

## 5. TOURISM

### The role of tourism in Torbay

**5.1** Torbay is the premier long stay major resort in Britain. It is also a conference centre and is marketed nationally and internationally as the English Riviera. It is the leading resort in the West Country and the largest in the U.K. in terms of visitor bed nights, with about 8.5 million each year. During the peak summer months, the resident population rises by about 50% as a result of the influx of tourists and foreign students who come to enjoy the facilities, surroundings and climate offered by Torbay. It is one of the few seaside resorts in the U.K. to attract substantial numbers of overseas visitors.

**5.2** The dominance of the tourism industry has an impact on most aspects of life in Torbay. In particular, the presence of such large numbers of visitors has necessitated the provision and maintenance of a wider range and level of services than would be required by the resident population.

**5.3** Whilst the main product of the industry is still the traditional family seaside holiday, the emphasis is shifting in the face of changing demand. The average length of stay of holidaymakers has fallen to approximately six days, and more second holidays, short breaks and activity holidays are taking place. It is recognised that the archaeological, cultural and natural heritage of an area is becoming an increasingly important part of the tourism industry. Conference and exhibition breaks have also increased.

### Tourism characteristics and facilities

**5.4** The tourism industry has developed over many years, in response to the demands made upon it. Torbay's appeal is based on its coastal setting and environment, good climate and range of holiday facilities, including the following features:-

- some 33 km (22 miles) of attractive coastline, including the South West Coast National Trail with 18 beaches ranging from long expanses of sand to small picturesque coves
- an excellent range of good quality hotels, guesthouses and holiday apartments, holiday centres and caravan parks (providing some 51,510 bedspaces in 1999). This amounted to a quarter of the bedspace capacity in Devon
- a variety of cultural and social facilities, including museums, theatres, cinemas, nightclubs and restaurants
- a good range of conference venues, including the Riviera Centre
- a wide choice of visitor attractions, including Paignton Zoo, Living Coasts, Babbacombe Model Village, Kents Cavern, Steam Railway, the Riviera Centre and Quaywest Water Park
- two marinas and extensive opportunities for maritime activities
- extensive areas of open space, seafront gardens and parkland, including the two Country Parks at Cockington and Berry Head
- an attractive hinterland, including moorland, countryside and outstanding coastal scenery
- good road and rail communications with other parts of the country

### The economic significance of tourism

**5.5** Tourism has been the cornerstone of Torbay's economy since the mid nineteenth century. In 1999 direct spending by staying visitors to Torbay amounted to £300 million. The largest element of this was accommodation, accounting for £107 million. In addition, day visitors to Torbay spent approximately £25 million (Tourism Trends in Devon 1999). The service industries account for about 82% of employment in the Torbay area, the largest proportion relating to tourism which directly and indirectly provides an estimated 1 in 3 jobs during the main holiday season. Although tourism is regarded as a service industry, the holiday product is 'exported' to visitors from outside the area and is therefore basic to the economic life of the area.

### Changes in the industry

**5.6** During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the tourism industry in Torbay experienced a significant decline, reflecting both regional and national trends. This was in stark contrast to the peak years in the mid to late 1970s when visitor numbers were at their highest. In the mid-to-late eighties, the number of tourist nights remained broadly stable, with intermittent fluctuations. However, during the 1990s there was a slow but consistent decline in numbers. Between 1990 and 1999 there was a fall of nearly 15% in numbers (nearly 1,500,000 tourist nights). This trend has continued into the noughties. **Figure 24** illustrates these changes in relation to specific sectors of accommodation:-

**Figure 24: Estimated number of tourist nights in Torbay holiday accommodation (figures in millions)**

| Type of holiday Accommodation | 1977         | 1986        | 1990        | 1994        | 1998        | 1999        |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Hotels & Guesthouses          | 4.55         | 3.97        | 4.02        | 3.56        | 3.59        | 3.53        |
| Flats and Cottages            | 1.43         | 0.77        | 0.92        | 0.83        | 0.83        | 0.8         |
| Holiday Park Units            | 2.42         | 2.19        | 2.05        | 1.9         | 1.69        | 1.67        |
| Touring Pitches               | 1.25         | 0.59        | 0.52        | 0.40        | 0.37        | 0.44        |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>12.76</b> | <b>9.95</b> | <b>9.94</b> | <b>8.80</b> | <b>8.46</b> | <b>8.45</b> |

**Source:** Devon Tourism Review (Devon County Council).

**Note:**

'Holiday Park Units' comprise chalets and static caravans.

'Touring Pitches' include tents and touring caravan sites.

**5.7** The reductions which have taken place are a cause of considerable concern in view of the underlying economic significance of tourism to the area. These recent figures again reflect a countrywide trend of decline in the tourist industry, due in part to the following factors:-

- changing attitudes towards the English seaside holiday, together with the adverse effects of unpredictable summer weather
- continuation of the ever-growing competition from keenly priced overseas holiday packages
- an increase in long haul tourism and people's increasing wish to visit more exotic locations
- the highly seasonal and low wage nature of tourism employment leading to concerns about poverty

Such changes are reflected in various academic "resort cycle" models which predict that tourist resorts reach stages of maturity and decline, where drastic action is needed to prevent decline.

**5.8** One response has been to diversify into new tourism markets and seek to increase the length of the holiday season. In particular, there has been an increase in Torbay of weekend and off-peak breaks, special interest holidays, second holidays and business/conference tourism.

**5.9** The Council is also seeking to diversify the local economy into other areas such as high-tech business.

Torbay has been granted Assisted Area Status and parts of the Bay have been awarded Objective 2 Status under European structural funds. Torquay town centre and waterfront has been awarded funding under the Single Regeneration Budget Round 5. These factors offer opportunities to enable the Council to address problems of over-dependence on contracting industries in a more comprehensive way. However, these funding opportunities do not occur on a regular basis and need to be fully utilised if improvements are to be achieved.

