

Position Statement

North Somerset Core Strategy – Martyn Leisure (Issue 4h (i) Tourism provisions) – Tuesday 13 December

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Our client, Martyn Leisure, has been monitoring and contributing to the progress of North Somerset Council's Core Strategy. Colliers International (formerly Colliers CRE) has submitted representations to the North Somerset Core Strategy Consultation Draft (2009) (**SD/40**); the Core Strategy: Key Changes Consultation (2010) (**SD/41**); and Core Strategy Publication Version (2011).
- 1.2 Our client has had regard to the Core Strategy Evidence Base supporting, in particular, Tourism Policy – the basis of this Position Statement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Martyn Leisure is a hotel and leisure resort operator with hotels in the South West and near London as well as a long established coastal holiday resort for adults at Sand Bay, Kewstoke - around 3.5 miles by road north of Weston-Super-Mare. The resort extends to around 6.5 ha in area. It provides guest accommodation for adults only (over 300 visitor rooms with around 50 more for staff).
- 2.2 Notable facilities at the site include a ballroom, dining hall to accommodate around 650 guests, games room, outdoor recreation facilities, a covered swimming pool and gymnasium, and coach/car parking. The resort remains open for 50 weeks per year and only closes generally for on-site maintenance.
- 2.3 All of the facilities are well used and as a result require a rolling scheme of maintenance. As the site's buildings and facilities have a finite lifespan, Martyn Leisure has been reviewing and preparing a full regeneration programme for the resort. Helpful and positive discussions have taken place with the local planning authority and statutory bodies over the past 3 or so years. However, our client has not progressed with a planning application for the works – choosing for the time being to monitor the economic situation carefully and its effect on bookings, overall visitor numbers, on support businesses such as travel companies; and other tourist attractions. Ultimately it is hoped that new accommodation/facilities will be delivered through a phased regeneration scheme: its central main building refurbished and extended; and other facilities expanded and enhanced. A scheme for access for local residents has also been considered.

3.0 Core Strategy Representations

- 3.1 The overall thrust of the representations made is to ensure that tourism, and in particular, rural tourism is acknowledged at the strategic level within the Core Strategy.
- 3.2 Planning is now very much at the forefront of domestic policy – the recent consultation on the Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (**ND/07**) only served to reinforce that. Our client welcomes North Somerset Council's (NSC) acceptance that Policy CS22 should be clarified. We take this opportunity to help reinforce Martyn Leisure's response.

4.0 Evidence Base

- 4.1 Reviewing the evidence base it is unclear as to what information/evidence has been considered and applied in policy formulation. The emerging Core Strategy focuses on Weston-Super-Mare. However, the evidence base raises wider policy issues.
- 4.2 The West of England Tourism Development Plan (Executive Summary) & Tourism in Somerset (2006) – 5 Year Delivery Plan 2006-2010, helpfully identifies and focuses upon the challenges that face the wider tourism industry in North Somerset (copies submitted electronically).
- 4.3 Whilst it is somewhat dated, readily identifiable are the issues of iconic attractions in North Somerset; the quality of some accommodation; declining overnight visitor numbers and suitable development sites in urban areas. Here, notably, the West of England Tourism Development Plan identifies that "Opportunities exist to spread these [tourism] benefits to support the regeneration of rural communities and smaller towns and villages...".
- 4.4 Strategic opportunities in Somerset were also identified in the % Year Delivery Plan (page 4) to "link the rural areas together ... while also building links between the countryside and coast".
- 4.5 The Regional Tourist Board for the South West of England's document 'Towards 2015 – The Rural Dimension' recognises the importance of providing holiday park accommodation – being a "vital component of bed stock" and proving "an important role" in providing holidays for those with restricted means and supporting other sectors of the industry. It notes that there is a "need to continually improve the offering and many holiday parks are looking to develop 'lodge type' accommodation and increase landscaping and screening, plus improve the range and extent of facilities such as health, sports and spas and these should be supported".
- 4.6 The Regional Tourist Board also recognises that rural tourism can provide local employment and increase opportunities for other small and micro businesses which support others in the rural community.
- 4.7 NSC's 'Blue Skies – A Vision for Tourism in North Somerset' (2001) (copy submitted electronically) which looked at tourism trends and then created a vision for the future of tourism in North Somerset. Whilst the emerging Core Strategy refers to the Blue Skies Strategy in that the increase in tourism activities will be concentrated at Weston-super-

Mare, Blue Skies does reveal that there are requests for the local planning authority to support local tourism and investigate it further (as little appears to be known about it in North Somerset). Interestingly, some 82% of respondents wanted more tourism to be brought to rural locations (Page 59).

- 4.8 The extant Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG10) and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (**RD/02**) (paragraph 8.5.1) acknowledge the importance of supporting rural policy. National Planning Policy, notably PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Growth (Policy EC7) (**NP/05**), confirms that the local planning authorities should support the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities. The Draft National Planning Policy Framework also recognises that rural tourism can support the rural economy.
- 4.9 So, with this evidence base, when the Council's Tourism Strategy is considered and when looking at the plan as a whole it is clearly notable that there appears to be a lack of depth in policy and positive support to encourage such development (noting also Policy CS33 as drafted).

5.0 Martyn Leisure's Considerations

5.1 In the review of NSC's Tourism policy, Martyn Leisure make the following points:

- It is sensible that a coastal district should present positively worded policies which make absolutely clear that there is support for rural tourism development. Of course, sustainable environmental principles should be applied in the consideration of development principles. However, there needs to be balanced consideration over the issue of sustaining: communities through job creation and wider economic benefits; attractions through visitor numbers; and other social benefits
- In setting the foundations for neighbourhood planning, it is essential that strategic (Core) policy recognises and makes clear that there is support for rural tourism – given that this, in some parts of the district, will directly influence planning and the future of neighbourhoods at this level
- In again considering the evidence base and policy formulation our client seeks clarification as to whether key tourist facilities/attractions; their needs; local and wider needs and anticipated requirements have been fully considered and reflected in policy – particularly as all of the evidence suggests that tourism is a key economic driver.

18 November 2011