

SECTION 7

Tourism

7.0 TOURISM

7.1. INTRODUCTION

- 7.1.1. Tourism has an important role to play in the economy of Ross-on-Wye. This role has never been more evident than in the last few years when the growth in the tourist trade has increased significantly at a time when the economic depression and lack of employment generally in the town has been most severe. The benefits are mainly felt by the local traders which in turn can benefit the local community in that the town may be able to support a larger range of facilities (shops etc.), as a result of increased spending through tourism, thus providing more jobs.

The economic benefits gained from tourism can obviously greatly assist the economy of the town. However, what must be carefully considered is whether there is any adverse affect to the environment, the town's character and to local inhabitants life-style as a result of such tourist activity. It is the objective of this report to examine the attractions of the area, to assess the needs of tourists, the facilities and accommodation they require, the impacts that tourism has had on the town to-date and the town's tourism potential.

7.2. VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

- 7.2.1. Ross-on-Wye is a great tourist attraction not only in its own right but as a centre to visit the Wye Valley, the Royal Forest of Dean or other attractions further afield such as the Cotswolds and Black Mountains.

Its attractiveness to visitors is enhanced by its location in relation to major communication routes. The market town lies just over a mile from the southern end of the M.50, thus affording easy access for visitors from the industrial Midlands and the Black Country. An improved A.40 Trunk Road to Monmouth and beyond now offers motorway standard access to the town from South Wales, the South West and also M.4 traffic from London and the South East.

- 7.2.2. What then are the visitor attractions?

i) The Town - The town boasts an abundance of old historic Listed Buildings and is an Outstanding Conservation Area. The 17th Century Market Hall in the town's centre, the Gazebo Tower perched on a high cliff overlooking the river, and the Rudhall Almshouses reconstructed in 1575 are fine examples. The town is also famed for its connection with John Kyrle, a pioneer in Town Planning and subsequently named the 'Man of Ross' who settled in the town a few years after the 17th Century plague. In addition to being greatly involved with the development of the town, John Kyrle designed and laid out the Prospect adjoining St. Mary's Churchyard (with its magnificent avenue of trees), to provide unrivalled views of the river and the meadows beyond.

ii) The riverside and the River Wye itself - Known as the 'Gateway to the Wye', Ross-on-Wye is a popular centre for touring the upper and lower reaches of the river. In the town itself Rope Walk Meadow with its boating pool and the Long Acres are popular riverside haunts for tourists, whilst the winding river both upstream and downstream of the town passes through peaceful meadows and well wooded steep sided cliffs offering contrasting scenery to visitors.

iii) Symonds Yat - Symonds Yat Rock is world famous. This picturesque beauty spot commands a marvellous view of the River Wye and a panorama of seven counties.

iv) Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - From Symonds Yat the River Wye meanders through a wooded gorge to Chepstow passing picturesque villages and famous ancient monuments such as Tintern Abbey and St. Briavels Castle.

v) Royal Forest of Dean - Administered by the Forestry Commission the Forest lies on a plateau between the Wye and the Severn. Now a Forest Park, it covers some 27,000 acres of peaceful woodlands, hills, valleys and swiftly flowing streams.

vi) Hereford City and its surrounding villages - As the capital city of the Wye Valley, the city boasts a Norman Cathedral which holds the unique 'Mappa Mundi' map of the world drawn about 1300, and a famous chained library. In the modern pedestrianised precinct of High Town is the Old House, built in 1621. The black and white timbered house was part of Butchers Row and is now a museum containing a collection of furnishings and relics of the Jacobean period. The city also has a unique Museum of Cider, a steam railway centre and another museum based on the city's old Victorian Waterworks with machinery still being used.

Surrounding the city a number of picturesque villages invite exploration - their charm and character in the main unspoilt. The northern villages of Weobley, Eardisland and Brimfield contain a fine collection of half timbered black and white buildings typifying the attractiveness of Herefordshire's settlements.

