

REPORT ON THE CHANGES TO POLICY 14: LOCAL TOURISM

B+ NP(1) sought to encourage investment in the tourism offer of the area, both in terms of tourist attractions (to be located in the town centre) and of the supply of tourist accommodation (within the development boundary).

The examiner of B+NP (1) issued ‘No comment’ on policy 14 and recommended that it proceeds to referendum as part of the Plan.

Consultation results show that 93% of local residents who participated in the poll are in favour of B+ proposals on tourism; 7% opposed.

Since the examination of B+NP(1) three District Councils, including North Dorset District Council, commissioned a Joint Retail and Commercial Leisure Study which was published in March 2018. The Study recognises that overall Blandford Forum is a vital and viable centre, although it offers some suggestions for improvements to its offer and the public realm. These relate mainly to the town centre shopping experience, however it includes reference to the regeneration of the Corn Exchange “*There are a number of key developments...including the potential regeneration of the Corn Exchange, which we consider will further improve the town centre’s offer and quality of environment.*”.

Tourism and positive town centre strategies are strongly linked, and the Neighbourhood Plan has sought to set out a positive strategy for the Town Centre, in Policy B7, as well. In addition to the planned improvements to the Corn Exchange, there are a number of other attractions that all add to the attractiveness of the Blandford+ area as a tourist destination. These include Hall & Woodhouse visitor centre (and the area around the centre is also planned for regeneration, which will include opening up access to the centre from Stour Meadows); Blandford Museum, Blandford Fashion Museum, the uniqueness of the town’s Georgian facades, riverside walks, the Trailway, and the shops and businesses in the town centre. The regeneration of the Railway Arches and continued maintenance and enhancements to the Trailway and other footpaths to increase the attraction of the area to eco-tourism, the installation of cycle racks to further encourage local and visiting cyclists are all projects that are developing in the area at present. These projects all seek to contribute to the tourism offer of the area and is not an exhaustive list of development taking place to enhance the town centre offer and so continued encouragement from the Neighbourhood Plan for such projects is necessary.

The Carter Jonas Study also highlighted that there are fewer hotels in North Dorset, but that the area is an important tourist destination and that there may be opportunities for growth in this sector. It states that:

“The study area generally benefits from a diverse cultural and tourist attractions, which contribute significantly to the visitor economy of the area. These need to be maintained and promoted in order to attract further visitors to the area and to help attract all-year trips.

20.92 In terms of hotel provision, the area is well served by a range of national and independent operators. Notwithstanding this, to help maintain and enhance the visitor and tourist economy

across the study area and its main centres, the respective LPA's should proactively seek to increase hotel and visitor/tourist accommodation in the main centres, subject to market demand."

With the Blandford area investing in its tourism offer it also continues to support the development of new accommodation for the provision of new hotel, hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation to support the growth of the tourist economy.

It is therefore considered that the recent study indicates that the Neighbourhood Plan should continue to encourage investment in the tourism offer of the area, both in terms of tourist attractions (to be located in the town centre) and of the supply of tourist accommodation (within the development boundary) and no changes have been made to the policy.

This approach is further supported within the Grimsey review 2017 (Key finding 1 p4)

'There is a need for all towns to develop plans that are business-like and focused on transforming the place into a complete community hub incorporating health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as some shops, while developing a unique selling proposition (USP)'.