



Report on Tourism Provision in Minehead

Background

Councillors will be aware that Minehead's visitor information service, previously delivered by the Minehead Coastal Development Trust (MCDT), operated both a face-to-face service based at the Beach Hotel and an online presence until April 2025. MCDT presented to the Town Council in October 2024, highlighting significant changes in visitor behaviour and the resulting implications for the service.

Their presentation outlined how footfall at the physical visitor centre had declined due to changing visitor habits, with more tourists seeking information online ahead of or during their visits. The face-to-face operation had been primarily sustained by external grant funding and income from product sales. However, due to a reduction in this funding, the financial model underpinning the service became unviable. This situation was further accelerated by the sudden withdrawal of grant support, leading to the closure of both the physical visitor information centre and its associated online functions.

Needs

Minehead's local economy depends significantly on tourism. An effective visitor information service is not only vital to attracting and supporting tourists but also plays a valuable role for local residents. The former service regularly assisted locals in accessing information about community events, activities and services.

There is a clear consensus that a visitor information service remains essential. However, any future provision must reflect current tourism trends, particularly the increasing reliance on digital engagement. At the same time, there is recognition that existing infrastructure, experience, and community relationships—particularly those already established by MCDT—should not be discarded but rather built upon to create a more modern, efficient and sustainable model.

Discussions to date have emphasised the importance of delivering a service that is both viable and aligned with evolving visitor expectations. A complete reinvention is not necessary; rather, a refreshed and realistic approach should be developed using the strong foundation already in place.

Role of the Town Council

Minehead Town Council has historically supported and at times, directly operated local tourism services. In recent years, MCDT has taken on this responsibility and has demonstrated capability, local insight and a long-term vision for tourism in Minehead.

With the appropriate support, MCDT is well-positioned to re-establish a digital-first visitor information platform. Such a platform would offer year-round access to accurate and engaging content, event listings, local business promotion, and visitor guidance—fostering both economic activity and civic pride.

Financial and Legal Considerations

Recognising the uncertainty surrounding the future of Minehead's visitor information service, the Town Council allocated up to £5,000 within its 2025/26 budget to support tourism initiatives.

Under Section 144 of the Local Government Act 1972, parish and town councils are empowered to encourage tourism within their area. This includes providing or contributing to the cost of promotional and informational services.

Recommendation

It is recommended that councillors:

- Review the report and attached supporting documentation;
- Acknowledge the urgent need for a reimagined, sustainable visitor information service in Minehead;
- Consider allocating the earmarked £5,000 contribution to MCDT to support the development and delivery of an enhanced digital visitor information presence.

This contribution would enable MCDT to expand their online offering, capitalising on existing expertise, infrastructure, and community networks to effectively promote Minehead as a vibrant, welcoming destination for both visitors and residents alike.

Ben Parker

Town Clerk

May 2025