7.2.3. Ross-on-Wye has also been recognised as an ideal centre for touring such areas as the Cotswolds to the east, the Welsh Marches, the Golden Valley, Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons to the west and Bath and Bristol to the south. Such areas are all within an hour or so drive from Ross-on-Wye and hence are fairly easily reached (Plan 8).

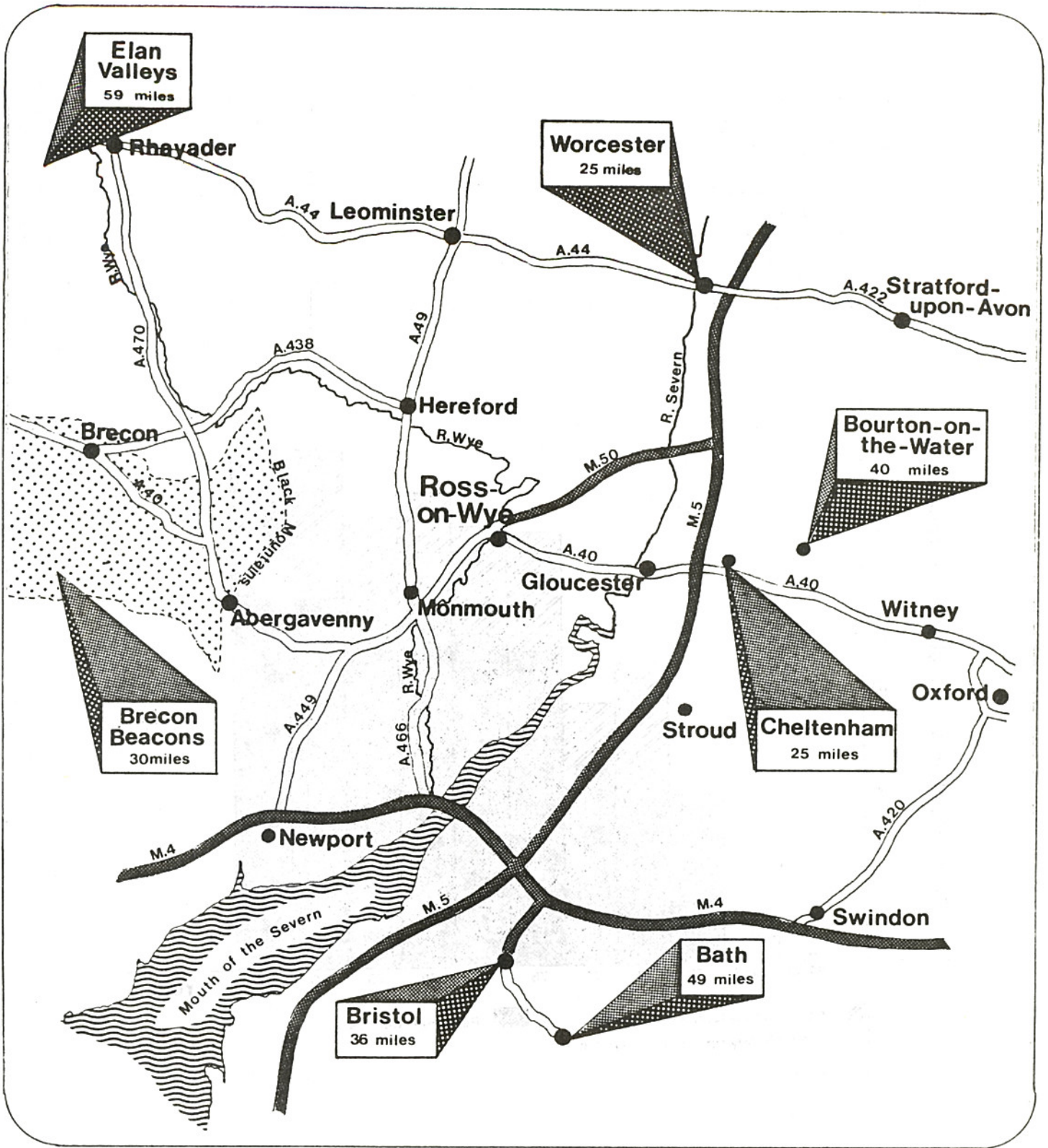
7.3. ACCOMMODATION

7.3.1. At the present time there are eleven hotels, two inns, eleven guest houses and eight private houses in the Plan area that are registered with the Wyedean Tourist Board, offering a total of 272 bedspaces. There are also two caravan sites which can accommodate a total of 55 touring caravans and 55 tents. In addition there are 24 units of accommodation known to the Wyedean Tourist Board offering sleeping facilities for about 120 persons for self-catering holidays. (It is important to note that these totals are not necessarily the comprehensive list of accommodation available to tourists but is that which is registered and recognised by the Wyedean Tourist Board and the Ross-on-Wye and District Hoteliers and Caterers Association). A full list of accommodation is given in Appendix III at the end of this report.

7.4. TOURISTS DEMANDS AND NEEDS

7.4.1. Accommodation enquiries

Figures received from the Wyedean Tourist Board revealed that enquiries received at the Tourist Office for accommodation in Ross-on-Wye and immediate surrounding area have increased considerably in recent years.



Plan 8.

Visitor Attractions

In fact in the eight year period from 1973-1981 the number of enquiries for accommodation and related matters has increased threefold i.e. 6,468 to 19,419.

7.4.2. The accompanying bar graph (diagram 9) shows the number of enquiries received by the Tourist Office either by post/telephone or by visits to the office. It can be seen from the graph that the greatest rise occurred in the mid-seventies when in the four year period between 1973-1976 the number of enquiries increased by nearly 10,000. Since 1976 the increase has not been so dramatic. For this current summer there are indications that the upward trend is continuing.

