



EUROPEAN UNION



Three scenarios for the future of tourism in the North Devon Biosphere Reserve

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Acknowledgements

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Background

These three scenarios for the future of tourism in the North Devon Biosphere Reserve were developed as part of the BioCultural Heritage Tourism project. This is an EU Interreg project involving four UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (North Devon Biosphere Reserve, Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere Reserve, Réserve de Biosphère Iles et Mer d'Iroise and Réserve de Biosphère Marais Audomarois) and two resource partners, Pas-de-Calais Tourisme and the University of Exeter. The collaborative project started in April 2018 and ends in December 2021. The project has sought to address the impacts of overtourism in the Biosphere Reserve by using the concept of BioCultural Heritage Tourism (BCHT), which is about celebrating the connections between humans and the natural world around us. The project has three main themes: tourism management, business engagement and the development of new tourism experiences. The three scenarios were part of the tourism theme, and were developed in parallel with a decision support tool, designed to inform decisions about how to manage visitor pressures and opportunities.

BUSINESS AS USUAL IN NORTH DEVON BIOSPHERE RESERVE

In this scenario, we imagined a future where there is no change made to protect environmentally sensitive tourist destinations. There would be a steady decline in the quality and appearance of the local environment. Tourism continues

to be highly seasonal and densely located in 'honey-pot' locations, with only modest success in prolonging the season or in redistributing visitors to less sensitive areas. Most visitors come for the honey-pot sites and are not aware of the Biosphere Reserve

designation or what it means. Tourism and accommodation providers, particularly small businesses, face an increasingly challenging economic climate. Funding for environmental management continues to decline. Limited economic resources allow

for some mitigation of the negative effects of tourism, but overall environmental quality slowly declines.

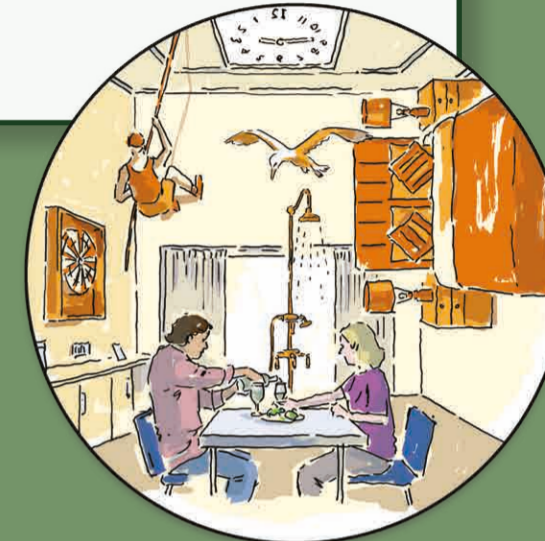
LOCAL LIFE

Tourists create large amounts of waste. Seasonal crowding gradually gets worse. There is a sense of dislocation between different groups; between locals and tourists, but also between different businesses operating in the area.



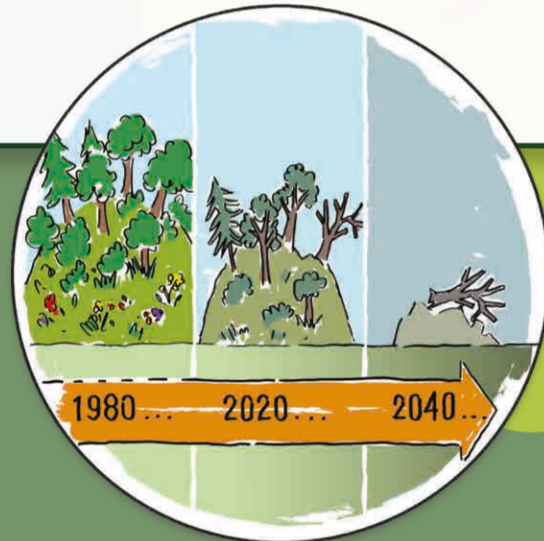
ACCESS

The car remains the most popular form of transport and traffic jams affect local access and the visitor experience. In places, roads are poorly maintained. The region's tourism offer is not entirely coherent and some visitors are confused about what the area has to offer.



ENVIRONMENT

Tourism focused on honey pot sites, which continue to degrade. The natural environment and air quality is gradually deteriorating. Some areas need regular and costly maintenance due to the effects of visitor pressure.



CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Local cultural heritage feels hidden, rather than celebrated. Prices to access historic places and cultural attractions are rising. There are independent shops, but chains dominate and local distinctiveness is fading.



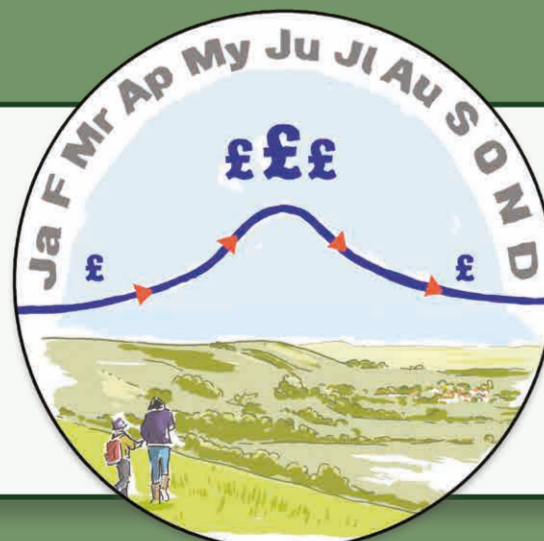
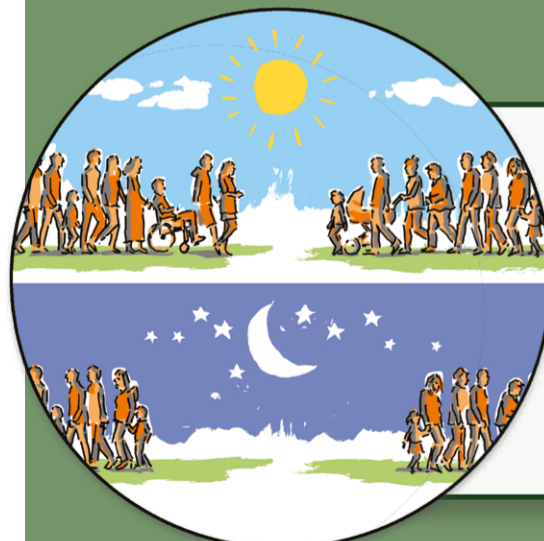
SOCIAL IMPACT

Seasonal peaks in visitor numbers. There is outward migration, particularly of young people. There is some disconnect between people and nature.



BUSINESSES

The area receives many day visitors, rather than higher spending overnight stays. There are seasonal peaks and troughs in visitor spend that negatively affect businesses. Visitor spend does not always stay in the local economy.



RESPONSIBILITY AND CUSTODIANSHIP IN NORTH DEVON BIOSPHERE RESERVE

In this scenario, we imagined a future where care for the environment and heritage is a shared responsibility and a key part of tourism in the Biosphere Reserve. Visitors understand the negative effects of over-tourism and try to avoid sensitive

sites during peak times. Businesses act in a highly sustainable manner and offset damaging activities with positive actions. Environmental managers are adequately resourced and help identify new sustainable business opportunities. Responsible tourists

contribute to 'Visitor Giving' schemes; the proceeds of which are reinvested in the local environment through local projects. As a result, the overall state of the environment improves. Business opportunities emerge from a vibrant local culture and enhanced

natural heritage, extending the tourist season. Landscape managers share the responsibility for stewardship for the environment; custodianship and responsibility are celebrated and embraced by all actors.

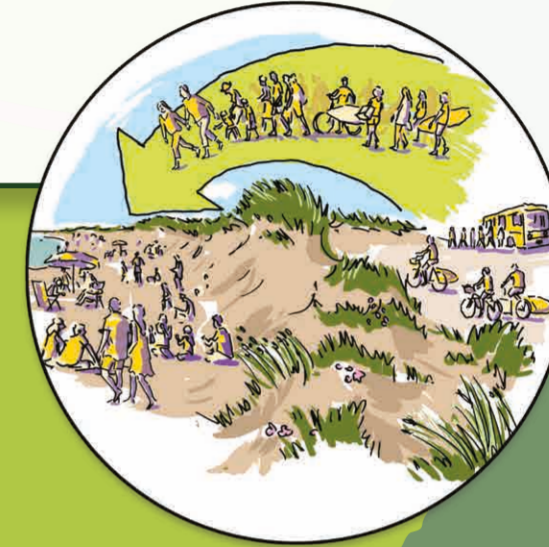
LOCAL LIFE

Clean and renewable energy supports the tourism industry. Locals interact meaningfully. There are more opportunities for young people to stay, with reduced seasonal peaks. Visitors learn about the area and act responsibly towards it.



