



Northumberland

County Council

Communities & Place OSC

Wednesday, 31st January 2024

Update on delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destinations management Plan 2022-2032

Report of Councillor(s) Cllr Jeffrey Watson, Cabinet Member for Healthy Lives

Responsible Officer(s): Simon Nielson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This Report is relevant to the Driving Economic Growth priority in the Corporate Plan which identifies the role of a thriving and sustainable visitor economy in supporting inclusive economic growth.

2. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to update the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on:

- National and Regional Visitor Economy partnership arrangements
- Visit Northumberland's accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northumberland
- Delivery against the Destination Plan for Northumberland 2022-32

3. Recommendations

The Communities & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- a. Note the achievements of Visit Northumberland's efforts to maximise the visitor economy's contribution to the Northumberland economy; and
- b. Consider and comment on progress made in the delivery of actions against the priorities of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

The report does not require a key decision and is not urgent.

5. Background

- 5.1 Post-covid recovery of the visitor economy was prioritised by Government through the publication of the Tourism Recovery Plan in June 2021 by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Tourism Recovery Plan set out the role that the UK government would play in assisting and accelerating the tourism sector's

recovery from COVID-19. It also set out a framework for how the government would work with the sector to ensure that every nation and region would benefit from the sector's recovery, with visitors staying longer, growing accommodation occupancy rates in the off-season and high levels of investment in tourism products and transport infrastructure, while employing more UK nationals in year-round quality jobs.

- 5.2 Visit Northumberland was established as the county's Destination management Organisation to lead the coordination and management of the Northumberland visitor economy to ensure that Northumberland can effectively manage tourism growth sustainably, and ultimately, contribute to the Government's recovery objectives. It is funded via public and private investment, providing a vehicle for business engagement, and a partnership and collegiate approach across the sectors involved. Visit Northumberland is responsible for bringing together other public agencies, tourism producers and communities.
- 5.3 Prepared by Visit Northumberland through a process of multi-partner coordination and collaboration, the Northumberland Destination Management is the blueprint for the strategic development and management of the county's visitor economy. It is a living document, with specific actions established to deliver outcomes of identified priorities required to achieve this sustainable growth to contribute to the Government's recovery objectives. These actions and outcomes require annual refresh to ensure the Plan remains relevant and demonstrates progress.

Delivery of National Tourism Objectives

- 5.4 In response to the DCMS Tourism Recovery Plan, the Government acknowledged that England's Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) had an important role to play in recovery and Levelling Up and, it was necessary to transform the DMO landscape at a local level to harness their potential to grow visitor spend.
- 5.5 An immediate action of this report undertaken in 2021 was the De Bois review of DMOs aimed at strengthening the tourism delivery infrastructure in England, leading to improved collaboration and investment.
- 5.6 Key recommendations from the de Bois Review were to bring coherence to England's DMO landscape using an accreditation process to create a national portfolio of DMOs known as LVEP's (Local Visitor Economy Partnerships) and wider regional Destination Development Partnerships, a geographic hub of LVEPs working together in partnership to collaborate on projects on a size and scale to bring wider regional benefit.
- 5.7 VisitEngland, the national tourism board were tasked by Government to create this framework and the process of LVEP accreditation commenced in Autumn 2022. Concurrently, Government also committed to creating and funding one national pilot DDP programme, also coordinated through VisitEngland who would seek to identify a geography that contained LVEPs that represented multiple aspects of the destination to include coast, city and countryside, local authority areas with an interest in the visitor economy but no operational tourism body in place and partners with a

willingness and ability to collaborate at pace. The Government would provide core funding to the DDP of £2.25million over a 2.5 year period to March 2025.

