

POSITION STATEMENT

Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

The National Trust is a significant player in the tourism industry, welcoming nearly 12 million visitors to its pay-for-entry properties and an estimated 50 million visits to its coast and countryside properties annually. As well as balancing its statutory responsibilities for conservation and access, the National Trust also has to ensure that it is sensitive to the life of the local communities in which it operates.

What is sustainable tourism?

The National Trust believes that the prime objective of any tourism strategy must be to protect the environment on which tourism depends. If tourism impacts too much on the environment, visitors may degrade the very thing they are coming to enjoy. A sustainable approach must also embrace the social and economic effects of tourism ensuring that visitors enjoy their visit, local economies benefit, living standards are protected and the skills of local people are harnessed. The National Trust's approach is in line with the 'wise' growth strategy for tourism outlined in the Government's 'Tomorrow's Tourism' White Paper published in February 1999.

Putting sustainable tourism into practice

The Government's White Paper on tourism placed special emphasis on sustainability and included many new initiatives. The National Trust is working with Government and other partners to put theory into practice. If sustainable tourism is to be achieved, we believe it will be necessary to:

- *Promote regional characteristics*
Tourism strategies should respect and nurture and local regional characteristics. The rich diversity of Britain's landscapes and local culture, including dialect, language and events, is one of our greatest assets, drawing visitors from Britain and abroad. Safeguards should be put in place to ensure these characteristics are not adversely affected by tourism and profits from tourism should be applied to identify and encourage diversity. The National Trust has recently started a programme to identify and understand what is special about the places we manage in order to be able to promote regional characteristics.
- *Provide improved public transport*
In order to balance conservation with accessibility, the Trust is actively encouraging alternatives to the car such as walking, cycling, horse riding, travelling by canal and public transport. Increasingly the Trust is working with bus and rail operators to offer realistic and attractive alternatives to visiting by car. In the Lake District the Trust provides minibuses to distribute visitors evenly across the region and away from 'honey pot' areas. However, success in influencing the habits and travel patterns of the public and our visitors, ultimately depends on the policies, practices and funding regimes adopted by Government and a profound cultural shift among the travelling public.
- *Support local economies*
It is important that the tourism industry uses local supplies and local services to support the local economy. National Trust restaurants and shops stock local produce wherever possible. 60% of the produce used in Trust restaurants is sourced locally.

- *Work in partnership*
We believe co-ordination and working with others to be essential. It is important that there should be open dialogue between all involved in the industry, including Government Departments, local government, Regional Development Agencies, local communities, the tourism industry, interested organisations and visitors themselves.
- *Educate*
The Trust believes the key to encouraging more sustainable tourism is to promote greater understanding of the issues involved. Action should be taken to raise public awareness regarding sustainable development and what individuals can do to help. Sustainable tourism and management of the environment should also be included at all levels of formal education from schools to leisure and tourism courses. At Studland in Dorset, the National Trust has opened an environmental education centre, which has been built on sustainable principles, where visitors can monitor the impact they are having on the environment. At Brancaster, the Trust's Millennium Activity Centre also focuses on sustainability and offers accommodation for groups of students and families.
- *Support the environment*
All money raised by the Trust is used to support its work. We would encourage the tourism industry to put a proportion of their profits back into the environment by joining Visitor Payback schemes, for example, which encourage visitors to give money (or other help) to assist the conservation and management of the places they visit.
- *Increase access*
The Trust shares the Government's view that sustainable tourism should be inclusive in its practice, providing access opportunities for people who are less affluent and people with particular needs, such as those with disabilities, families with young children and elderly people. In Newcastle the National Trust is working with people of all ages and backgrounds to give them the confidence to visit the countryside as part of its inner city project.
- *Manage visitor flows*
The Trust believes that it is possible to increase the capacity of tourist attractions by managing the flow of visitors. This ensures visitors continue to enjoy their visit and the historic environment is protected. The Trust has done this successfully at several places. Timed tickets are in use at particularly vulnerable properties such as Mr Straw's House in Nottinghamshire and Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent. At Dyrham Park near Bath, a new visitor route has been devised to ease the pressure on the more fragile parts of the house. Visitors can also enjoy the more robust servants' areas at advertised times during the winter when the house is closed.
- *Improve Planning Guidance*
Measures to promote sustainable tourism should be embedded at the heart of the planning system, in particular in PPG17 (Leisure and Recreation) and PPG21 (Tourism). The Trust would strongly urge the Government to comprehensively revise these Guidance notes. Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Design Guides can make a real difference, promoting sustainable practice from the start of a project.

Success in achieving sustainable tourism is essential if the Trust's landscape, cultural and heritage assets are to survive intact and where possible be enhanced so that millions of people now and in the future can continue to enjoy them.