**Future needs**

**5.10** In spite of the above considerations tourism will continue to form the basis of Torbay's economy for the foreseeable future, albeit on a more focused and competitive basis. The Local Plan recognises the huge contribution that tourism makes to the local economy. It also acknowledges the need to promote its success whilst safeguarding the interests of the environment and those of local people.

**5.11** Policies and proposals are, therefore, aimed both at facilitating tourist development and seeking to protect the industry. In particular, the Plan seeks to provide a policy framework for the following:-

- regeneration and development of attractions - the investment necessary to stimulate tourism and employment and to create facilities
- modernisation and upgrading of accommodation - the improvement of standards of holiday accommodation in each sector to match the future

demands of the holidaymaker, in order to achieve appropriate levels and standards of excellence

- diversification and meeting new demands - development of non-traditional holidays and facilities (activity, special interest, heritage and green sustainable tourism holidays), stimulation of out of season breaks and promotion of special events
- enhancement of competitiveness - the need to achieve levels of excellence in the industry in order to offer relevant and high quality holiday experience, against a background of strong and effective marketing
- improvement of access and infrastructure - vital prerequisites for the successful future development of the tourism industry, ranging from transportation facilities to seawater quality

### The policy framework

**5.12** The Local Plan Strategy (described more fully in Chapter 2) is to promote a sustainable and dynamic tourism industry whilst seeking to provide a framework for economic diversification and increased prosperity. It is recognised, for example, that in a successful resort, tourism contributes to the retail industry and the resort function strengthens Torbay as a Principal Urban Area and sub-regional shopping centre. Conversely, investment in retail and town centre management can make a significant contribution to the roles of the three towns as tourist centres.

**5.13** Current Government guidance, in PPG21 'Tourism' (1992), advises that local plans should make provision for tourism on an integrated basis, addressing the need to protect the environment and to contribute positively to economic development, conservation and urban regeneration. In addition to facilitating tourism, local plans may seek to protect the industry "by ensuring that other land users are distributed in a way that respects the qualities that underpin the tourist industry" (paragraph 4.13). The Government is intending to replace PPG21 with best practice guidance on tourism.

**5.14** PPG7 'The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development' (1997) advises that tourism plays an important part in the development and diversification of the rural economy, but can also damage the landscape and heritage on which it depends (paragraphs 3.12 - 3.13).

**5.15** The importance of tourism to the economy of the South West is acknowledged in current Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10 - September 2001). Torbay is one of only two resorts to be specifically mentioned in the RPG. Policy SS16 seeks to raise the quality of its tourism industry within the context of diversification and economic restructuring. Policy TCS1 sets out a strategy for making the South West a flagship for sustainable tourism.

**5.16** The Adopted Devon Structure Plan First Review (1999) acknowledges that resorts are the mainstay of Devon's tourist industry. Policy E5 encourages the sustained development of tourism in resorts such as Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, and resists the introduction of unacceptable development in main tourist areas in order to maintain their character and function. Policy E5a considers large scale accommodation and tourist facilities within sub-regional and area centres. Policy E7 gives guidance for provision of touring parks in key landscape designation areas, as well as outside these areas, where they may be acceptable where there is a proven need within a locality. Policy T01 of the Devon Structure Plan 2001-2016 (expected to be adopted Summer/Autumn 2004) reiterates these Policies.

**5.17 Policy TUS** sets out the Council's basic approach to the development of tourism, investment and the need to promote a sustainable industry.

**5.18** Acceptability of all tourism proposals will be subject to normal development control criteria, in particular location, scale, impact on surroundings, access and car parking and overall environmental implications. The Council will seek to ensure that any adverse effects on the amenity of adjoining areas are minimised. New developments may be made the subject of appropriate conditions in order to reduce their level of impact.

### Tourist facilities

**5.19** The provision of good quality tourist facilities is essential in a resort of Torbay's scale and importance. Central to this is the development and regeneration of Torquay and Brixham harbour and waterfront areas for a range of uses including various types of tourism activity. **Policy TU1** provides the planning framework. The development of the potential for various water-borne facilities in Torbay's harbours is supported in **Policy TU4**. **Policies TU2** and **TU3** support the improvement of existing and development of new facilities and attractions in order to ensure

that the resort continues to retain its attractiveness and competitiveness in a rapidly developing and innovative industry. Certain sites are identified as having potential either for new or additional tourist development. These include land at Claylands near Paignton Zoo, Quay West, Goodrington and a site adjacent to the Torbay Leisure Centre, Clennon Valley.

### Holiday accommodation

**5.20** The excellent range of hotels and guesthouses constitutes one of Torbay's most valuable assets. Its holiday accommodation can be regarded as a key element of the tourism infrastructure for the whole of South Devon, especially in relation to good quality hotels. It is recognised that with an ever widening choice of holiday and increasing expectation of standards, the upgrading and improvement of the tourism product is vital to the future of Torbay.

**5.21** Development of facilities which help to produce a longer holiday season will be of particular importance for the future well-being of the resort. The improvement of existing self-catering accommodation is also important for the industry. The aim is therefore to stimulate measures for investment in holiday apartments, with a view to upgrading their use over a longer holiday period. (The upgrading of holiday centres and parks is dealt with in **Policy TU9**).

**5.22** The industry has undergone a period of contraction during the past decade and a large number of bedspaces have been lost. So long as this is part of a managed reduction, with commensurate improvement to the quality of remaining accommodation, this will not undermine Torbay's viability as a premier resort. However an unchecked conversion of Torbay's hotel, guest house and holiday apartment stock to alternative uses can undermine its role as a tourist destination. The Local Plan sets out a range of policies designed to guide the industry during the current critical period of rationalisation.

