

Tourism and Land Use Planning Regional Seminars

Region: South East

Venue: Denbies English Vineyard and Wine Estate, Dorking Surrey

Date: 5 September 2007

SUMMARY

1. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in collaboration with regional stakeholders has started a series of regional seminars to mark the first anniversary of the publication of the Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism.
2. Led by Tourism South East, the South East seminar was held at the Denbies English Vineyard and chaired by Ken Robinson CBE FTS, Chairman of the Leisure, Recreation and Tourism think tank.
3. The objectives of the seminar were:
 - To further awareness of the Good Practice Guide principles;
 - To promote understanding among the planning community of the economic importance of tourism and take this fully into account when taking planning decisions;
 - To help develop greater understanding of the values of the plan-led system among the tourism industry; and
 - To facilitate network creation at regional and local level

The outcome of the seminars will help to identify any gaps in the guidance, inform future policy and initiatives at all levels.

4. The seminar attracted thirty-four delegates. The key audiences were well represented and included delegates from the planning community at regional and local level, industry, tourism bodies, and Government both national and regional.
5. The first part of the seminar consisted of several presentations that set the context and provided different perspectives on the subject: **Ken Robinson** made the case for the tourism industry as a major economic driver still wrestling to shake its derogatory image, **Joan Clark** from BH&HPA presented an industry perspective and **Kevin Hazzel** from the South East Regional Assembly gave a strategic overview of *Planning and Engaging with the Planning System*. The second set of presentations concentrated on planning issues

related to the accommodation and hotel sector. Presenters included **Roger Budden**, Head of Partnerships and Business Development, TSE, **Andrew Keeling** from Tourism Solutions and **Mark Smith**, Head of Tourism, Bournemouth Tourism. Presentations can be accessed on the Tourism South East Website.

ISSUES RAISED

Q&A sessions were held after each set of presentations and the following points were raised:

1. Ken Robinson, Chair, began the Q&A session by asking how many of the local authorities represented at the seminar didn't have tourism strategies. More than half of them did not.
2. Darren Hood of Humbert's Leisure asked about planning policy and who is responsible for studies and the setting of criteria. Ken answered first pointing out that devolution had led to a disjointed sharing of information between the regional development agencies. Brigid Simmonds from the BISL reported that Partners for England were trying to co-ordinate a sharing of information and pointed out that the recent review of the planning system by Kate Barker had questioned the need to prove demand to get planning permission. Joan Clark of BHHPA added that often demand is proven by the desire to develop.
3. Darren Hood asked about the role the environment agency plays in the consultation process and about whom developers should approach for advice. Brigid Simmonds advised potential developers to approach their local authority tourism officer as the first point for advice.
4. Simon Matthews from Mole Valley District Council asked about the competition between Local Authorities' tourism strategies and local pressures. Ken Robinson pointed out that this was the democratic process. Mark Smith from Bournemouth Borough Council said that a copy of the Good Practice Guidance had been sent out to all the members at Bournemouth Council. Simon said that the perception of Mole Valley as a tourist destination among the members of the council was likely to be much different to the perception of Bournemouth to the members of that council. Mark agreed but stressed the importance of engaging with members.
5. Chris Evans of the Tourism Company asked the speakers if they agreed with him that the appendices to both PPG 21 and the GPG were very helpful and important. Maria Schlee of the DCMS commented that the Guide's status was clearly stated in the document and in accordance regional and local planning authorities in England should have regard to the Guide in formulating their local and regional planning frameworks. The advice it contains may also be a 'material consideration' in individual planning decisions. Chris said he thought there should be a drive to push the importance of the GPG.
6. After the presentations on hotel retention and Bournemouth's policy on planning for tourism, Darren Hood asked if there were any examples of 'verticality' i.e combined building, for example hotels and providers of another service. Andrew Keeling, from

Tourism Solutions, responded that there were examples of this in high rise buildings in London, Birmingham and Liverpool but he couldn't think of any in the South East. Mark said there was an example of a high building in Bournemouth that had shops at the ground level and a hotel above. Ken agreed that facilities such as conference centres do not need to be on the ground floor. Roger Budden of Tourism South East commented that businesses such as pubs and golf courses have diversified to provide accommodation in addition to their 'core' product. Mark said there was a problem with the perception of budget hotel chains who might wish to invest in such projects.