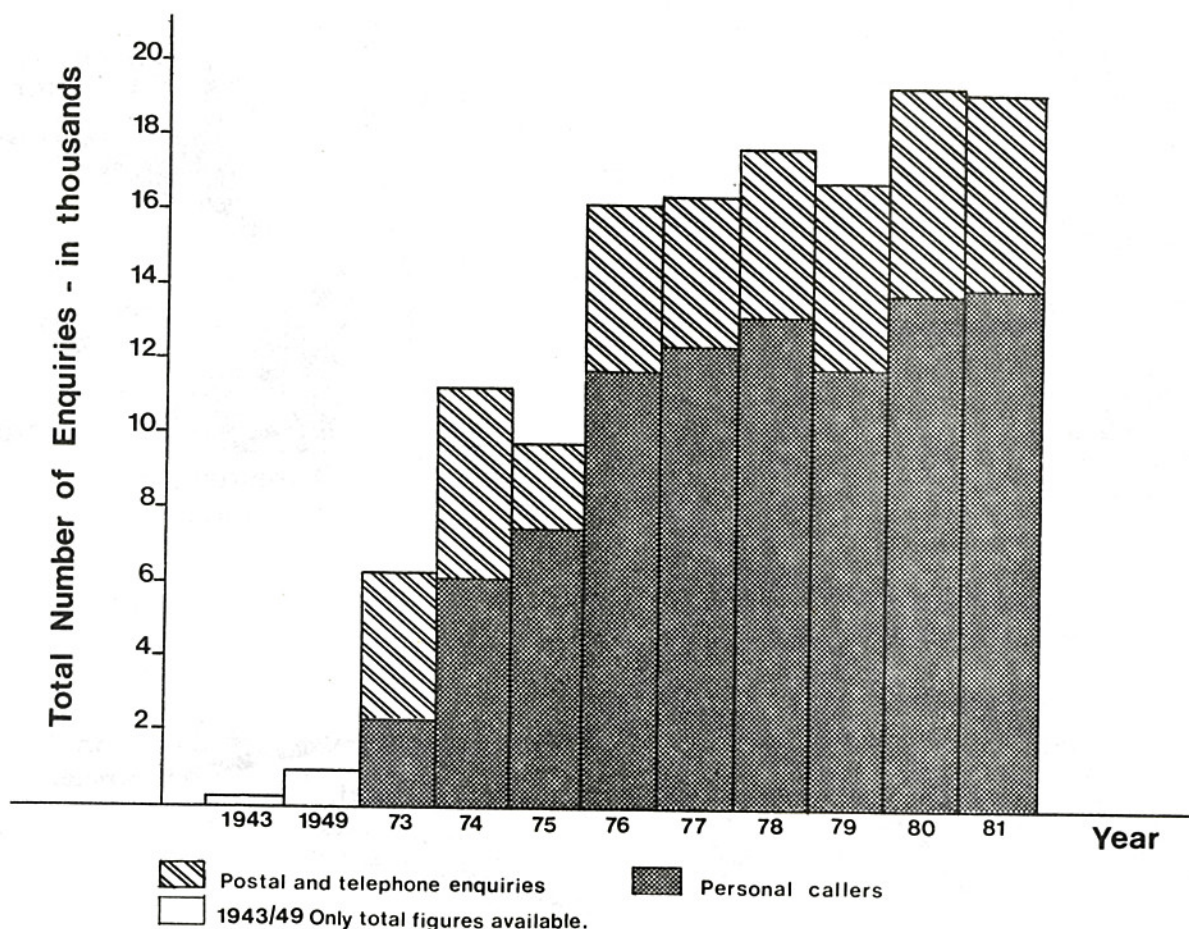


DIAGRAM 9 TOURIST ENQUIRIES

Source:- WYEDEAN TOURIST BOARD

7.4.3. Whilst the actual numbers of beds booked in accommodation registered with the Tourist Office has not risen in step with the enquiries i.e. 2,880 in 1973 to 3,683 in 1981, the increase does represent a 27% increase in Tourist Office bookings in this last eight years. The numbers of visitors booking accommodation privately cannot be estimated. (Bookings for self-catering accommodation and for caravanning/camping are not recorded in the total number of beds booked.)

7.4.4. Holiday Season

With the increase in the numbers of tourists to the town has come an extended holiday season. In 1973 the tourist season ran from April till September inclusive. There were few visitors to the town outside these months. Now, due to greater mobility, longer holidays and increased

affluence, tourism in Ross-on-Wye is nearing a twelve months of the year business. Figures obtained from Wyedean Tourist Office show that the total number of enquiries for accommodation in the town during the 'out-of-season' months would seem to reinforce this statement (see Diagram 10).