**5.23 Policy TU5** recognises that the introduction of new holiday accommodation may be appropriate. The Plan sets out policies which seek to protect the character of the resort's Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas (PHAAs) and which also consider loss of holiday accommodation elsewhere. **Policy TU6** defines PHAAs and sets out criteria for considering development proposals within them. In reviewing the Local Plan, a thorough review of the boundaries of PHAAs has been carried out, and most PHAAs have been reduced in size. Two former

PHAAs (Rock Walk, Torquay, formerly Deposit Version Policy TU9.5 and Babbacombe Road, Torquay, formerly Deposit Version Policy TU9.7) have been partially or completely removed. In addition, **Policy TU7** relating to change of use of holiday accommodation outside PHAAs has been made more flexible, whilst still protecting the tourism base of the resort. This review is intended to allow a managed reduction in the over supply of bedspaces whilst protecting the stock of holiday accommodation and key tourist areas.

**5.24** The principle of protecting holiday accommodation is well established and has served well in helping to retain Torbay's role as a premier resort, since the policy was introduced in the early 1980s. All of the comparable British seaside resorts have now adopted such policies and the Council believes that clearly defined and economically realistic policies of this nature should continue to be applied on a consistent basis. This approach is essential in order to protect the tourist industry from unacceptable change and to ensure that the broad base of tourist accommodation is maintained. The use of such premises out of season is dealt with by a policy relating to short term residential and winter letting of holiday accommodation (**Policy TU8**).

**5.25** There is extensive provision of sites for chalets, caravans and camping and holiday centres. These form a very important part of Torbay's tourism infrastructure. The Council is concerned that operators should be supported where they wish to refurbish or upgrade existing facilities. Equally, it is clear that new parks may have a role within the overall range of facilities in Torbay and the Council recognises the need to be responsive to changes in the tourist market. **Policy TU9** sets out criteria for the consideration of such applications. The importance of holiday parks and centres as providers of holiday accommodation in Torbay is such that the Council will wish to resist their loss to other uses unless specific criteria are met and these are set out in **Policy TU10**.

**5.26** The protection and enhancement of the rural and built environment is critical to the success of tourism in Torbay. These issues are dealt with in Chapters 11 and 14 of the Local Plan.

## TOURISM POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

### TUS Tourism strategy

Torbay's tourism industry will be developed in a sustainable and competitive manner having regard to environmental resources, through the retention of existing attractions; the retention of existing tourism accommodation within PHAAs and the most important holiday accommodation outside PHAAs; the investment in new facilities; and by the sensitive development of Torbay's heritage as a tourism asset.

#### Explanation:

**5.27** Tourism is the cornerstone of the economy of Torbay. It is therefore essential that the Local Plan provides a framework which facilitates the improvement and development of the tourist industry, to maintain the area's economic stability. Tourism now operates within an increasingly competitive climate and the strong promotional policies upon which it depends need a firm basis from which to operate.

**5.28** There is a major commitment on the part of the Council to stimulate improvement and prosperity in the conference/exhibition sector of the tourist industry. Tourism development can often assist in the process or urban regeneration, as well as in the conversion of buildings or landscape features in both urban and rural areas. It may also be an acceptable form of diversification for farmers.

**5.29** It is particularly important that new tourism development respects local distinctiveness and the needs of Torbay and its surroundings. As a basic principle, such development should always be implemented in a way which ensures that the future needs of residents and tourist are not compromised by short-term objectives. Torbay's heritage is of great significance to its visitors. Sustaining the tourism industry is a main strand in Torbay's Economic Development Strategy - protecting the heritage resource must inevitably be a part of that process. Torbay's heritage is an asset which can support its principal industry at the same time as enriching the lives of its residents. The Local Plan thus provides a framework for the integration of appropriate tourism developments and policies, to assist the industry to realise its potential, by maintaining a programme of investment and improvement.

**5.30** The Council supports the statutory regulation of holiday accommodation as a means of maintaining standards of excellence in the industry and to ensure compliance with health and safety and fire regulations.

### TU1 Harbourside and waterfront regeneration

The regeneration and enhancement of harbourside and adjoining waterfront areas in Torquay (TU1.1) and Brixham (TU1.2) is proposed through the following measures:-

- (1) the protection of the economic, maritime, tourism and retail roles of the areas and the maintenance of their attractiveness for visitors and shoppers;
- (2) the resistance to changes of use which detract from the special qualities of the areas and in particular the special character of the Torquay Harbour and Brixham Town Conservation Areas;
- (3) support for the introduction of appropriate new development which contributes to the enhancement of the areas as locations for all year round tourism and retailing;
- (4) the refurbishment of existing premises and frontages surrounding the harbour to a high standard of design;
- (5) the introduction of landscaping and streetscaping works to enhance the visual attractiveness of the harbourside and waterfront settings; and
- (6) appropriate traffic management measures which maintain a satisfactory amount of off-street car parking, in accordance with the operative parking standards (set out in Policy T25), improve levels of accessibility to the areas and enhance conditions for pedestrians.

#### Explanation:

**5.31** Torquay and Brixham harboursides and surrounding waterfront areas are at the heart of the English Riviera. The harbours are major focal points for tourism as well as having important shopping and leisure roles and serving as working harbours. The areas have historic importance - they are designated as Conservation Areas and contain several listed buildings and structures.

**5.32** It is important that the areas' charm and heritage are safeguarded. Both harbours have substantial opportunities for revitalisation and regeneration. There is a recognition that in order to provide an attractive and viable setting, there will be a need to improve the quality of facilities and premises and to move away from traditional "kiss me quick" types of tourism product.

### The Torquay Waterfront Project

**5.33** The Torquay Waterfront Project is a partnership between the Council and other parties such as traders in the area, which seeks to achieve the regeneration and revitalisation of the Torquay harbourside and waterfront.