Delivery of Regional Tourism Objectives

- 5.8 Visit Northumberland achieved LVEP accreditation from VisitEngland in February 2023, alongside 14 other destinations across the country, including NewcastleGateshead Initiative and Visit County Durham from the north east region.
- 5.9 At the same time, the North East of England was selected to operate a new DDP pilot, under the leadership of NewcastleGatehead Initiative. Visit Northumberland became a primary LVEP partner in the North East Destination Development Partnership pilot alongside Visit County Durham.
- 5.10 The role of the DDP is to develop and oversee the delivery of region wide activity and lead on advocacy, partnership working, funding bids, major events, data and business support. The immediate impact of the DDP has been the strengthening of the regional dialogue about the importance of the visitor economy, including a commitment in the North East devolution deal to write a ten-year strategy for the North East allowing for projects to be delivered at scale beyond the lifespan of the initial pilot.

Visitor Economy in Northumberland

- 5.11 The Visitor Economy is a vibrant and important sector in our economy and has the potential, with careful management, to attract more visitors to stay longer, at all times of the year, and spend more. As outlined in the Northumberland Corporate and Plan and Economic Strategy, we are committed to create an environment for tourism and the visitor economy to develop and flourish sustainably for the benefit of local communities, businesses, visitors and the natural environment.
- 5.12 Headline indicators are measured annually via a tourism economic impact modelling process which enables the measurement of the volume and value of tourism using local data, tourism performance and visitor survey data. In 2022:
- The Northumberland visitor economy recorded the highest ever gross value contribution to the Northumberland economy of £1.169billion.
 - Northumberland welcomed 9.97million visitors, an increase of 28% over the previous year.
 - The recovery in spend is being driven by growth in overnight stays which are now just 0.2% off pre-covid levels, and growing at a faster rate than day visitors. Staying visitors account for 19% of visits and 67% of spend.
 - There has been a significant shift in the contribution of food and drink to the visitor economy, which is now the biggest contributor to direct economic impact (48.3%) and direct employment (39.9%).
 - 14,683 jobs are supported by the visitor economy, 12,004 directly employed in the sector.

Delivery of Northumberland's Tourism Objectives

- 5.13 The Visit Northumberland Local Visitor Economy Partnership provides the leadership, influence and strategic drive essential to realise the vision of Visit Northumberland being the recognised voice of the Northumberland visitor economy.
- 5.14 Visit Northumberland aims to be an LVEP which proactively leads the tourism business community in Northumberland, provides expert advice and information, and champions and delivers projects to showcase and develop Northumberland as a premier visitor destination. Its strategic priorities are:
- Leadership and engagement
 - Increased visitors – quality over quantity
 - Sustainable product and destination development
 - Better use of data and intelligence
 - Focused and co-ordinated communication, PR and Marketing
 - Business and people development
- 5.15 A two-year Partnership Agreement between Northumberland County Council and Visit Northumberland Ltd sets out how the Partners have agreed to work together, and what commitments each Partner has made and describes the shared objectives. The partnership agreement commenced 1 April 2022 and will be renewed from 1 April 2024.

The Northumberland Destination Management Plan

- 5.16 Visit Northumberland is responsible for the development and updating of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan (DMP). 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.
- 5.17 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. The DMP is owned by all partners through collaboration and partnership and Visit Northumberland's role in addition to curation and oversight of the plan, is to identify how partner policies and services can support the visitor economy on one hand and be supported by it on the other. The Northumberland DMP feeds into the DDP strategic priorities, and the DDP activities support the delivery of the Northumberland DMP.
- 5.18 The strategic aims of the DMP are to ensure Northumberland:
- is a successful, integrated destination providing a high-quality and distinct visitor experience.
 - is a tourism destination which is respectful of the needs of the economy and communities, local people, and the natural environment.
 - creates an environment where the tourism industry can develop/ increase its contribution to the Northumberland economy.
 - is regarded as an environmentally responsible destination.