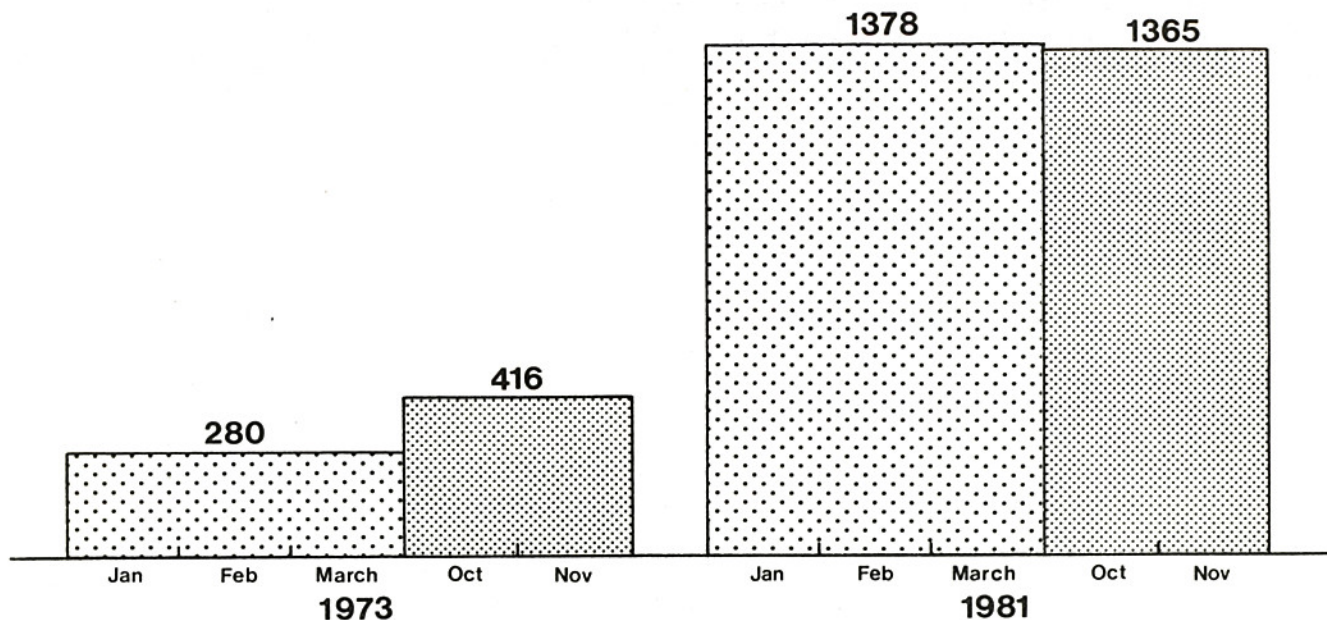


DIAGRAM 10 ENQUIRIES FOR 'OUT-OF-SEASON' ACCOMMODATION

Source:- WYEDEAN TOURIST BOARD

7.4.5. Day Trippers

Ross-on-Wye has a considerable number of day trippers visiting the town, which peak sharply during the summer weekends, bank holidays and industrial works holidays. Wyedean Tourist Office indicated that a high proportion of Sunday trippers were from the industrial Midlands, whilst significant numbers of visitors come to Ross from the North West of England (good motorway link), Essex and Kent.

7.4.6. The vast majority of day trippers have their own transport and it is estimated that only around 10% of trippers use public transport due mainly to difficulties regarding bus routes but coach traffic is increasing. The introduction of such private transport to local traffic at peak periods during the weekday and on Saturdays has added to the traffic congestion in the town and has frequently caused parking problems.

7.4.7. Car parks in Ross-on-Wye give reasonable access to visitors entering the town from the north, east and west. However, visitors entering from the Forest of Dean area have to negotiate the narrow Copse Cross Street and cross the busy A.40 Gloucester Road before finding central area car parks. Considering the visitor interest in John Kyrles' Prospect, St. Mary's Church and the Gazebo Tower (all south of the A.40) additional off-street parking is considered desirable near to these attractions.

7.4.8. In conclusion, day visitors to Ross-on-Wye are most likely to spend their money on food and drink in local cafes, restaurants and public houses, and souvenirs and gifts from the small shops and obviously provide the town with a valuable source of income in the short time that they stay.

7.4.9. Self-Catering Accommodation

The Heart of England Tourist Board have confirmed the continued increase in the demand for self-catering accommodation within the region. However, they did report a 'slowing up' in the last two years. The demand for self-catering accommodation has been strengthened by the recent recession and it confidently expected that this trend will continue at least for the next two to three years. In Ross-on-Wye, flats and cottages for self-catering holidays were reported to be very popular, whilst at Bank Holidays and weeks in July and August during school holidays caravan sites are at capacity.

The need for self-catering accommodation generally within the County has been acknowledged by the County Council. Policy TSM.5 of the new County Structure Plan states:-

"TO GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST ACCOMMODATION (IN PARTICULAR SERVICED AND SELF-CATERING) IN OR ATTACHED TO EXISTING TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS. SUCH DEVELOPMENT WOULD INCLUDE:-

- (I) THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW OR ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION AT COUNTRY INNS; AND
- (II) THE RENOVATION OF DERELICT VERNACULAR COTTAGES AND SUITABLE REDUNDANT BUILDINGS FOR SELF-CATERING HOLIDAYS; AND
- (III) THE USE OF LARGER HOUSES AS HOTELS, GUEST HOUSE OR SELF-CATERING FLATS;

AND SUCH ACCOMMODATION WOULD HAVE TO BE OF A SCALE APPROPRIATE TO ITS LOCATION, AND ACCEPTABLE ON SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, TRAFFIC AND PLANNING GROUNDS."