**5.34** The Project intends to bring about a number of environmental improvements and street-scene enhancements to encourage a vibrant 24-hour economy. Six phases are proposed over a ten-year period for the entire harbourside. In the first two phases, completed in the summer of 2003, a cill was created in the inner harbour to retain water in order to create a water-based town square, and a lifting pedestrian bridge erected across the South Pier creating a link between both sides of the harbour. The Coral Island/Beacon Quay site has been redeveloped to form a marine aviary, family restaurant and a number of small business units. The reinstatement of Beacon Cove as an accessible and attractive popular beach has also been achieved.

**5.35** In the context of the Council's aims for the waterside, there is a need to prevent unsuitable developments from taking place in the area. In particular, a number of unsympathetic frontages exist and improvements to these will be encouraged. Grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Torquay Harbour Townscape Heritage Initiative will enable the reinstatement of historic features and improvements to the streetscape of Victoria Parade and Beacon Terrace on the harbourside over the next few years.

### Brixham Harbour Regeneration

**5.36** Brixham Harbour is a major fishing port. Scope exists for improvement to harbour facilities and possible introduction of a Northern Arm breakwater to encourage other port related industries. These proposals are covered in **Policies E7** and **E8**. In addition, the Council appointed consultants in December 1999 to look at the broader regeneration of Brixham harbour waterfront and town centre, and a programme of public consultation was undertaken. Environmental improvements in the harbour area, town square and shopping areas would enhance the area's tourism potential and vibrancy. The area is characterised by a mix of uses including residential, tourism, retail and employment (particularly fishing, port and marine related) activities. It is important that the area's 'organic' character which contributes much to Brixham's charm is retained. More recently, the regeneration of the area has been promoted via the Brixham 21 community-based initiative.

### TU2 Proposals for new tourist facilities

**Improvement of existing and the development of new tourist/leisure facilities and attractions, particularly all-weather facilities, are proposed on the following sites, provided that there are no unacceptable environmental impacts:-**

- (1) **Zoo extension, Claylands, Paignton;**
- (2) **Land adjacent to Torbay Leisure Centre, Clennon Valley, Paignton; and**
- (3) **Quay West site, Goodrington, Paignton.**

#### Explanation:

**5.37** The wealth of tourist attractions and amenities available in Torbay is highly regarded by visitors and also constitutes a valuable asset for residents. The Council wishes to support new schemes which will be of benefit to the tourist industry and lead to improvements in standards and levels of services.

**5.38** Tourist facilities and attractions which make suitable use of historic, architectural or natural features will be supported in principle, provided that the scale and overall level of impact is acceptable and proposals accord with relevant conservation and landscape protection policies. When development is required in the countryside to meet the needs of visitors to specific attractions, particularly careful consideration of such criteria will be necessary.

**5.39** Tourism is a rapidly changing and innovative industry, and for this reason proposals for specific tourism schemes have not been put forward for individual sites, in order to retain the necessary degree of flexibility regarding the most appropriate form of tourism use. However, suitable uses of the sites identified on the Proposals Map could include leisure / cultural activities / catering / entertainment, sport/recreation, and specific (possibly themed) visitor attractions. Mixed-use developments may be suitable, especially on coastal sites, and could include an element of holiday accommodation.

**5.40** Land at Claylands, Paignton is suitable for future Zoo expansion. The site is being used for landfill and will therefore require appropriate remedial work prior to its re-use. The site is adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site and it is intended that the proposal should enhance the local biodiversity of the area. The present car park adjacent to the Torbay Leisure Centre, Clennon Valley is under-used and would be suitable for a range of leisure/recreation uses, possibly as part of a mixed-use scheme incorporating residential use. It will be

important to retain a suitable level of car parking to meet the needs of the Leisure Centre and other tourist attractions and facilities in the immediate locality, including the Quay West site.

**5.41** Opportunities may arise for projects of a larger scale than currently available. New ideas for tourist facilities will be welcomed where it can be demonstrated that schemes can be satisfactorily accommodated in suitable locations, and where economic and social benefits are likely to arise. Formal environmental impact assessment may be required, particularly in greenfield locations which will be especially sensitive to the effects of larger scale change.

### **TU3 New tourist facilities elsewhere**

**Proposals for the improvement of existing and the development of new tourist facilities on sites other than those identified in Policies TU1 and TU2 will be permitted, provided that the following criteria are met:-**

- (1) **the proposal preserves or enhances the attractiveness and competitiveness of the resort in terms of the range and quality of its tourist facilities;**
- (2) **the location of major development meets the requirements of the sequential approach to site allocation and is readily accessible by a range of means of transport, in particular coaches;**
- (3) **the scheme is of satisfactory scale and design in relation to its surroundings, and does not harm residential amenity;**
- (4) **the scheme does not conflict with relevant landscape protection policies; and**
- (5) **the development does not cause harm to Torbay's heritage resource in terms of the landscape, built environment, archaeology, geology and nature conservation.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.42** The improvement of existing and development of new tourist facilities is important to maintaining Torbay's position as a premier resort. With the rapid changes in the tourism market, it is recognised that the industry needs to be dynamic and innovative.

**5.43** Proposals that enhance the attractiveness of the resort, particularly all weather and non-seasonal facilities, will be welcomed in principle. However, it is recognised that there are environmental constraints to development. Government Guidance in PPG6 'Town

Centres and Retail Development' (2000) stresses the importance of favouring town centre sites and facilities should also be located where economic and social benefits are likely to arise. **Policy S6** summarises this sequential approach. There will, however, be types of use not suitable to central or urban locations. These will be assessed on the basis of other Local Plan policies, in particular those relating to landscape and nature conservation. Proposals for leisure / recreation facilities are addressed in **Policy R1**.

