

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2010

**Briefing on Tourist Information Centres in Northern Devon.**

*There are currently 8 Tourism Information Centres in the Northern Devon area (Woolacombe, Braunton, Ilfracombe, Lynton, Barnstaple, South Molton, Bideford and Combe Martin) and three Visitor Information Centres (Holsworthy, Torrington and Atlantic Village). Each is run differently either by a Local Authority, in private ownership, a Tourism Association, a Community Organization or North Devon +.*

*Traditionally the Information Centres in Bideford, Torrington, Holsworthy and Atlantic Village have been grant funded by Torridge District Council and the private sector. Information Centres in North Devon by North Devon +, Exmoor National Park, Parish and Town Councils and the private sector. Prior to 1995 a grant was paid to North Devon TICs directly from North Devon Council but once the North Devon Marketing Bureau was formed the grant was paid through this body. The then Board of the NDMB decided to increase the grant given to North Devon TICs from the original £60,000 per annum to a total of £88,744 per annum with available EU funds. North Devon + has maintained this grant rate for the last two years even though the EU funds are no longer available. Last year the grants to TICs in North Devon were:*

*Combe Martin £9,283*

*South Molton £9,314*

*Braunton £11,872*

*Lynton £13,894*

*Woolacombe £12,714*

*Barnstaple £16,230*

*Ilfracombe £15,434*

*Other than grant income TICs earn additional income from membership, ticket, web and retail sales, commission on bookings, guided tours and advertising through the production of printed*

materials. Some TICs benefit from subsidized rental cost from North Devon Council which is a historical allowance given to support relocation to larger more costly premises. All North Devon TICs are membership organizations with membership figures ranging from 140 down to 65 members. Amongst North Devon TICs there are 4 full time equivalent jobs and 27 part time equivalent jobs. Some TICs also rely on volunteers to cover all the hours they are open.

Footfall into TICs is not an exact science but figures submitted to us suggest that this may vary from 214,000 down to 24,000 people. Evidence suggest that very little income is derived from a higher footfall as the main reason for visiting a TIC is to get free information. TICs are open all the year round with restricted opening hours in the winter months.

Tourism marketing and visitor buying behaviour has undergone a radical change as a result of increasing sophistication of the internet and traditional revenue streams for TICs are also changing with ticket sales being particularly affected. For an analysis of the current trends in the Tourism industry please refer to our consultation document on our website <http://www.northdevonplus.com/downloads/TourismStrategyPositionPaper.pdf> for more detail.

The National Tourism Open Platform (NTOP) is the national platform for the collation and distribution of information on the UK's tourism product and exists to support the tourism industry (for more information see <http://www.visitbritain.org/opportunitiesadvice/activities/AboutNTOP.aspx> ). NTOP is designed to link web sites at all levels to ensure maximum visibility to the consumer of accommodation, attractions and events. This system is powered by a Destination Management System and North Devon + are the data stewards for the Northern Devon and Exmoor Area and our task is to ensure all data is input correctly into the system.

Only one major TIC is networked via this web based Destination Management System (Ilfracombe) and is thus able to upload web based content to North Devon + ([www.northdevon.com](http://www.northdevon.com)), Visit Devon ([www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk)) and if businesses are eligible to Englandnet ([www.enjoyengland.cm](http://www.enjoyengland.cm)) and Visit Britain ([www.visitbritain.co.uk](http://www.visitbritain.co.uk)). Currently not all TICs/VICs have a web site. Cost is a major determining factor by those TICs not subscribing to this system. One non networked TIC still manages to generate significant commission from bookings although this is an exception with all other TICs only deriving a very small percentage of their income from bookings.

Recently North Devon Council announced a cut in the grant to North Devon + of £56,000. North Devon + has had to review all their activities in light of this reduction in funding and in consultation with North Devon Council has decided to reduce the grant paid to the TICs. To facilitate this decision TICs have been asked to submit a grant application form giving details of

*their key performance indicators and their accounts so that a fair and equitable settlement can be reached.*

*Given the importance of Visitor Services to the economy of this area we have met with the TICs and suggested that a review be conducted into the way in which visitor services are delivered in this area. Torrington and North Devon Councils have pledged funding support for this review and South West Tourism has also agreed to support the work as this issue is not isolated to Northern Devon.*

*This project will aim to establish how businesses wish to locally market their tourism products and how consumers wish to access tourism related information either through utilising the power of the internet or through face to face contact. We intend to learn from other areas how they tackle this same issue which will lead us identify the most effective ways of achieving the requirement and implement those solutions so as to provide a first class but sustainable service. Funding bids will be submitted to relevant programmes that support the rural economy within the next two months.*

*ENDS*

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