

Tourism Background Paper

1. Introduction

1.1 The NLP actively promotes the benefits of increased tourism in Northumberland. Indeed, there is a Destination Management Plan and this states:

“Our vision is to create an environment in Northumberland for tourism and the visitor economy to develop and flourish sustainably, maximising benefits and combating negative impacts, for the benefit of local communities, businesses, visitors and the natural environment.”

1.2 Further, in section 3 of the NLP NCC sets out its strategic objectives for the Plan period. At paragraph 3.5, the strategic objective with regard to tourism is as follows:

“The tourism sector will have grown in a sustainable way benefiting rural areas, communities and visitors. The potential for Northumberland’s environmental and historic assets to make a substantial contribution to the County’s economy will have been realised, while ensuring their full protection, and where possible their enhancement. Tourist and visitor facilities will be located in appropriate places, enhancing Northumberland as a visitor destination.”

1.3 Policy ECN 1 Planning strategy for the economy (Strategic Policy) it is stated at paragraph 2f that development proposals will support and promote tourism and the visitor economy.

1.4 It is therefore recognised in drafting the Plan that tourism has and will in the future, have a contribution to make in the overall planned economy of Northumberland. Nonetheless, for the purpose of the Plan, it is also important to recognise and consider the effect that tourism has on Climate Change.

1.5 In 2019 NCC made the following Declaration:

“NCC understands that climate change needs to be acted on urgently. This is why we have declared a climate emergency and set our goal to make Northumberland net-zero by 2030.”

1.6 NCC also aims to have halved its emissions across its own estate and operations by 2025. Following on from that NCC have made this latest (2024) statement on its website:

“Climate change is a significant long-term challenge for the planet. We are committed to taking action to reduce the impacts climate change will have on all our lives long into the future.”

1.7 In recent years the council has reduced its carbon emissions by a third and the area is now ranked as one of the greenest in the country. But we still have a significant role to play in

further reducing our own greenhouse gas emissions and providing the leadership to encourage residents, businesses and other organisations to take action to cut their own carbon footprint.

2. Sustainable Tourism

2.1 Given that the two policies above, in drafting the Plan we have chosen to adopt a “sustainable tourism” approach. By sustainable tourism we mean stating long term policies that will underpin all tourism activities and are integral to all the aspects of tourism development and management.

2.2 Sustainable tourism is being committed to generating a low impact on the surrounding environment and community, by acting responsibly while generating income and employment for the local economy.

3. Existing Tourism in the Parish

3.1 The main reasons for Tourism in the Parish are considered to be the quiet rural landscape of Northumberland, known to be picturesque; historical sites; and proximity to the Northumberland National Park.

3.2 In Swarland there is a local connection to Lord Nelson as his agent, Alexander Davison, lived in the area and has left two memorials, namely The Column on the Old A1 and Nile Park which is the oak tree memorial of the Battle of the Nile off Park Road in Swarland.

3.3 The Parish has three different types of Tourist accommodation:

- a) Small: A few properties offering Bed and Breakfast accommodation, e.g. holiday cottages, single caravan/shepherd hut and glamping sites located throughout the Parish
- b) Medium: The Cook and Barker Pub, restaurant and 16 bed Hotel located in Newton on the Moor
- c) Large Establishment: The Percy Wood Country Retreat a site of approximately 500 non residential mixed Lodges and Caravans and a Golf course at Swarland.

4. New Development of Small Existing Tourist Accommodation

4.1 New development of small tourist accommodation will be supported if the applicants comply with NLP Policy ECN 15, ECN16 and Policy TP1. NPPF (2024) paragraph 88 states that planning policies should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that respect the character of the countryside.

POLICY TP1

4.2 **All new tourist developments** should be proportionate to their location in scale and type and have suitable off road parking and electric vehicle charging for all of its guests; or be located on

a public transport route which utilises low emission technology or be on the route of a safe, long distance /circular long distance cycleway or footpath.

- 4.3 New developments relating to **land outside settlement boundaries**, in addition to the above, will need to demonstrate that the use proposed will promote the unique characteristics of the area; not lead to significant damage to the areas natural assets of the area, the ecology and wildlife corridors; protect the historic environment; not obstruct the key views and avoid conflict with any strategic policies designed to protect the environment, ecology and countryside.

5. New development of existing medium sized tourist accommodation

- 5.1 New development of existing medium sized tourist accommodation will be supported if the application complies with NLP Policy ECN 15, ECN 16 and Policy TP1. NPPF (2024) paragraph 88 states that planning policies should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that respect the character of the countryside.

6. New development of existing large sized tourist accommodation

- 6.1 Any development of existing large site tourist accommodation will only be supported if it **fully** conforms to NLP Policy ECN 15, 16 and Policy TP1. NPPF (2024) paragraph 88 states that planning policies should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that respect the character of the countryside.

- 6.2 In a Parish wide survey in January 2024, one of questions asked was:

- a) “If you are in agreement with the introduction of additional businesses, which of the below would you support?” For Caravans/Holiday Pods there was a 10:1 ‘No’. Consequently, any future enlargement of the Percy Wood Country Retreat site will not be supported.

7. Percy Wood

- 7.1 The first caravan park at Percy Wood was set up in 1975. There was Planning permission for 40 touring caravans. Since then, the site has grown considerably and the Steering Group believe that Northumberland County Council believe that this is in compliance with the original approved Planning Applications. There are currently over 450 units and the target is 500 non residential lodges and caravans. This is greater than the total number of houses in Swarland.
- 7.2 In 2024 the Neighbourhood Plan Steering group began a dialogue with the Site Manager at Percy Wood and following this, prepared a Memorandum of Understanding (copy included in the Appendix).
- 7.3 The Steering Group recommends that as a Community Action, a dialogue be maintained with Percy Wood Management to encourage the implementation/observance of the provisions in the Neighbourhood Plan, once made, that relate to Percy Wood.

NB It is important to note, there are changes in legislation that have taken place in the licensing of Caravans Sites and Control Development Act 1960, which has to be regarded as out of date, and has been updated by the Mobile Homes Act 2013.

The Mobile Homes Act 2013 changes the procedures and penalties for the enforcement of site licence conditions on residential parks, and provides local authorities with the tools to ensure standards on residential parks are met.

8. Other Tourism Developments NLP POLICY TP2

8.1 Policy TP2 supports the creation of new tourist routes that will attract visitors to walk and cycle and enjoy what the area has to offer by way of environment, views, character and heritage. Such trails need to meet appropriate accessibility standards, in terms of slope, width and surface yet, at the same time, be sensitively designed into the landscape to minimise intrusion and avoid destruction or disturbance of natural habitats.

Reference Documents:

Northumberland Local Plan (NLP): Policies STP1-4 P92 The strategy for tourism – Policies ECN15 and 16 NCC Destination Management Plan
National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (NPPF)
NCC Northumberland Town & Parish Council Climate Change Toolkit