**5.44** It is particularly important that major proposals satisfy a sequential approach to site selection. The Council considers 'major' in this context to be developments of over 0.4ha (1 acre) in area, or likely to attract significant visitor numbers, or likely to have a significant environmental impact.

**5.45** Formal environmental impact assessments may be required, particularly in greenfield locations, sensitive landscape designations or where historic, archaeological or historical assets are of importance (see also **Policy EPS**).

### **TU4 Water-based tourist facilities**

**The development of water-based tourist facilities will be permitted in Torbay's harbours (Torquay Harbour - TU4.1; Paignton Harbour - TU4.2; Brixham Harbour - TU4.3) where:-**

- (1) **the proposals enhance the range and attractiveness of facilities available in the harbourside areas;**
- (2) **schemes do not have an adverse effect on environmental quality, pedestrian safety or highway capacity;**
- (3) **developments are visually acceptable by complementing the character and setting of the harbourside and waterfront areas;**
- (4) **proposals do not have an adverse effect on marine wildlife in the harbourside areas; and**
- (5) **schemes do not undermine the working role of the harbours.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.46** The Torbay's coastal water resource is a major underused asset. Tor Bay constitutes one of the finest stretches of sailing water in the UK with great potential to satisfy the increasing demand for water-based leisure activity in all its varied forms. The natural maritime amphitheatre of the Bay provides an unrivalled setting for competitors, spectators and the media.

**5.47** The construction of the 460 and 500 berth marinas at Torquay and Brixham in the mid/late 1980s helped to stimulate a resurgence of interest in Torbay as a maritime leisure and events centre. In order to fully utilise opportunities for water-based tourism activities, the Council is seeking further development of pontoon berths to replace the swing moorings in Torquay Outer Harbour. Potential also exists for improvements to provision of berths in the Brixham Harbour area, and on a much smaller scale in Paignton Harbour.

**5.48** There are opportunities for the improvement of Torquay Inner Harbour through the introduction of new facilities to enhance its attractiveness to visitors. Proposals put forward would need to be properly related to the Council's wider aspirations for the upgrading of the harbourside/waterfront areas to be acceptable (see **Policy TU1**). In view of the importance and sensitivity of Torbay's maritime wildlife, it will be important that the environmental impact of proposals relating to the harbour and waterside areas is properly assessed. It will be important to ensure that improvements or the introduction of new facilities do not compromise the day-to-day functions of the harbour.

#### **TU5 New holiday accommodation**

**Proposals for the development of, or change of use to, new hotels, guest houses or holiday apartments will be acceptable in principle in or on the edge of Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas and in other locations where concentrations of holiday use already exist. Applications outside these established holiday areas will be permitted where proposals do not conflict with landscape protection policies and do not have a detrimental effect on the amenities of the surrounding area, in terms of traffic generation, wildlife impact, visual impact or general levels of activity.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.49** Although there is a general contraction in Torbay's stock of holiday accommodation, the Council recognises that the introduction of additional new facilities may be appropriate, particularly where they can contribute to the enhancement of the quality and range of existing bedspaces. New accommodation may vary from a change of use to a small guesthouse to the construction of a new hotel with the full range of facilities. Each type of facility will have a contribution to make within the overall level of provision in the resort. The creation of new bedspaces will also be supported as part of mixed tourism/leisure investment schemes.

**5.50** The aims of this policy are to support new provision in suitable locations whilst protecting the amenities of residential areas and the countryside, and minimising conflict between residents and visitors.

**5.51** Whilst it is accepted in principle that Torbay should actively promote the improvement of its bedspace stock, there is clearly a need to control and channel such developments in order to protect existing amenities and resources. Given the nature of their use, methods of operation, traffic generation and overall levels of activity, it is likely that any further major development or intensification of hotels, guest houses and holiday apartments will be most appropriate in areas where holiday uses are well established. Large new hotels offering facilities for banqueting conferences and entertainment, which serve the wider community will usually be acceptable only in areas of established holiday, leisure or commercial activity.

**5.52** Applications outside established holiday areas will be supported if it can be demonstrated that the proposed use meets the relevant criteria set out in other appropriate Local Plan Policies, in particular with regard to amenity, landscape protection, wildlife and transportation.

#### **TU6 Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas**

**Proposals for new building, extensions, change of use or other developments which are to the detriment of the character and function of the Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas (PHAAs) identified below will not be permitted:-**

- (1) Babbacombe Downs, Torquay.
- (2) Newton Road, Torquay.
- (3) Torre, Torquay.
- (4) Belgrave Road, Torquay.
- (5) Torwood Gardens, Torquay.
- (6) Meadfoot Road, Torquay.
- (7) Meadfoot Sea Road, Torquay.
- (8) Torbay Road seafront, Torquay.
- (9) Preston seafront, Paignton.
- (10) Paignton seafront - North.
- (11) Paignton seafront - South.
- (12) Roundham Road West, Paignton.
- (13) Roundham Road East, Paignton.

**The loss of holiday accommodation or important tourism-related facilities may, however, be permitted within PHAAs where the following criteria apply:-**

- a) **the premises lack an appropriate basic range of facilities and do not offer scope or potential for improvement, thereby failing to meet the reasonable requirements of the tourist;**
- b) **the premises have restricted bedspace capacity, having a limited number of bedrooms (if serviced accommodation) or apartments (if self-catering);**
- c) **the loss of the premises would not be to the detriment of the holiday character of the particular locality, nor set an unacceptable precedent in relation to the concentration and role of nearby premises; and**
- d) **the proposed new use or development is compatible with the surrounding tourism-related uses and does not harm the holiday character and atmosphere of the PHAA.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.53** Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas (PHAAs) are regarded by the Council to be of fundamental importance to tourism in Torbay. They are the 'shop windows' of the industry and as a consequence the Council will seek to resist any changes which have a detrimental or undermining effect on their function and character. Such changes may include the loss of existing tourist facilities or accommodation and/or the introduction of inappropriate non-tourism oriented uses, either by change of use or proposals for redevelopment. In addition, the design, massing and location of new developments, including extensions, will also be material considerations.