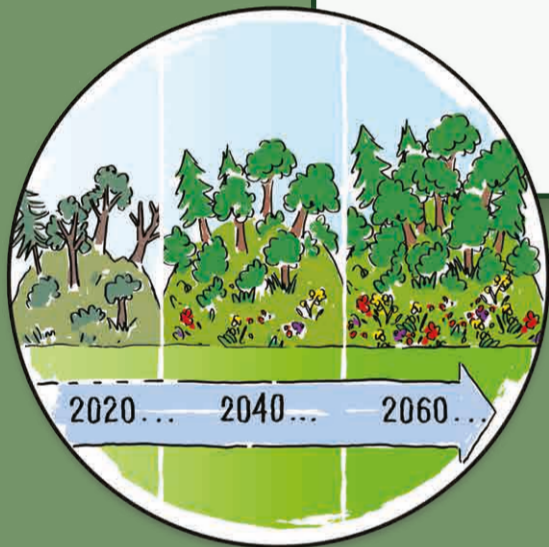
ACCESS

Visitors can travel easily around the Biosphere Reserve using green travel infrastructure like electric bikes or buses. Sites are less congested and well maintained, with tourists avoiding the delicate sand dunes. Visitors stay for at least two nights, spending more in the local economy.



ENVIRONMENT

Local biodiversity improves and net zero emissions has been achieved. Tourists volunteer to help lower their environmental impact. Visitors choose to come to the area because of the Biosphere Reserve status.



CULTURAL AND HERITAGE

Heritage is renovated and tourists learn about the history through well-designed interpretation. Tourists participate in immersive workshops and experiences. Local festivals thrive, creating more distinctiveness. Local producers are supported.



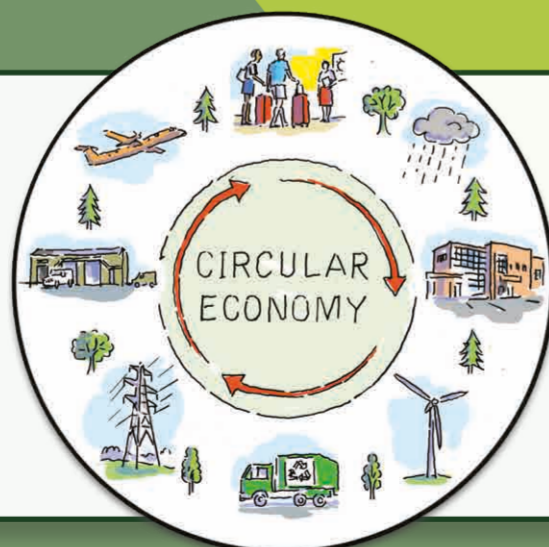
SOCIAL IMPACT

The tourism industry creates new jobs so local people can stay in the area. Tourism stakeholders have a shared vision and ownership of the area. Locals see the value in protecting the landscape, for themselves and to attract visitors.



BUSINESSES

Tourists visit local independent businesses and buy local products, funnelling money into the local economy. A variety of businesses work together on collective visions and marketing messages. A circular economy is created in the tourism sector with local supply chains.



LESS REGULATION IN NORTH DEVON BIOSPHERE RESERVE

In this scenario, we imagined that profit was a motivating factor in the Biosphere Reserves. Businesses and visitors would have the attitude of 'the environment is not my problem'. Local government and environmental managers would have