- 5.19 The DMP sets the strategic direction for Northumberland and guides the apportionment of resources through objectives and prioritised actions within an annual rolling programme, identifying individuals and organisations is responsible for their delivery. The priorities are:
1. Data, Evidence and Intelligence
 2. Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity
 3. Position and Profile
 4. Business, Product and People Development
 5. Cross-cutting: Sustainability

Delivery of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan

- 5.20 The Northumberland Destination Management Plan is now into its first full year of delivery and structures are well established. Governance to oversee the delivery and provide quarterly and annual updates of the plan are in place and a review to ensure the plan's 10-year vision remains relevant and aligned to strategic developments within the sector will be taken forward in 2024.
- 5.21 A Destination Management Plan Board, made up of the priority leads and subject specific advisors oversees the delivery of actions emanating from an Action Planning Forum of c80 invited visitor economy stakeholder, partner and business interests.
- 5.22 This board oversees the implementation of the priorities within this plan with a primary objective to oversee the delivery of actions and identify immediate issues, risks and challenges and outline potential solutions or mitigations. An update on actions for year 1 are included in Appendix 1 of this report.

DMP Review and Relaunch 2024

- 5.23 The DMP has a 10-year vision with outcomes monitored quarterly through the DMP Board and reviewed annually to ensure priorities remain valid and actions relevant and achievable. A report on activities and key achievements will be delivered at the annual Visit Northumberland Tourism Conference on 30 January 2024 and progress will be fed into the annual review process. The review will progress the plan from one with a focus on post-covid recovery to one with a focus on sustainable growth and development.
- 5.24 The DMP will be reviewed by 31st March 2024 and will be coordinated by Visit Northumberland. It will involve internal and external stakeholder engagement and integrated into the Action Planning Forum process scheduled to take place on 27th February 2024.
- 5.25 The review will incorporate:
- A destination audit to assess the impact of work and/or change in identified strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats, replacing any expired and adding new where appropriate. This will refresh priorities as appropriate.
 - Update actions and the roles, responsibilities and action planning groups.
 - Ensure there is strategic alignment with all relevant national and regional tourism delivery structures and strategies particularly, the VE Growth Plan

for Northumberland, the North East Destination Development Partnership and North East Mayoral Combined Authority. In addition, there is a need to identify the relevant strategies and policies which exist and affect the visitor economy which the DMP needs to align with or influence.

- Data and intelligence review to develop a deep understanding of the full value of tourism to the national, regional and local visitor economy.
- Management and monitoring – review the reporting of the delivery of the Plan and how the monitoring, management and communications can be enhanced to reflect the benefits and impact the Plan is making to funders, stakeholders and all visitor economy businesses.

5.26 The refreshed plan will be reviewed and updated with the Action Planning Forum, stakeholder briefings, through the Visit Northumberland schedule of networking events and regional Destination Development Partnership monthly briefings from 1 April 2024.

5.27 A full programme will also be established aligned with the development and delivery of an internal communications plan and strategy devised as an outcome of the Position and Profile group to better report on the achievements of the Plan.

6. Implications

Policy	The Destination Management Plan is fully aligned with the Corporate Plan, the Northumberland Cultural Strategy 2018-2030 and the Northumberland Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024.
Finance and value for money	LVEP status and DDP involvement provides a platform of future collaborative working and scale to benefit Northumberland. The DMP provides an evidence base and strategic context for potential future external funding applications and investment.
Legal	N/A
Procurement	N/A
Human resources	N/A
Property	N/A
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point

Risk assessment	A detailed risk register for the Destination Management Plan is maintained, enabling risks to be monitored and mitigating actions to be introduced. These risks are monitored through the DMP Governance structures.
Crime and disorder	N/A
Customer considerations	The DMP was informed by extensive stakeholder and industry engagement. Its DMP Board and Action Planning Forum are well established made up of industry stakeholders.
Carbon reduction	The DMP has a cross cutting priority of sustainability with the aim to identify measures and actions which underscore Northumberland's ambition to be regarded as a responsible destination which supports sustainable tourism development.
Health and wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All wards

7. Background papers

N/A

8. Links to other key reports already published

- Visit Northumberland Destination Management Plan
https://www.visitnorthumberland.com/VisitNorthumberland/media/VisitNorthumberland/Downloads/Northumberland-Destination-Management-Plan-2022-32_WEB.pdf
- Place and Communities Overview and Scrutiny report October 2022 – Endorsement of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-32
<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12022/Endorsement%20of%20the%20Northumberland%20Destination%20Management%20Plan%202022-2032.pdf>
- Cabinet Report October 2022 - Endorsement of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022 - 2032
- <https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12203/07%20Endorsement%20of%20the%20Northumberland%20Destination%20Management%20Plan%202022-2032.pdf>

