

COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 11 OCTOBER 2022

**ENDORSEMENT OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND DESTINATION
MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2032**

Report of: Nigel Walsh

Cabinet Member: Cllr Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Lives

Purpose of report

Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience. A Destination Management Plan is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take. This Report requests that the County Council endorse the Vision, Partnership Principles, Strategic Aims, and Priorities of the 10 year Destination Management Plan for Northumberland.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Vision, Partnership Principles, Strategic Aims, and Priorities of the Destination Management Plan for Northumberland 2022-2032

Link to Corporate Plan

This Report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for
- We want you to love where you live
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential

Key issues

Northumberland is now recognised as a leading UK destination following unrivalled growth in visitor numbers and the value of tourism over the past 10 years. In this context of rapid growth, the challenge is now to continue to drive private sector investment to increase the quality of employment, whilst ensuring that the ecosystem and infrastructure that supports the sector, in terms of attractors and associated visitor experience across Northumberland is maintained and improved in balance with the needs of our residents, and the environment.

The Northumberland Economic Strategy 2019-2024 highlights the significance of the Tourism and Creative sector for the County. In 2019, 13,076 were people directly employed in tourism, when indirect employment in the supply chain is considered, total employment stood at 15,790. Tourism and Culture is included as a key industrial growth opportunity alongside Agri-Tech, Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare and Life Sciences, Energy. Offshore, Wind and Subsea and Rural Scale Up.

In December 2021 NCC Cabinet received a Report outlining how the structure and arrangements for the strategic management and marketing of Tourism have evolved into the creation of *Visit Northumberland*. Following consideration of the Recommendations of The Report Members agreed to replace the existing annual SLA for provision of destination marketing services with a new SLA, and Partnership Agreement for combined destination management and marketing through Visit Northumberland. Members also agreed to continue the established £130,000 annual financial contribution to Visit Northumberland and enter into a new two-year funding agreement for 2022-24.

2021 STEAM Survey

The annual report on the economic impact of tourism in Northumberland (STEAM) has revealed a strong bounce back from 2020 in respect to visits, expenditure and employment, but as expected it is still at levels below that of the record levels achieved in 2019. The value of the visitor economy doubled to £858.95 million in 2021 compared to 2020, although this remains 21% lower than 2019.

The research shows a stronger recovery in spend than in visitor numbers, driven by an increase in spend by staying visitors. This indicates that more people stayed and spent more while here which supports findings from the 2021 campaign evaluation where average length of stay increased to an average of 4.5 nights.

The number of people directly employed in tourism stands at 11,179, a 61% recovery from 2020 with the return of 4,236 jobs, however this is still 15% lower than the 13,076 supported in 2019. A 2022 employment survey highlighted that staff recruitment was limiting the recovery and growth of businesses across the sector, a factor that remains a significant challenge throughout the UK.

Introducing the Destination Management Plan

1. Vision

Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience, taking account of the needs of visitors, residents, businesses and the environment.

During the past two years the Visit Northumberland Team has managed the development of a new 10-year Destination Management Plan (DMP), and Action Plan for the County.

The vision driving the Northumberland DMP is:

'To create an environment in Northumberland for tourism and the visitor economy to develop and flourish sustainably, maximising benefits and combating negative impacts, for the benefit of local communities, businesses, visitors and the natural environment.'

The DMP sets a strategic direction for Northumberland over a period of up to 10 years and contains prioritised actions within an annual rolling programme which clearly identifies which stakeholders are responsible for their progression and delivery.

The development of the DMP is characterised by a thoroughly industry and stakeholder-led approach, representing the geography and diversity of the visitor economy and reflecting the wide range and scale of product. Through the new structures, businesses, partners and key stakeholders can work collaboratively towards the shared Vision through the agreed Aims, Priorities, and Action Plan.

The Destination Management Plan (2022-2032) can be viewed here

[Northumberland DMP 2022-2032](#)

2. Partnership Principles

The County Council undoubtedly has a major role to play in creating the conditions for the visitor economy to thrive including advocacy, policy development, regional and local strategic alignment, resource allocation and support to the cultural sector. However, delivery of the Vision and Aims of the new DMP will be dependent on a commitment from all partners and stakeholders across the County's tourism sector. The Plan is underpinned by the following four Principles which partners will be urged to embrace and exemplify as Northumberland continues to develop as a destination.

- Sustainability will be at the heart of everything we do.
- Our actions will be inclusive and equitable, respectful of residents and the communities in which they live, and of benefit to visitors.
- Our partnership will be diverse, collaborative and solution focused for the greater good.
- All partners will be advocates for the county.