7.4.10. Hotel and Guest House Accommodation

The growth of the self-catering group of tourists in recent years has taken custom away from hotels and guest houses. Statistics from the Heart of England Tourist Board show that for the region the average bed occupancy in Hotels and Guest Houses for the year had dropped from 43% in 1980 to 37% in 1981. The Chairman of Ross-on-Wye and District Hoteliers and Caterers Association confirmed this decline and further reported that whilst bookings in the town generally had increased in the 'out-of-season' months, there were fewer bookings in the popular months of July and August. However, at Bank Holiday periods there was never enough accommodation to meet the demand.

7.5. IMPACT OF TOURISM

7.5.1. Any increase in tourism in the Plan area is likely to have two main impacts. Firstly there are the obvious economic benefits to be gained through tourist spending.

7.5.2. Economic Benefits of Tourism

It has already been stated that the most immediate and obvious benefits that the tourist industry can give an area, are increased wealth and extra jobs. This accrues from visitor spending on accommodation, meals, entertainment, tourist facilities and shopping.

- 7.5.3. The extra jobs and income are not confined to the more obvious tourist interests such as hotels, restaurants and similar attractions. A major holiday activity is shopping, and research suggests that up to a quarter of the tourist expenditure is spent in local shops. The initial expenditure by the tourists is then circulated within the economy due to spending by hoteliers, restaurateurs and shops, on such items as wages, rates, goods and services. The ripple effects of the tourist expenditure spreads into almost all sections of the economy.
- 7.5.4. Secondly, if the town is promoted as a tourist centre beyond its physical capabilities to absorb excessive numbers of visitors then the environment could be damaged.
- 7.5.5. Environmental Damage
- Ross-on-Wye is a historic centre and it would be wrong to see vast numbers of visitors physically destroying the peaceful charm and character that has helped make it so famous. Up until now the town's fabric and general environment has not been spoilt.
- 7.5.6. We have already seen that the existing road network does at times cause problems and conflict. This in many cases is unavoidable due to the narrowness of roads and pavements and tight road junctions. It is important therefore that the additional visitor traffic is catered for as best it can, not only for the sake of the town's amenity and physical environment but also for those who live in the town, everyday shoppers and those using the town in connection with their livelihood.
- 7.5.7. It will therefore be one of the purposes of this Plan to ensure that environmental damage is minimised and that visitor conflict is reduced to an acceptable level.

7.6. THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ROSS-ON-WYE

- 7.6.1. The potential for tourism in the Plan area is recognised. Policy TSM 7 of the Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan states:-

"TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE MAIN URBAN AREAS WITHIN THE COUNTY."

Policy E.20 also echoes this view:-

"THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURIST INDUSTRY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY PARTICULARLY IN THE RURAL WEST, WITH THE TWOFOLD AIMS OF GENERATING WEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT AND OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE COUNTY BY ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME SAFEGUARDING THE NATURAL INTERESTS OF THE AREAS CONCERNED."

- 7.6.2. It is however, also recognised in the above policy that safeguards must be applied to ensure that the social and environmental fabric is not damaged by the development of tourism. Policy TSM 1 states:-

"THE SOCIAL COSTS WHICH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT MAY BRING WILL BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM BY THE DEVELOPMENT ONLY OF FACILITIES WHICH ARE APPROPRIATE TO THEIR LOCATION."

Likewise Policy TSM 3:-

"THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVING THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE WYE VALLEY, MALVERN HILLS AND COTSWOLDS AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTIES, AND AREAS OF GREAT LANDSCAPE VALUE, IS RECOGNISED AND CARE AND CONTROL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISITOR FACILITIES WILL BE EXERCISED IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A BALANCE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT."

- 7.6.3. With regards to Ross-on-Wye the Wyedean Tourist Board are of the opinion that providing more worthwhile attractions are made available in the town, then growth could continue without any detrimental affect. However, it must be remembered that being an Outstanding Conservation Area any changes should be sympathetic to, and in character with, the town.