**5.54** PHAAs are defined in accordance with criteria relating to concentrations of holiday accommodation, holiday character, proximity to tourist facilities and accessibility.

**5.55** PHAAs are areas where there is a concentration of hotels, guesthouses and/or holiday apartments which form an important part of the overall stock of bedspaces. About 45% of hotels and guesthouses and 14% of holiday apartment premises are situated within the thirteen PHAAs. As a result of such concentrations, tourism is visibly the predominant land use and this in turn creates a distinct holiday atmosphere. Such locations are a focus of tourism activity and may provide attractive views for customers. They are generally well-related to tourism facilities including the seafront, harbourside, principal holiday traffic routes, and other established and accessible holiday attractions.

**5.56** There will inevitably be variations in holiday character and atmosphere within and between individual PHAAs which will be attributable to type of tourism, topography, townscape and location. Certain areas will therefore not necessarily offer good views or be on main traffic/pedestrian routes.

**5.57** Some resorts have adopted a two-tier policy of affording "core" areas, such as seafronts, higher protection than areas of holiday accommodation elsewhere. This approach is not considered appropriate in Torbay because of its range of different types of holiday area, not all of which conform to a traditional esplanade / golden mile type configuration, but which nevertheless have an important role to play in their own right.

**5.58** The decline in visitor numbers since 1977 has already contributed to a significant loss of holiday accommodation (mainly hotels) to other uses, including elderly persons' homes and residential flats. In preparing the Revised Deposit Version of the Local Plan (2000), the function and boundaries of PHAAs were carefully reviewed and discussions held with various interested bodies. Holiday accommodation within PHAAs has been reduced by about 19%. Changes have been made to ensure that boundaries are realistically drawn and to accommodate the changing nature of the tourism industry. However, it is considered important that the character of PHAAs remains protected and that an unrestricted move out of holiday use should continue to be resisted, as this would undermine the stock and range of bedspaces. The Torbay Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas Monitor is carried out annually in order to assess the effectiveness of this Policy.

**5.59** Whilst this Policy therefore seeks to ensure the retention of the holiday atmosphere of the PHAAs, it is nevertheless recognised that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to allow changes to take place. Although continued investment is necessary to remain competitive, some premises may, for example, offer little or no potential for refurbishment or development to provide an appropriate level of tourist accommodation and associated facilities.

**5.60** In reaching a decision on applications involving a loss of holiday accommodation or other important tourism related facilities, the Council will take into account the overall level of facilities provided, the potential for the upgrading of facilities and the number of bedrooms / apartments. Siting, including accessibility and visual prominence, relationships with other accommodation and effect on overall holiday character will also be considered. However, under-investment

and general lack of maintenance will not be accepted as justification for loss of inherently suitable and appropriately located holiday accommodation. Management and marketing will clearly also influence the commercial viability of businesses and this issue will also be a relevant consideration.

**5.61** In circumstances where the loss of holiday accommodation may be appropriate, the Council will consider the contribution that the new use of the building would make to the character of the PHAA. In the first instance, tourism-related activities will normally be supported as alternative uses. It will usually be the smaller hotel/guest house or holiday apartment business (typically with 6 or less bedrooms, or 4 or less units) which is more likely to be granted planning approval for change of use to non-holiday uses as an exception to this policy.

**5.62** Such properties are likely to be suitable for use as single family dwellings. Suitable commercial uses may also be acceptable in appropriate locations. Institutional uses such as elderly persons homes, nursing homes and hospitals may detract from the overall holiday character of PHAAs and may be resisted. For similar reasons, the change of use to hostels is likely to be unacceptable in such areas (see **Policy CF3**).

**5.63** Changes of use which maintain a holiday accommodation presence (e.g hotel/guest house to holiday apartment, or vice versa) are acceptable in principle, subject to normal development control considerations, provided that such a change does not impact on the tourism role of the resort in an unacceptable way. Change of use from serviced accommodation to holiday flats should not be seen as a first step to achieving residential use. Where appropriate, permissions for holiday flat use will be subject to conditions requiring that they are for holiday occupancy only.

**TU7 Change of use or redevelopment of holiday accommodation outside Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas**

**The redevelopment or change of use of hotels, guest houses and holiday apartments to non-holiday accommodation will be permitted outside the Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas (PHAAs) where:-**

- (1) the loss of the holiday accommodation would not undermine the holiday character in the locality, or the range of tourism facilities or accommodation offered by the resort;**

- (2) the site of the accommodation is of limited significance in terms of its holiday setting, view and relationship to tourism facilities; and**
- (3) the new use would be compatible with the character and other uses in the area**

**Explanation:**

**5.64** The holiday character and quality of the resort is the product of its setting and the facilities and accommodation within it. Some 55% of hotels and guesthouses and 86% of holiday apartments are located outside the thirteen Principal Holiday Accommodation Areas (PHAAs). However, it is significant that some 8,100 bedspaces in hotels/guesthouses and holiday apartments have been lost in Torbay as a whole between 1981 and 1994, a reduction of almost 20%. Between 1994 and 1999 there was a further loss of some 1900 bedspaces in the same type of accommodation, a decline of about 6%.

**5.65** It is recognised that this contraction in the supply of holiday accommodation is likely to continue. It is generally acknowledged that providing a high quality product is essential in today's market. Therefore a managed reduction in bedspace numbers is considered acceptable, so long as there is a commensurate improvement in the quality of remaining stock. **Policy TU6** sets out guidance relating to PHAAs, where the Council wishes to retain the predominantly holiday use.