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Appendix 1 - Northumberland Destination Management Plan Update

OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES	ACTIONS – YEAR 1	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>Data, Evidence and Intelligence</p> <p>The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to have robust evidence and intelligence to inform and shape destination management.</p> <p>It is led by Ian Thomas, Destination Director of NewcastleGateshead Initiative and the national North East Destination Development Partnership pilot.</p>	<p>Audit current data and research studies collected for Northumberland by NE strategic partners to identify gaps and challenges to industry.</p>	<p>Undertaken an audit and mapped out survey requirements to enable better understanding of requirements and shift emphasis from reliance on reactive data reporting to proactive data collection.</p>
	<p>Request regular insight from select accommodation and attraction providers.</p>	<p>Data is being collated to help create a Northumberland dashboard to demonstrate the importance of the visitor economy and encourage investment in the sector.</p>
	<p>Discuss a collaborated approach to regional data collection and reporting.</p>	<p>Taken advantage of a growing opportunity for collaboration across the region via the North East Destination Development Partnership with Northumberland datasets emerging from regional accommodation, accessibility and sustainability studies, with opportunities for Northumberland businesses to participate as these evolve.</p>
	<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Focus on identifying and collecting additional information or data required by priority leads to take their work forward, and what approach is best suited to meet those needs.</p>
<p>Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity</p> <p>The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to have infrastructure that attracts visitors, aids visitor management and provides benefits to residents and communities.</p>	<p>Convene Tactical Visitor Management Group.</p>	<p>Convened the Tactical Visitor Management working group through the summers of 2022 and 2023 to review community issues to aid visitor management and mitigate issues as they arise. The multi-stakeholder 'Love it Like It's Yours' campaign has been delivered through Northumberland County Council communications team, driving behaviour change messaging via visitnorthumberland.com</p>
	<p>Undertake audit of infrastructure to improve quality of visitor experience..</p>	<p>Overseen the delivery of a significant capital investment programme which impacts on, and improves services, within the Northumberland visitor economy with improvements to car parking, public toilets, and leisure facilities.</p>

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<p>It is led by Paul Jones, Director of Environment and Transport at Northumberland County Council.</p>	<p>Establish a strategic transport working group.</p>	<p>Identification of the most effective approach to taking forward strategic transport initiatives ensuring the voice of tourism is adequately represented in existing groups as appropriate within the development of facilities and tourism products within established activities to develop EV charging stations, motorhome camping facilities, walking routes etc</p>
	<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Focus on the better understanding of activity being delivered that can be included as a progress to the plan's delivery outside of the local authority responsibility, and with support of the data, evidence and intelligence group, an audit of infrastructure to improve quality of visitor experience.</p>
<p>Position and Profile</p> <p>The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to be known as a responsible tourism destination to attract domestic and international visitors.</p> <p>It is led by Sonya Galloway, Marketing and Communications Manager for the Vindolanda Charitable Trust. Sonya acts as Chair of the DMP Board and is Deputy Chair of the Visit Northumberland Board.</p>	<p>Create a framework for adoption of shared destination message and brand proposition.</p>	<p>Overseen the creation of a working group to lead the adoption of an industry-wide approach to celebrate Northumberland and support the delivery of the 'Love it Like It's Yours' visitor management campaigns, and encourage partner use of Visit Northumberland's seasonal campaign tagline 'Discover somewhere...' to suit their product.</p>
	<p>Encourage all stakeholders to adopt a destination proposition and messaging. Support champions to oversee delivery of DMP actions.</p>	<p>Developed a Northumberland Pledge to encourage visitors to act responsibly and sustainably whilst visiting to underline Northumberland as a responsible tourism destination.</p>
	<p>Promote thematic tourism products and events.</p>	<p>Promote thematic tourism products and events with campaigns focussing on lesser visitor attractions and destinations away from the coastal hotspots, monthly thematic promotion of themes to drive visits to refreshed content on visitnorthumberland.com and from the Autumn 2023 Northumberland's Dark Skies.</p>
	<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Focus on the development of an internal communications plan and strategy to better report on the achievements of the Plan and support champions to oversee delivery of DMP actions, and encourage stakeholder participation and adoption of the Pledge as the</p>

