

# Local Economy WG Report, 6 January 2017

## Background

The key industries and sources of employment in the parish are Agriculture, Tourism, and local services (including Building, Contracting, Plumbing, Electricians and Garage. Etc.)  
In addition there is an increasing number of people running businesses from home via use of the Internet.

## Agriculture

There are eight farms in the parish covering in excess of 1000 acres.  
Farming is a mixture of arable and pasture (mainly cattle and sheep)  
The farms are all privately owned and are operated mainly by family members. Consequently with very few additional employees, farming does not provide many opportunities for increasing employment. In any event those few that are employed are at the lower end of the pay scale.  
There would also seem to be little immediate opportunity for expansion of agriculture within the area.  
Generally, the farm owners, in line with many farmers elsewhere, are looking to supplement their businesses with other activities such as camping, renting buildings for self employed craft industries, storage etc, plant hire and in one case, a small, experimental vineyard.

## Tourism

Tourism is by far the largest area of economic and employment activity, although the majority of employment is at low-income levels.  
In 2011, it is estimated just over 15% of those employed in the Parish were employed in tourism.  
Tourism is a significant part of the local economy and helps the viability of smaller-scale businesses, including local public houses and shops. However due to the seasonality of the Tourist industry there is support for methods whereby the industry might be extended throughout the year.

Bantham Beach and The Avon Estuary are the main focus for tourists and holidaymakers.  
Watersports include Surfing, Boating, Swimming, Golf, (Thurlestone Golf and Tennis Club), and Walking (approximately 4 miles of the South West Coastal Path). According to our surveys, the main attraction for visitors and holidaymakers is the AONB, which is relatively unspoilt and unchanged over the years.

## Bantham Estate

The Bantham Estate is the largest individual landowner (589 acres, and 21 residential properties). It owns the Bantham Beach and Car Park and most of the foreshore of the Estuary down to the 'Mean High Watermark'.

The Duchy of Cornwall owns the river and estuary bed up to the 'Mean High Water Mark'. However, the Bantham Estate leases the river- bed from the Duchy, and then in turn, leases the boat mooring (140 moorings).

The Bantham Estate consequently owns the major tourist attraction in the area and the beach car park in Bantham is one of the major revenue earners for the Estate.

The Bantham Estate also owns the Bantham Village Shop and the Coronation Boathouse, which is run by the Estate employing the Bantham Harbour Master who also stores, maintains and repairs boats.

The Bantham Estate has recently undergone a change of ownership and the new owner has plans to develop the Estate.

The Bantham Estate has established a commercial pheasant and partridge shoot mainly catering for fee - paying external, shooting parties and operates between 2-3 times per week in the season

(October – February). The Estate now has six full time and four part time employees including gamekeepers.

## **Accommodation**

Accommodation for visitors to the area is met by The Thurlestone Hotel (77 bedrooms) plus approx. 108 properties available for holiday-lets (approx. 760 beds).

The Hotel employs 100 staff (3% part time). It has had to provide its own accommodation facility, as there is little available affordable housing for staff, the majority of whom are foreign and on the low pay scale. The hotel may have plans to expand in the future.

NB. The Parish also has 39% second homes and/or holiday lets compared with the average in South Hams of 14%. Although this brings some limited economic benefit to the Parish, most second homeowners obtain their most of their groceries and other supplies and services outside of the Parish (i.e. in neighbouring Kingsbridge etc.).

Attached to one of the farms there is the only caravan site in the Parish with 30 static caravans plus a caravan club site and an area for camping. This is approximately 1.5 miles away from the coast and is relatively unobtrusive.

## **Tourist facilities**

There are two pubs:

The Village Inn, Thurlestone, attached to and owned by the Thurlestone Hotel, provides drinks and pub food.

The Sloop Inn in Bantham provides local employment for 5 full time and 15 part time / casual employees. The Sloop provides accommodation with six bedrooms and a family unit.

There are two shops:

The Bantham shop is rented from the Bantham Estate and is family run. It provides a limited number of grocery and household provisions as well as beach equipment etc. and has a coffee shop selling hot food. The owners estimate that 80% of their business is derived from visitors.

Thurlestone shop also provides provisions and is also a Post Office. Estimated revenue is 60% from tourists, 40% local. The leaseholder employs one full time employee and one part time as well as 4 students in the peak summer periods. According to the leaseholder there is little scope for expansion.

Other facilities for Tourists and holidaymakers are Sailing / Boating, (140 moorings rented from the Bantham Estate, over half of which are for second homeowners or visitors.)

Bantham Surfing Academy is located on Bantham Beach providing surfing lessons, stand up paddle boarding lessons, lifeguard and surf coach courses. The owners are keen to expand and require more local storage facilities.

The Thurlestone Golf Club employs 24 staff (10 full time equivalents) plus the Pro Shop, which employs five staff.

The Golf Club owns Yarmouth and Leas Foot beaches.

## **Thurlestone Garage.**

This provides Auto - servicing and sells petrol and diesel fuel. Owned independently and entirely run by a local mechanic (employee) and an accounts assistant, the garage provides a valuable

service for local people. However the future of the garage is under threat as a potential development site.

### **Small Business / Self-employed.**

There are, a significant number of small businesses; mainly individuals on a self- employed basis. These range from organising outdoor events and corporate training, to a recording studio, to builders, contractors, plumbers, electricians, painters and decorators as well as professionals, e.g. Accountants and Consultants etc. All cite the lack of good Internet and mobile phone facilities, which inhibit their businesses.

## **Issues and Concerns**

### **1. Lack of employment in the Parish**

Most of the activities in the area are highly seasonal.

The limited employment available is confined to lower paid service employment.

Consequently the major opportunity areas, are in self- employed or small business roles, centred on leisure activity and outdoor activities / sports.

### **2. The decline of agriculture**

Most of the farms are family owned and run and only employ a few farm assistants.

Under current circumstances, it is likely that at best, agriculture will remain at the current level or will decline. One of the biggest farms in the area has recently ceased to operate.

The opportunity is to encourage those farmers with land and redundant farm buildings to develop new enterprises and provide alternative use for their barns and buildings e.g. Craft workshops, boat building and repair, marine engineering and servicing, storage etc.

### **3. Poor access down narrow roads and lack of parking.**

Many existing business and potential new businesses, as well as a high number of residents cite the inadequacy and narrowness of the roads in the parish as a major issue. The community is also worried about safety on the roads for pedestrians and children.

During the summer months, the roads can be clogged with vehicles trying to access Bantham Beach making it difficult for vehicles trying to leave the area and causing considerable difficulty for both visitors and permanent residents.

Any developing new businesses need to take this into consideration when planning new ventures. Also any new venture will require adequate parking facilities.

### **4. Inadequate infrastructure**

The *Thurlestone Parish Appraisal Report* in 1980 highlighted the inadequacy of infrastructure services e.g. sewerage disposal etc. to cope with any significant economic or housing development, even proposing that development should not take place until a full survey of infrastructure capability was made. Little has changed.

### **5. Protection of the AONB**

Any economic development should be weighed against any significant harmful impacts it may have on the surrounding countryside (South Devon AONB).