

Report to: Overview Committee



Date of Meeting 20th February 2025

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Coach Tourism in East Devon - Task and Finish Forum Update

Report summary:

This report outlines the work of the Coach Tourism Task and Finish Forum (TAFF) set up in April 2024, which aimed to explore opportunities around coach tourism development in East Devon and help increase coach passenger visitors to the district.

It provides summary on key benefits of coach tourism and key factors, which facilitate its development.

It points out what the TAFF managed to achieve and sets out recommended steps ahead.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☐ No ☒

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

Recommendation to Cabinet that EDDC fund 50% of the costs of signage required for East Devon towns to satisfy the criteria for Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) Coach Friendly Accreditation as identified through the formal CPT audit process, up to £1,500 per town and an overall maximum for the district of £12,000, subject to individual town and parish councils meeting the remaining 50% of the costs.

Reason for recommendation:

To facilitate further growth of the coach tourism sector and assist our town's in achieving the Coach Friendly accreditation which should encourage a higher number of visitors and thus support local economy.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Economy
- ☒ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning

- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Medium Impact

Coach tourism has positive impact in terms equality and inclusivity as it caters predominantly (but not exclusively) to an older demographic. It enables people who cannot yet drive, for example school children and students and those who can no longer drive to enjoy cultural, educational and leisure experiences.

Climate change High Impact.

Coach travel has significant green credentials and lesser environmental impact, minimising traffic on roads: one single coach can take a minimum of 12 single cars off the road.

Risk: Low Risk; There are no significant risks associated with the report recommendation.

Links to background information N/A

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
- ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Report in full

Background

The Coach Tourism in East Devon Task and Finish Group was set up in April 2024 with the aim to increase coach passenger visitors to East Devon.

The terms of Reference outlined the following areas of activity:

1. To improve signage for attractions, coach & car parking, town centres toilets & TIC.
2. To investigate the introduction of free coach parking facilities in East Devon.
3. To identify designated drop off and pick up points for coach passengers.
4. To assess whether coach driver facilities can be introduced.
5. To assess whether meet and greet service possibly linked with TIC, towns & attractions can be introduced.
6. To foster working together as one East Devon Team improving the tourist footfall, aimed at working for our district.

The indicator of success was set up as working with a range of partners and stakeholders to improve the tourist footfall in the East Devon District area.

The following stakeholders were identified: Parish and Town Councils; DCC; Confederation of Passenger Transport; coach travel operators; TICs.

A series of meetings took place between May 2024 and January 2025. The final meeting agreed options and recommendations for consideration by Overview.

The Executive Leadership Team have reviewed and welcomed the outcome of the Task and Finish Forum and have suggested that the Overview Committee might wish to consider recommending a consultation to ascertain the public's views concerning coach tourism in the district.

Coach Tourism key stats and benefits

At the beginning of the work of the TAFF a briefing paper was produced providing an insight into coach tourism as an industry and specifically its development in Devon, to highlight the importance of the sector, set the context and inform the work and decision-making process of the TAFF.

The full briefing paper is presented in Appendix A.

Key UK stats on coach tourism

- Coach tourism contributed £14 billion to the UK economy (2019)
- One coach can keep up to 50 cars off the road
- In 2019 there were 23 million visits to tourist attractions and locations by coach
- The coach industry employs 42,000 people
- There are 2,500 coach operators in the UK
- 80% of the coach industry's income is from tourism-related work

Key facts about coach tourism and its importance

- Year-round operation, significant contributor to occupation during the shoulder season
- Very loyal customer base; consistency, predictability, ability to plan - bookings occur up to an year in advance
- Requires a 'full package' approach - from coach parking, accommodation and attractions to visit to food & drink and shopping experiences. Established itineraries are key.
- Accessibility is very important, both in terms of ease of access for coaches and accessible facilities, including public toilets provision
- Economic enabler - very important to expanding the season/maintaining business during shoulder periods
- Resilience of the sector – predicted decline has not materialised; growing market nationally, but tends to stick to familiar destination, tried & tested approach
- Tends to cater for an older demographic, for many holiday makers this type of travel is now their holiday of choice. However, it's not just an OAP market - attracting younger profile of visitors via increasing share of school trips, university groups, professional associations, special interest groups, etc.
- Green credentials, lesser environmental impact, minimising traffic on roads: one single coach can take a minimum of 12 single cars off the road and that can easily rise to 24 cars for a full 48-seater coach.
- Inclusivity: coach travel enables people who cannot yet drive, for example school children and students and those who can no longer drive to enjoy cultural, educational and leisure experiences. Coach travel is an inclusive form of transport that brings customers to destinations and towns which they may otherwise not visit or experience. Contributes to a more welcoming and inclusive visitor experience that benefits local residents, as well.

Main enablers for its development

- Road infrastructure and parking facilities
- Good signage and accessibility
- Established itineraries and content to sell
- Sufficient accommodation provision
- Ability to offer familiarisation visits for prospective group organisers and operators

What incentivises coach tourism

- Provision of sufficient coach parking and rest stops
- Drop off points conveniently located for coach passengers to access services
- Facilities for drivers, incentives, e.g. vouchers, food & drink provision
- Well-maintained roadside facilities

- Clear guidance on traffic management affecting coaches
- Group travel offers and visitor information
- Established relationship with coach tour operators; welcoming environment

Risks associated with increased coach tourism and mitigation against them

Risk	Mitigation
Increased pressure on road infrastructure	Assessment of capacity to handle any increased traffic by professional bodies like the Confederation of Passenger Transport; Ensuring there is clear signage provision
Pressure on parking facilities	Assessment of current parking provision and potential to increase it
Pressure on accommodation provision	Assessment of available provision
Risk of overtourism	Assessed via current and expected volume and value of tourism

In East Devon's case coach tourism is still not a fully developed offer so there is potential to encourage further development for the local economy benefit. EDDC's Tourism Strategy identifies the role of the Council as an enabler for the sector and through facilitating further developments and improvement of infrastructure, it will create better conditions for private sector to take advantage of the benefits this type of tourism brings.