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		continuation of the tactical visitor management campaign to create a movement towards responsible tourism visiting.
<p>Business, Product and People Development</p> <p>This priority has three objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Northumberland’s visitor economy businesses will thrive in an environment of collaboration and have agility to adapt to every opportunity. 2. Quality, longer staying visitors, will be inspired by an array of experiences based on a solid understanding of their motivations, needs and wants. 3. A skilled and knowledgeable visitor economy workforce will stimulate quality improvements and an improved visitor experience. <p>It is led by Mark Brassell, Director of The Alnwick Garden, with support on business development by hospitality consultant Debrah Dhugga; on product development by leisure consultant Rob Aubrook; and on people development by Robert Stewart, Visit Northumberland board member</p>	Develop business partnerships.	Developed and delivered the New Adventures and Dark Skies Star Trails product development programmes with a Winter Trails programme underway with an initial focus on businesses in and around Alnwick to March 2024. In addition, an Active tourism working group established and supporting new product in development.
	Business improvement.	Provided business development opportunities to over 100 businesses through Visit Northumberland partner engagement activity and product development strands and widened the partnership programme to include events, and suppliers to industry with food and drink and previously lapsed partners a focus on business development.
	Develop relevant product	Initial focus has been the continued development of thematic experiences and activities through funded programmes to augment Northumberland’s Dark Skies product and engage with bookable product and experience development.
	Promote tourism as a viable, rewarding career.	Relaunched “Know your Northumberland” to support industry’s people development priorities, identified all establishments offering career training in tourism related industries and developed education resources for teachers, and encouraged more Northumberland organisations involved in Visit England inspections and Tourism Award entries.
	Next Steps	Focus on what can be done to attract more businesses to actively engage in the development of the sector and what is needed to help them grow. Initial focus will be on the continued development of thematic experiences and activities that demonstrate working and operating in the visitor economy is desirable and rewarding. Expansion and accreditation of the Know your Northumberland programme is also progressing, to be implemented for 2024 delivery.

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responsible for skills from Northumberland College.		
<p>Cross-Cutting: Sustainability</p> <p>The objective of this priority is to identify measures and actions which underscore Northumberland’s ambition to be regarded as a responsible destination which supports sustainable tourism development.</p> <p>It is led by Duncan Wise, Visitor Development and Tourism Officer for the Northumberland National Park Authority.</p>	<p>Develop business partnerships.</p> <p>Creation of a sustainability advisory group.</p> <p>Regenerative tourism and championing the circular economy.</p> <p>Become a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on climate action in tourism.</p> <p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Developed and delivered the New Adventures and Dark Skies Star Trails product development programmes, and will deliver a Winter Trails programme with an initial focus on businesses in and around Alnwick to March 2024. In addition, an Active tourism working group established and supporting new product in development.</p> <p>Overseen the creation a sustainability advisory group with representatives from the county’s protected landscapes, climate action team and interested parties to address sustainable transport, accessibility and broadening participation in the Green Tourism Accreditation Scheme, sustainable food practices to help support food and drink product development and waste recycling.</p> <p>Participation as an active member of the North East England Regenerative Tourism Advisory Taskforce to show how the framework of the DMP can demonstrate a destination committed to regenerative tourism when setting the benchmarks for a future rural Global Destination Index for Northumberland.</p> <p>Work to identify which stakeholders and at what level of authority would be require to progress this, and what steps and simple actions could be taken for Northumberland to become a signatory of the Glasgow declaration.</p> <p>Focus on what businesses/organisations need to do to demonstrate a commitment to the principles of sustainability to demonstrate progress towards being a responsible tourism destination through case studies, benchmarking and reporting.</p>