3. Overarching Strategic Aims

The DMP Vision is driven by the following four overarching Strategic Aims:

- To be a successful, integrated destination providing a high-quality and distinct visitor experience.
- To be a tourism destination which is respectful of the needs of the economy and communities, local people, and the natural environment.
- To create an environment where the tourism industry can develop/ increase its contribution to the Northumberland economy.
- To be an environmentally responsible destination.

4. Priorities

In response to the DMP development process, the established Sector Groups have evolved into four Action Planning Groups reflecting the identified Strategic Priorities driving the DMP.

These priorities are:

One: Data, Evidence and Intelligence

Understanding the destination, current position and opportunities. Effectively collating and using data and intelligence to future proof activities, to support destination and product

development, to identify and respond to issues and to identify business and market opportunities.

Two: Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity

Identifying development needs and opportunities and supporting the sustainable expansion of the visitor economy; and ensuring Northumberland is accessible for visitors and those active in the visitor economy

Three: Position and Profile

Sharing expertise and impact to strengthen Northumberland's position as a leading tourism destination.

Four: Business, Product and People Development

Providing businesses with the tools and evidence to improve, develop and focus their business and people to ensure the highest quality provision, skills, service and welcome.

5. Action Planning

An Action Planning Forum has been established which meets quarterly. This Forum is comprised of the four distinct Action Planning Groups working to the same shared vision and strategic aims within the framework of the DMP. Each of the Chairs of the four Action Planning Groups is supported by a collective of experienced stakeholders from within the public, private and voluntary sectors. Each group has developed a clear objective which will be delivered through short term, medium term and long term activity.

The DMP Action Plan can be viewed here

[Northumberland DMP Action Plan 2022-2032](#)

The DMP is a ten-year plan monitored quarterly and reviewed annually through a circular process of consideration, evaluation and progression. The DMP will remain a live document throughout its 10 year span and focussed research will continue to provide the evidence base

The Action Planning Forum, which oversees and takes activity and initiatives forward, will meet quarterly. The annual rolling programme of Action Planning Forums provide a platform to build plans around outcomes, opportunities and identified issues. Updates regarding progress on current and planned activity within each priority are reported to the wider sector through six weekly Partner Meetings. These Partner Meetings provide an opportunity to gather real time feedback, identify delivery issues and build collective momentum.

A Destination Management Plan Board is being established comprised of the four Action Planning Group Chairs, prominent stakeholders and senior NCC officers. This Board will monitor and consider progress in each priority area in the context of sector feedback and align / review activity accordingly. The Destination Management Plan Board will also prepare an Annual Report for stakeholders, partners and the industry on progress towards the agreed Vision, Aims and Priorities. This dynamic approach allows for flexibility to adjust planning agendas where necessary ahead of returning to the Action Planning Forum for the cycle to recommence.

Background

Historically, two different entities have contributed to the overall direction and development of tourism within the county, Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Tourism who acted as the County's Destination Management Organisation (DMO). DMO's are a common feature of local and regional tourism landscapes worldwide. There are an estimated 150 DMOs in England, varying substantially in activity, size, geographical area covered, funding models, structure and the degree to which they work with locally, regionally and nationally. The DMO's marketing focused activity, and NCC's tourism development and infrastructure role previously operated with no overall strategic coordination.

Following a jointly commissioned review (NCC and Northumberland Tourism) in 2019 it was agreed that a strong partnership between the public and private sector was essential to take the destination forward. This partnership would underpin the importance of tourism within the wider economy, supporting the area's wider ambitions around driving enterprise, growth and employment. Additionally, that this partnership should develop into a new Destination Management Organisation – *Visit Northumberland*.

In September 2021, following Board consideration, Northumberland Tourism was renamed as 'Visit Northumberland' through Companies House. The Cabinet Member for Healthier Lives is registered as a Director of Visit Northumberland (previously Northumberland Tourism) alongside representatives of the tourism sector comprising the Limited Company's Board. The Head of Cultural Services attends all Board meetings as an Observer whilst acting as Client in the NCC Visit Northumberland contractual relationship.

Visit Northumberland brings together the marketing activity of Northumberland Tourism (the previous Destination Management Organisation for Northumberland) and the Tourism Development Team based within Northumberland County Council.

The creation of one sustainable, standalone Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for Northumberland provides the leadership, influence and strategic drive essential to realise the vision of putting Northumberland firmly on the map as a premier visitor destination whilst proactively leading and supporting the tourism business community.