EDDC's Parking strategy seeks to actively encourage tourism and ensure the long-term economic sustainability of our towns, coastline and shopping areas. It encourages coach tourism through suitable parking arrangements.

Internal review of coach parking assessed current provision and determined there is suitable coach parking provision and should there be increased demand more coach park spaces can be created.

The tourism sector is still recovering from the impact of the Covid pandemic and visitor numbers and spend have not reached pre-pandemic levels so there is no risk of overtourism. There is slowing down of initial growth straight after the end of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has further slowed down growth in the last couple of years.

Confederation of Passenger Transport conducts audits for all settlements applying for Coach Friendly status so it assesses the area's road infrastructure and its capacity to handle increased coach numbers.

Accommodation provision in East Devon was assessed as part of the development of the Tourism Strategy and it was determined that serviced accommodation provision is sufficient.

Work of the Coach Tourism TAFF

The TAFF identified that one of the main ways to support coach tourism is to encourage our towns and villages to apply for a Coach Friendly status, a national scheme run by Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT): [Coach Friendly Scheme | CPT \(cpt-uk.org\)](https://www.cpt-uk.org/coach-friendly-scheme)

The scoping document indicated that the target towns are Exmouth, Budleigh, Sidmouth, Beer, Seaton, Honiton, Colyton, Axminster, Ottery St Mary.

The clerks of the above towns and villages have been approached with information on coach tourism and Coach Friendly application for their consideration.

On the invitation of the TAFF, applications for Coach Friendly status were submitted to CPT from six town and parish councils: Beer, Exmouth, Honiton, Ottery St Mary, Seaton and Sidmouth, representing significant progress and commitment to the coach friendly initiative.

Axminster and Budleigh Salterton expressed interest in the Coach Friendly scheme for their towns but are not yet in a position to apply.

Coach parking is a major consideration for all of the towns wishing to apply for coach friendly accreditation and EDDC coach parking provision was assessed as well as that offered by local businesses.

It was deemed that there was suitable coach parking provision in all towns except Axminster and Budleigh Salterton, and that the coach parking bays in Ottery St Mary were in need of reinvigoration as part of the upcoming resurfacing works in the Land of Canaan car park.

Existing coach parking tariffs were also reviewed and these were not seen as a barrier to the towns gaining the desired accreditation.

Where the aspiration is that all towns achieve coach friendly status in order for EDDC to be deemed a completely coach friendly district, coach parking provision will need to be identified in Axminster and Budleigh Salterton should they wish to continue with their application. As there is currently no EDDC coach parking provision in either of these locations, space will need to be identified on EDDC land, or be provided a local business or landowner. The impetus for progressing this will remain with the relevant town council with EDDC committing to support reviewing the various options, including providing new coach parking bays within EDDC car parks.

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) was approached and asked to inspect the towns and report on the steps they need to take to meet the criteria for coach friendly status.

The TAFF received presentations on best practice and helpful contributions to inform priorities from Lauren Clark of Stuart Line Cruises, Lisa Bowman, Exmouth Town Clerk, Rons Boatman, Exmouth Town Council's Tourism Officer and Phil Smith from the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), the Coach Friendly awarding body.

Additional support was agreed from the Sustainable Tourism Programme funded through the UKSPF for sponsoring our Coach Friendly status ready towns to take part in a dedicated Group Travel Campaign run by Visit South Devon (which includes East Devon).

The Coach Friendly status and the Group Travel campaign were identified as an excellent starting point for towns and villages looking to attract more coach tourism and benefit from increased group tourism visitors.

CPT's Phil Smith visited East Devon in November to carry out a Coach Friendly audit of the towns. In the event, due to heavy snowfall, he was only able to visit Exmouth, Honiton and Sidmouth. The outcome from the audits was that all three locations needed to install some directional signage, to satisfy the requirements for Coach Friendly accreditation.

The audits for Ottery St Mary, Seaton and Beer remain outstanding.

Exmouth has been awarded Coach Friendly status currently on a 12-month rolling renewal, having obtained a written commitment from DCC that the required signage will be built into the delivery timetable for the Dinan Way extension, at no additional cost to the town council. Sidmouth and Honiton are in the process of exploring costs.

The CTP representative will return to East Devon to complete the audits of Beer, Seaton and Ottery in early Spring.

The recommendations of the audits already performed have informed this report and its own recommendations.

The TAFF considered that it should be a joined responsibility of the district and the towns to secure financial resources for the additional signage required, as the benefits of the increased tourism will be widely felt across the district.

As an outcome from the TAFF's work, this report recommends to Cabinet that the costs for signage are met 50/50 by the respective town and parish councils and EDDC up to the maximum identified above.

Financial implications:

The request for is Council to approve a supplementary (new) budget of up to £12,000 which will have to be from the General Fund Balance.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.