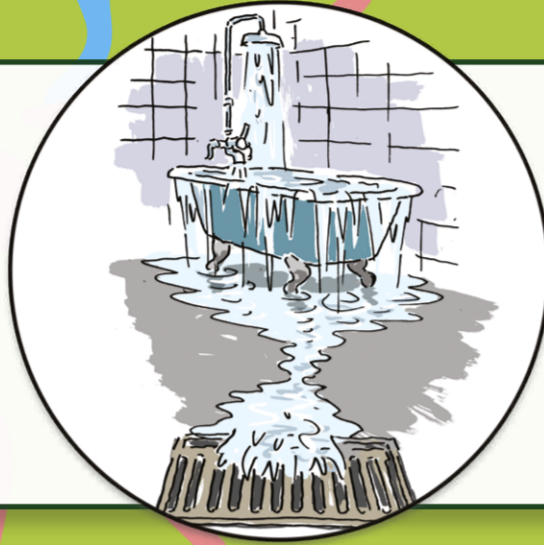
little power to intervene in private sector development, which results in insensitive tourist developments that negatively impact the environment. Second homes and sub-letting to tourists would proliferate, reducing available housing stock and inflating

the market for locals. Visitor numbers increase and they pay premium rates for accommodation and activities. Tourists over-consume natural heritage and appear uninterested in the consequences on the environment or local people. This leads to

a loss of biodiversity, reduced landscape quality and increased antagonism between locals and visitors. Authentic knowledge about nature, heritage and local practices are either commodified or lost. Awareness of the Biosphere Reserve is very low.

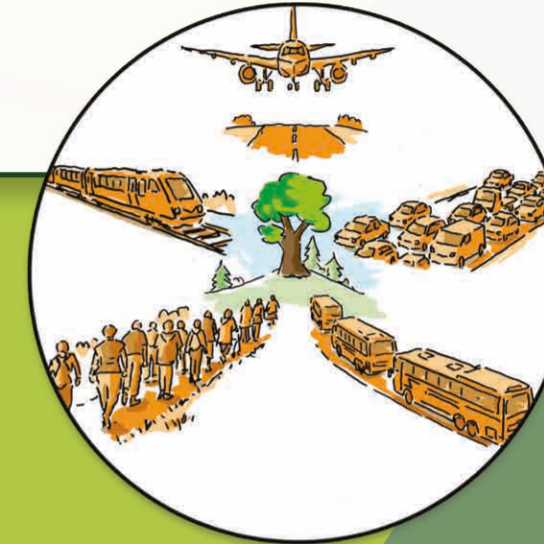
LOCAL LIFE

Houses become unaffordable for local people. The environment becomes polluted and water quality lowers, making it unattractive to live in. Locals find it hard to access shops as they are catered to tourists and busy.



ACCESS

Increased use of private vehicles will fill car parks, with overflow spilling into nature. Tourists overuse public services, making them hard for locals to access. Too many tourists will access the beaches over protected landscapes like sand dunes.



ENVIRONMENT

Loss of natural habitat, biodiversity and green space due to mass development, worryingly also in protected habitats (e.g. sand dunes, salt marshes, oak woodland). Over-tourism causes foot path erosion and leaves habitats trampled. Large wind farms dominate the landscape.



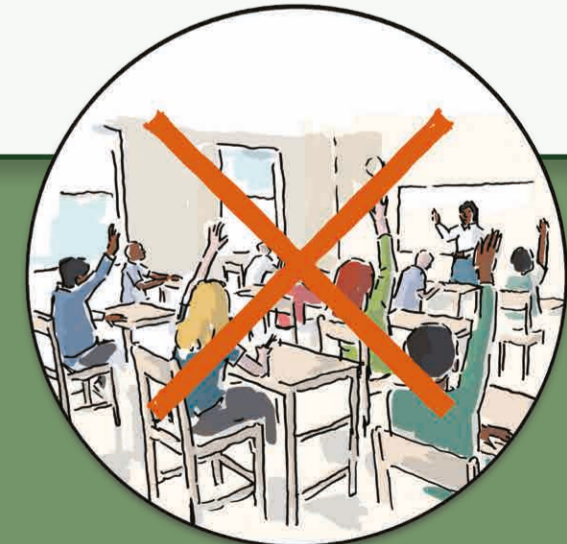
CULTURAL AND HERITAGE

Museums and archeological sites are removed in favour of more development. Local culture becomes commodified or lost entirely. The unique characteristics of local towns and traditions are lost to modern generic buildings and attitudes.



SOCIAL IMPACT

There are tensions and conflict between tourists and residents. Social divides forms where second home owners force massive outward migration of locals. Services such as schools and public transport routes close as residents are forced away.



BUSINESSES

Local independent businesses are forced to close and are replaced with corporate chains. Low wages and the seasonal economy of the tourist sector is exaggerated. Day visitors consume the local heritage without supporting the local economy.