7. Brigid asked if there was a need to recognise that the release of hotel accommodation is sometimes appropriate. Mark agreed that sometimes there is no viable future for some hotels although often big companies will be prepared to invest in older stock. For example there are successful cases of redevelopment in Brighton (boutique hotels) and on the Isle of Wight which have recaptured a share of the market. Ken commented that there was a need to encourage creativity.
8. Debbie Vodden of East Hampshire District Council asked whether developers found the Bournemouth guide helpful. Mark said even if they didn't like it initially, they soon realised that it is the system and they have to work with it. Ken said it could act as a litmus test for the proposed development.
9. Philip Rolls of Cherwell District Council asked about the effect of new budget hotel developments on existing accommodation stock. Mark said that it is a myth that halving your accommodation stock will result in a doubling of business. Experience shows that budget hotels bring more business to an area that can be exploited by smaller operators. Andrew said that a small amount of displacement can occur. Ken said that 'place' matters most to accommodation providers and larger hotels will invest in marketing the 'place' to the advantage of smaller operators. He also used the example of theme parks in Florida as evidence that opening up competing businesses can actually increase business rather than decrease your share of the same pot.
10. Chris Evans asked if it was correct to assume that Bournemouth's planning guidance had not changed the tests for planning but merely set them out in a transparent way was correct. Mark agreed. Ken added that another benefit of this approach is that developers do not have to pay for advice.
11. Finally Simon asked if the sub-regional bodies/contacts were an appropriate point of contact for developers seeking advice. Roger answered that the first point of call should be the local authority tourism officer and then Tourism South East. Ken added that some sub-regional groups have very strong working relationships and are therefore a good point of contact but that some sub-regions have little or no working relationships and are therefore not a good contact.

Conclusions

The seminar was considered a success, and key audiences were well represented with useful points raised in the Q&A sessions. Many within the audience were familiar with the Guide but concerns were raised over its weight in relation to PPG21. All agreed that it was important to continue to raise its profile and that of the tourism industry.

It was surprising to hear that not many Local Authorities have tourism strategies and therefore early and effective councillor involvement was considered an important step in championing tourism development and facilitating earlier joined-up engagement.

The seminar included a section on hotel development and retention, very relevant in most regions, which raised issues such as the danger of accommodation being replaced below recovery levels by more lucrative housing developments, the importance of sensible design – not all buildings in town centres are suitable for renovation or expansion – and the benefits of creative design which enables integration in a single space of a variety of complimentary services: hotels, conferencing, retail, sport and leisure.

PLANNING FOR TOURISM

Wednesday 5 September 2007

Denbies Suite, Denbies English Vineyard and Wine Estate, Dorking,
Surrey

- 09.30** Arrival. Tea and coffee served
- 10.00** Welcome and overview of the role of tourism – Chairman Ken Robinson CBE FTS
- 10.25** Aims of the Guide and Seminar - Maria Schlee, Senior Policy Advisor, DCMS
- 10.35** DCMS Planning for Tourism Guidance - a tourism industry view - Joan Clark, Deputy Director-General, British Holiday and Home Parks Association
- 11.05** A regional planner's response to the Guide – Kevin Hazzell - SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly)
- 11.30** Q & A session
- 11.45** Tea and coffee served
- 12.00** Introduction to accommodation sector retention and shortage issues – Roger Budden, Head of Partnerships and Business Development, TSE
- 12.05** Developing and retaining hotel accommodation - Lynn Thomason, Director, Tourism Solutions
- 12.25** Best Practice Case Study: Developing a Resort - Mark Smith, Head of Tourism, Bournemouth Tourism
- 12.45** Q & A session
- 13.00** Lunch and networking opportunities

TOURISM
SOUTH EAST



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