**5.66 Policy TU7** seeks to allow for greater flexibility outside PHAAs and to encourage suitable alternative uses where the loss of holiday accommodation is appropriate. However, there are a number of premises located outside of PHAAs whose loss would be undesirable, due to the range of facilities offered, visual prominence, contribution to the holiday character of the area or bedspace capacity.

**5.67** Investment is necessary to remain competitive but some premises may not offer any potential for refurbishment or development to provide an appropriate level of tourism accommodation and associated facilities. The commercial viability of holiday accommodation businesses may therefore be a relevant consideration, together with management and marketing. However, under-investment and general lack of maintenance will not be accepted as justifications for redevelopment or change of use of inherently suitable and appropriately located holiday accommodation.

**5.68** Examples of clusters of holiday accommodation also exist outside PHAAs. Although of less significance than PHAAs, individually and collectively they make a contribution to the overall holiday character and role of the resort. The Council will be concerned to ensure that changes of use do not set a precedent for further changes that may undermine the holiday character of such areas.

**5.69** In circumstances where the loss of holiday accommodation is considered acceptable, the Council will be particularly concerned to ensure that the replacement use respects the amenity and character of this surrounding area. Changes of use which maintain a holiday accommodation presence (i.e. hotel/guest house to holiday apartment, or vice versa) will be supported in principle in those locations where the retention of a holiday accommodation use is acceptable.

**5.70** Where applications meet the criteria set out in this Policy, the type of alternative use proposed will be subject to the relevant policies set out in the Local Plan. To assist the diversification and restructuring of the local economy, and the sustainable development of land, commercial, leisure and residential uses will be supported in principle within the urban area. The new use should be compatible with the character and operation of other uses in the area. In predominantly commercial areas, offices and other professional services may be the most suitable use. Self-contained dwellings will usually be the most appropriate form of housing in “transitional” areas of mixed holiday and residential use. Such ‘windfalls’ will have the added benefit of relieving pressure on greenfield sites for new housing. The Council’s affordable housing policies, particularly **Policy H6**, may apply where holiday accommodation is converted into residential use.

#### **TU8 Winter letting of holiday accommodation**

**During the winter months (i.e. outside the main holiday season of Easter to the end of October), short-term residential letting will be permitted in holiday flats where:-**

- (1) the use is strictly temporary in nature (i.e. it lasts no longer than a maximum of six months, after which time the holiday use shall resume);**
- (2) there is a resident owner/manager on site with their own separate, permanent on-site accommodation; and**
- (3) the use does not undermine the function, character or appearance of the surrounding area, or adversely affect the amenities of the neighbouring properties.**

**The use of hotels/guest houses for winter letting will only be permitted where the use would not conflict with the role or function of PHAAs or be to the detriment of the tourist character of other areas, would not adversely affect the viability of neighbouring uses or harm residential amenity.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.71** The letting of holiday flats to non-holidaymakers during winter months is a well-established practice. It can contribute to the viability of holiday accommodation and keeps premises occupied. Winter letting is taken to mean letting to people for non-holiday or other tourist purposes.

**5.72** The practice of winter letting of holiday flats is often contrary to planning conditions, in which case planning permission is required. The above policy establishes criteria for considering the planning merit of applications for such proposals.

**5.73** It is important that the non-tourist use is strictly subordinate to the holiday use of accommodation and does not harm the character of the area. On-site management by the owner or professional manager has been shown to be important as a way of minimising problems associated with winter letting. Where it is not practical to provide on-site management, for example in the case of small premises of holiday flats, alternative measures of management, such as a local telephone contact for an owner/manager, may be acceptable. However, applicants should be able to show that adequate control over premises is achieved.

**5.74** Longer term residential letting of hotels and guest houses is a material change of use requiring planning permission. Torbay is seeking to maximise its all-year-round tourism and it is important that an adequate range of facilities is provided on this basis. It is not usually appropriate, therefore, to allow winter residential letting in hotels/guest houses within PHAAs. Winter letting of hotel/guest house rooms may also be problematic outside PHAAs in terms of its effect on the character of the area and impact on neighbouring uses. In addition, serviced accommodation is unlikely to offer a satisfactory long term living environment.

**5.75** Applications for the change of use of holiday accommodation to permanent residential or other use will be subject to **Policies TU6** (development within PHAAs) and **TU7** (development outside PHAAs). Applications specifically for the permanent use or development of accommodation for the purpose of a hostel will not be permitted within PHAAs, or where they fail to meet the criteria set out in **Policy CF3**.

### **TU9 Refurbishment and development of new holiday centres and parks**

**Proposals for new holiday parks, chalet, caravan and camping sites, or schemes for the refurbishment and upgrading of existing facilities will be permitted, provided that the following criteria can be met:-**

- (1) the development does not have an adverse impact on the landscape conservation, nature conservation and agricultural characteristics of the area or involve the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land;**
- (2) the development is acceptable in terms of transportation, access and safety considerations; and**
- (3) the proposal does not adversely affect the amenities of any adjoining residential areas.**

#### **Explanation:**

**5.76** Holiday centres and parks form an important part of Torbay's tourism infrastructure. Holiday and touring caravan parks are likely to form an increasingly significant part of the self-catering tourism sector. Evidence suggests that existing facilities are well used.

**5.77** The Council recognises the need to remain responsive to changes in the tourism market and the corresponding demand for new facilities.

**5.78** The opportunities for development of further major new holiday centres and parks in Torbay are, nevertheless, extremely limited due to lack of availability of suitable sites in appropriate locations.