Visit Northumberland focuses on economic growth, by engaging with, and working in partnership with businesses and ensuring connectivity across the visitor economy. The organisation focuses on leadership and engagement, better use of data and intelligence, increasing visitor spend rather than visitor numbers, sustainable destination and product development, focused and monitorable marketing, and business and people development.

Visit Northumberland works in partnership with key organisations active in the management of place across the county and directly with business partners via the Visit Northumberland Partnership scheme. The Visit Northumberland Partnership provides access to a range of benefits designed to promote, connect and grow visitor economy

businesses. Membership of the Partnership supplies businesses with insight into the latest visitor trends and sentiment, best practice and development opportunities

Five tiers of partnership are offered with partnership packages determined on the size of business and an escalating range of benefits. The Visit Northumberland Partnership Scheme actively engages with over 600 products from 400 business suppliers.

Destination Management Planning Process

Information, Insight and Evidence Collection

The Covid response saw the development of sector groups to assess the current and future landscape, issues and opportunities. These sector groups represented key theme areas (Environment, Accommodation, Attractions, Hospitality and Place), and were used as a basis to also start discussions in relation to the development of the DMP. In addition to the recovery activity these groups communicated with their wider constituency of businesses and engaged with key stakeholders to gather vital information and an evidence base on which to begin to inform the DMP.

For context the Visit Northumberland team initially collated and considered information relating to:

- The national and regional policy context for Tourism.
- The national and regional delivery structures for Tourism
- The current local stakeholder structures and business engagement processes.
- Prominent, and emerging issues, that the DMP would need to address.

The DMP is evidence based rather than being built on assumptions or on limited knowledge and opinion. It was therefore crucial to be aware of all the available existing evidence and insight. The team reviewed:

- Existing evidence and data collected by individual public and private stakeholders.
- Previous tourism/visitor economy plans, strategies and research
- Plans, Strategies and research for contributory sectors e.g. economic development and regeneration, sport / leisure, walking / cycling, strategic transport and planning
- National data and local economic impact.
- Annual information on visitor volumes at key sites and attractions
- Surveys of businesses and visitors in the destination.
- Visitor profiles, visit characteristics, activities and destination feedback
- Performance and impact data from tourism businesses

A formal product audit questionnaire was distributed widely to all partners, businesses and those who expressed an interest in the visitor economy. The questionnaire focused on a product audit which assessed Tourism facilities, Heritage and Culture; landscape and countryside; built environment; access and transport; and other visitor services. The survey particularly measured quantity, quality, distinctiveness, and change factors and threats.

With comprehensive evidence on destination performance and the local, regional and context, the next stages identified the goals for the future visitor economy in Northumberland. This discussion was set in the context of policy and plans in place for the

County to ensure that the DMP supports, and is supported by, the wider strategic framework. This work was undertaken through the Sector groups and also through focussed workshops and consultation across the public and private sector.

Implications

Policy	Northumberland Cultural Strategy 2018-2030 Northumberland Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024
Finance and value for money	There will be no implications in relation to the agreed annual grant to Visit Northumberland or the current NCC staffing budget. The DMP provides an evidence base and strategic context for potential future external funding applications and investment.
Legal	NA
Procurement	NA
Human Resources	NA
Property	NA
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	The DMP is informed by extensive stakeholder and industry engagement. The Visit Northumberland partnership scheme actively engages with over 600 products from 400 business suppliers. A Product Audit Survey was commissioned in Spring 2021 to benchmark the size and scale of the sector and better understand industry perceptions. 56 responses were received from representatives of the visitor economy, with two-thirds of responses from the four main accommodation, attraction, heritage/cultural organisation and experience provider sectors. A Visitor Survey was also carried out, the first extensive study of past and current visitors since 2013. An online survey to previous visitors generated 3,500 responses with key findings

	informing the DMP. A face-to-face survey in the summer of 2021 delivered over 400 responses. Significant findings were that Northumberland holds significant appeal to new and existing audiences, and that visitor satisfaction levels were high, with 100% of visitors saying they were made to feel welcome and 99% would recommend Northumberland as a destination to visit.
Carbon reduction	Sustainability will be measured in all of the activity via an overarching Sustainability Action Plan.
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All

Background papers:

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Maureen Taylor
Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Jeff Watson

Author and Contact Details

Nigel Walsh – Head of Cultural Services
Nigel.walsh@northumberland.gov.uk
07789654473