way of environment, character and heritage. Such trails need to meet appropriate accessibility standards, in terms of slope, width and surface yet, at the time, be sensitively designed into the landscape to minimise intrusion and avoid destruction or disturbance of natural habitats.

National Planning Context
Our policy aligns with current national planning policies and guidance:

NPPF para. 75 - protect and enhance public rights of way and access...... seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan
Our policy relates to the following Local Plan policies:

Policy COM7 Creating a Safe and Efficient Transport Network
Policy No. Port/ST4  Marine Berths for Tourists
Development proposals that enable the provision of new and additional marine berths and facilities at Osprey Quay, Castletown and Portland Port in the interests of increasing tourism will be supported.

13.22 The marine environment has the potential to serve as much of a tourist draw as other environments on the Island. For most of the last century, Portland was defined by its role as a Royal Navy base. Since 1997 Portland Port has been developed on a commercial basis. The land area is becoming a successful business park. The harbour serves as an important commercial gateway. The latest business development plan for Portland Port emphasises its intention to continue to grow the following: “‘agribulk’ (animal feeds, grains and fertilisers), ship repair yard, enhanced vessel services offshore and marine renewables and energy and recycled commodities”\(^{46}\).

13.23 Portland Port offers a safe, sheltered and deep harbour which makes it a viable choice for all vessels, from small yachts to some of the largest cruise ships in the world. The cruise business is already a success story. A significant financial investment in berth infrastructure should open up in excess of 95% of the global cruise fleet enabling continued expansion into international markets. We are pleased that the tourism potential of the Port is being realised.

13.24 Alongside the Port, the Olympic Games of 2012 provided us with Osprey Quay and the National Sailing Academy. This has also put us on the marine tourist map. We wish exploit this growing status and recognition by supporting more marine berths and facilities in the vicinity of the Osprey Quay and Castletown in particular that will encourage an even broader marine tourist offer and more visitors. We believe that marine-based tourism could revitalise the Castletown area significantly. Portland Heritage and Character Assessment of 2017 recommends that “development at Castletown should reflect the maritime and naval history of the area including the sensitive restoration of public houses and properties that maximise the views and physical relationship with the Port”\(^{47}\).

National Planning Context
Our policy aligns with current national planning policies and guidance:
NPPF para. 28 - the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations
West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan
Our policy relates to the following Local Plan policies:
Policy ECON5 Tourism Attractions and Facilities
Policy PORT1 Osprey Quay

\(^{46}\) Portland Port Business Development Plan, Portland Port, 2014 [http://www.portland-port.co.uk/](http://www.portland-port.co.uk/)

\(^{47}\) Portland Heritage and Character Assessment of 2017, AECOM for Portland Town Council, March 2017