**5.79** Due regard must be had to the full range of environmental, amenity, access and agricultural considerations as set out above. In particular, sites should be effectively screened, and both located and laid out in such a way that they are not visually intrusive. Applications for major new holiday parks may necessitate the submission of an environmental impact statement (see **Policy EPS**).

**5.80** Because of the limited opportunity for new holiday parks, the improvement and enhancement of existing holiday sites is more likely to be a more acceptable way of meeting demand.

**5.81** There is extensive provision of sites for chalets, caravans and camping within Torbay, most of which is concentrated in three areas in Paignton, and in Brixham. The size and range of these facilities in

Torbay vary widely, as to the standards of accommodation provided. Many operators have continued to invest in their site facilities as part of a rolling programme aimed at raising the quality of service. Other sites have managed to meet changing standards less successfully and are more likely to require substantial new investment.

**5.82** Many existing holiday centres and parks have been developed at high densities. To meet the needs and aspirations of today's holiday makers, it is important to improve the on-site environment, reduce high densities and improve on-site facilities such as club houses, swimming pools, tennis courts, shower buildings, etc.

**5.83** Whilst the Council is fully supportive of endeavours to upgrade and improve holiday facilities, by expanding the area covered in some cases, it is essential to ensure that developments do not have an adverse effect on other local plan objectives, such as landscape protection.

**5.84** Many holiday parks are in environmentally sensitive areas and this type of development has a significant visual impact. Static caravans and chalets can be particularly intrusive.

**5.85** The Council will seek to secure improvements to the appearance and layout of facilities and improve standards of landscaping and nature conservation. In many areas there is considerable scope to do this and many operators have developed innovative ways of screening development. Such improvements will be a key consideration in determining proposals for refurbishment and improvement of holiday centres.

**5.86** Sites generate a high level of vehicular traffic during the peak holiday season which can place a heavy burden not only on the principal traffic routes but also minor roads providing access to them.

**5.87** Applications for the improvement of site facilities (central 'club house' facilities, swimming pools, tennis courts, toilet and shower buildings, etc.) will be supported in principle, subject to the above considerations. The Council will adopt a flexible approach to applications submitted for changes in emphasis of holiday uses within existing sites. Since the distinctions between touring and motorised caravans and tents are now less obvious, it will be appropriate to consider touring accommodation in terms of touring units, and to allow flexibility between numbers of tents and touring units within a defined site. The Council will also support in principle dividing larger sites into smaller areas, in order to reduce their wider environmental impact.

**5.88** Schemes which are likely to result in a significant intensification of facilities and consequent levels of activity will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that there is sufficient environmental and highway capacity to absorb the additional pressures in a satisfactory manner.

**5.89** This issue is particularly relevant in the case of schemes for a total or partial replacement of an existing centre or park, either by significantly increasing the amount of accommodation and level of facilities within the original site, and/or by expanding the area covered. Although it is recognised that opportunities for improvements may arise from such redevelopment (e.g. better access and landscaping, reduction in environmental pressures) the Council would not wish to see the introduction of further environmental conflicts, particularly in sensitive designated landscape protection areas.

**5.90** The Council is mindful of owners’ rights of operation of 28-day sites as a means of meeting peak season demand. It will continue to monitor all such facilities used by touring caravans and tents, in the general context of amenity, environment and transportation considerations. In most instances, 28-day sites in Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLVs) are not regarded as being suitable for permanent use for environmental reasons. It may be acceptable in appropriate locations, however, to allow operators to use such sites for a longer but fixed summer season period if required. This could afford the operator more flexibility in meeting demands as they arise.

**TU10 Change of use or redevelopment of holiday centres and parks**

**The change of use or redevelopment of existing holiday centres, chalets, caravans and camping sites to non-tourism uses will not be permitted where:-**

- (1) the proposals would result in the loss of a site which offers a good range of facilities and makes a significant contribution to the stock of holiday accommodation in the resort;**
- (2) the site offers potential for development and/or refurbishment to provide an important level of tourist accommodation and related facilities;**
- (3) the site is in a prime location for holiday use (i.e. coastal, rural or close to major tourist attractions);**
- (4) the loss of a site and introduction of a new use would be detrimental to the general holiday character of the locality, or its loss would have a**

**detrimental effect on nearby chalet, caravan or camping sites by changing the character of the area; or**

- (5) the application is contrary to countryside and landscape policies set out in the Local Plan.**

**Explanation:**

**5.91** The facilities provided by holiday centres and parks offer an important source of holiday accommodation and cater for over a quarter of all tourist nights in Torbay. Although it is recognised that potential environmental problems can occur in sensitive areas, or where such sites are concentrated, it is the Council’s policy generally to support their retention and furthermore, to encourage their refurbishment (see **Policy TU9**).

**5.92** This type of accommodation is particularly important in Paignton and Brixham. Recent estimates suggest that about two fifths of paying holiday visitors to Paignton (i.e. excluding visitors to private houses) stay in holiday camps/holiday parks. In Brixham, the figure is around three-quarters. These proportions have grown in recent years and the importance of this type of accommodation in these areas and the facilities which they offer to tourists is self-evident. Any significant losses of sites by redevelopment to other uses would be unacceptable both to the tourist industry and the local economies of their surrounding areas, in particular Brixham.

**5.93** The Council is particularly concerned to ensure that the loss of a site in an established area of holiday parks would not in turn lead to the closure of adjoining sites, creating a ‘domino’ effect.

**5.94** Major sites offering a range of facilities for family accommodation are particularly important, but there is also a need to retain a variety of smaller sites offering a choice of different types of accommodation and holiday experience. The Council will therefore oppose their loss and will, in the context of **Policy TU9** encourage operators to exploit potential to make fundamental improvements to their facilities wherever possible. This will be necessary in order to maintain their role as significant providers of accommodation within the tourist industry. **Policy H13** deals with applications for residential caravans in the countryside.