- 7.6.4. The County Council have acknowlged the importance to tourism of historic buildings. Policies TSM 9 and 10 refer:-

"THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY PARTICULAR ATTENTION WILL BE PAID TO THE CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS, BOTH AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND AS IMPORTANT BUILDINGS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT."

and:

"THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE BY PUBLICITY AND INTERPRETATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS."

- 7.6.5. Finally, as has already been seen, Ross-on-Wye has good road communications on which to bring tourists to the town. Once here there are a great variety of things to see. It should be the town's aim to ensure that adequate accommodation is available to tourists and that sufficient attractions, facilities and services are available.

7.7. LOCAL OPINION

- 7.7.1. From comments received from local people, organisations/bodies and from recent public meetings held in the town, it would appear to be the general opinion that tourism should be encouraged.
- 7.7.2. At both public meetings held in the town (called by the Ross Civic Society and Ross-on-Wye and District Chamber of Trade and Industry) it was the general consensus from the floor that tourism should be promoted due to the increased revenue that would be brought to the

town and the jobs that would be created as a result of greater tourist activity. There was however, concern over further traffic congestion that would result from the generation of increased road traffic in the town centre. Members of the public also commented upon the need for improved public conveniences and the signposting of them and a concerted attempt to make the town centre more attractive.

- 7.7.3. Ross-on-Wye Town Council has confirmed its support for all efforts to promote tourism and makes reference to the work being carried out to attract tourists by the Wyedean Tourist Board and the Ross-on-Wye and District Hoteliers and Caterers Association,

7.8. PUBLICITY

- 7.8.1. The importance of publicity in attracting visitors to the area cannot be overstated.
- 7.8.2. Ross-on-Wye is perhaps fortunate in that it has its own local Tourist Office, an active Hoteliers Association and a District Council promotional group all working together promoting the town and its surrounding area in addition to the regional publicity provided by the Heart of England Tourist Board.
- 7.8.3. Basically, the Heart of England Tourist Board prepares material for its region which is aimed at both the home and foreign markets. The Wyedean Tourist Board in conjunction with the Heart of England Tourist Board and Ross-on-Wye and District Hoteliers and Caterers Association advertise in various tourist board publications, and have periodically advertised in the B.B.C. Radio Times, and in local press campaigns throughout the country, whilst overseas advertising has been accomplished through the British Travel Association. The Wyedean Tourist Board share with the Hoteliers Association advertising campaigns in magazines and join up with the South Herefordshire District Council promotional group in the Councils advertising.
- 7.8.4. The Wyedean Tourist Board has available for tourists a selection of Guide Books, maps and leaflets on local places of interest, and a bed booking service with information relating to hotel, guest house, private houses and inn accommodation, accommodation for self-catering holidays and caravan and camping sites.
- 7.8.5. The Tourist Information Centre is located in District Council premises in the town centre at 20, Broad Street and is now a busy office serving the needs for the area, it is recognised by the English Tourist Board as a National Tourist Information Centre.

7.9. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- a) In discussions with the Wyedean Tourist Board it was said that the town required a museum. This would provide a special attraction for visitors as well as providing tourists with a facility to visit on wet days.
- b) There has been considerable interest from townspeople for a pedestrianisation programme around the Market Place and the top end of Broad Street. It is thought that this would greatly enhance the attractiveness of the town centre.

- c) An enhancement scheme is also thought appropriate in Crofts Lane in conjunction with redevelopment of land at the rear of Hill Street, possibly with small specialised shops to attract further visitors.
- d) It has already been mentioned that there is an urgent requirement to improve public conveniences and provide sign posting.
- e) Sign posting is also seen as a requirement for the existing coach park in Homs Road.
- f) A suggestion has been made that the top of the Market Hall, when vacated, or the Old Court House could be used for a museum or heritage centre.
- g) Investigate the possibility of providing adequate and convenient car parking facilities south of the A.40.
- h) To investigate the continuation northwards from Ross-on-Wye to Hereford City, the recreational footpath from the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- i) Examine enhancement schemes for any eyesores within the town along with ways of securing the conservation of the architectural and historic character of the town centre.