

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Cabinet**

**14 February 2023**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Tourism Strategy</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Cllr Keith Flunder – Portfolio Holder for Tourism</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Nicholas Lamb - Interim Head of Regeneration</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>

**Appendix A – Project Plan**

**Appendix B – Baseline Data Report**

**Appendix C – Workshop Feedback**

**Appendix D – Draft Tourism Strategy**

**Appendix E – Town and Alton Towers High Level Objectives**

**1. Reason for the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the development of the Tourism Strategy and action plan for tourism delivery in the Staffordshire Moorlands over the next five years.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Tourism Strategy.
- 2.2 To note the actions taken for the effective delivery of this Strategy.

**3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector with total visits to the Staffordshire Moorlands down approximately 49% on 2019 figures with economic benefits down by over 50% on 2019 values. National forecasts are now suggesting that it will be the end of 2022 before domestic tourism recovers to 2019 levels. Given the reduction in visitor numbers, this Strategy is required to help the Council capture new markets, using the area's cultural and natural assets to fuel growth and capitalise on the staycation demand and people's desire for escape to and exploration of "the great

outdoors”. The key to success of the Strategy will be increasing overnight stays to maximise visitor spend in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

- 3.2 In February 2022 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council issued a tender to appoint consultancy services for the preparation of a five-year Tourism Strategy and action plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. In addition to this work a full review of the current tourism service for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council was commissioned to understand how it can help support the emerging Strategy and drive forward a modern tourism offer.
- 3.3 Tourism specialists, Blue Sail Consultants were appointed in April 2022 to conduct stakeholder and wider consultation and draft the Strategy working closely with Officers.
- 3.4 Blue Sail Consultants have held individual conversations with the people listed here:
  - SMDC Portfolio holder - Cllr Keith Flunder
  - Leek Town Councillors – Cllr Matt Swindlehurst
  - Biddulph Town Clerk -Sarah Haydon
  - Cheadle Town Clerk – David Mullington
  - SMDC Regeneration Officer – Clare Brookes and Joanna Bagnall
  - Destination Staffordshire – Charlotte Cain and Andrea Sammons
  - Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire – Jo Dilley
  - Alton Towers – Francis Jackson
  - James Lepke – Rudyard Lake Hotel
  - Helen Wilshaw – Biddulph Grange Gardens
  - David Smith – SMDC Head of Communities and Climate Change
  - Josie Muncaster and Jo Clough -Severn Trent
  - Julia Arnold – Caldon and Uttoxeter Canal
  - Ray Perry – Rudyard Lake
  - Thom Bateman – Flintlock of Cheddleton
  - Catherine Webster – Secret Cloud House Holidays
  - Joss Winter –Sustrans
  - Sarah Wilks – Peak District National Park Authority
- 3.5 In addition a cross-section of businesses and town representatives took part in an online survey and participated in three ‘Town Hall’ meetings. A summary of the online survey can be found at Appendix B and Town Hall meetings at Appendix C.
- 3.6 The Baseline Report was delivered by Blue Sail in November 2022 and shared with key Regeneration Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Tourism for further input and feedback (Appendix B). This report includes:
  - Current Tourism Performance
  - Comprehensive Product Audit
  - Regional and Local Strategy Review
  - Market Review
  - Best Practice (learning from others and case studies)

- Consultation and Engagement
- Business Surveys

3.7 As a result of consultation the four key priorities identified for growth are:

- **Alton Towers** – unlocking investment to create a year-round driver of visits
- **Towns & Villages** – animated hubs with distinct food & drink to increase dwell times
- **Active Experiences** – developing cycling and walking routes, trails and events
- **Accommodation** – expand, improve and encourage investment

3.8 Following the three ‘Town Hall’ meetings, five high level objectives have been identified for growth and for consideration by each town and Alton Towers as one of the key attractions, these objectives can be found at Appendix E.

### **Leek**

- Improve active travel links to the nearby countryside for both cyclists and walkers.
- Build a stronger reputation for ‘local’ food and drink through markets and cafes and restaurants.
- Help visitors move around the town easily with great signage and strengthen links from the town centre to the canal and proposed railway.
- Strengthen animation across the day and into the evening with improved markets, events and food and drink.
- Grow the accommodation base to serve visitors to Staffordshire Moorlands.

### **Cheadle**

- Support accommodation development. Especially family accommodation, serviced and non-serviced.
- Establish coach parking in a central location to accommodate groups and tie in with the experiences such as St Giles Church.
- Strengthen links to walks and cycle trails and improve the responsible tourism offer.
- Develop the evening economy, making use of vacant premises and improve animation of the town across the day and into the evening.
- Stay focussed on essential facilities such as signage, toilets, parking, cleaning.

### **Biddulph**

- Develop accommodation including campervan and camping sites and functional serviced/budget accommodation.
- Improve signage and links to greenways and active travel opportunities and where possible use these to improve sustainable travel choices to nearby attractions.
- Build the towns events programme to strengthen animation.
- Improve the food and drink offer to encourage visitors to spend time and money into the evening.

## **Alton Towers TBC**

- 3.9 The five high level objectives were shared with each Town Council for consideration and further comment on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022, the deadline for comment 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023

## **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 This Strategy supports the principles of the Staffordshire Moorlands Corporate Plan: 2019 - 2023 and has the potential to help deliver all four aims of the Corporate Plan.

- Aim 1 – Help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.
- Aim 2 – To use resources effectively and provide value for money.
- Aim 3 – To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages.
- Aim 4 – To protect and improve the environment and respond to the climate change emergency.

## **5. Alternative Options**

- 5.1 To reject the draft Tourism Strategy.  
This is not considered the preferred option. Baseline data and consultation provides evidence to suggest that the Staffordshire Moorlands lacks destination brand awareness. A long-term strategic vision is required and a framework for service delivery to aid economic recovery following Covid and more recently with the Cost of Living Crisis.

**Not recommended**

- 5.2 Approve draft Tourism Strategy.  
Under this scenario, the Council would acknowledge the Baseline data findings to date and approve the proposed Tourism Strategy and action plan for the next five years, this will support and align with the work of DMO's and reflect and build upon the work already achieved.

The main aim being to develop the Staffordshire Moorlands as a destination and a brand. Promote the area nationally and internationally and deliver long term sustainable growth in the value of Staffordshire Moorlands' visitor economy.

**Recommended**

## **6. Implications**

- 6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)  
Long -term sustainable growth to the local economy will benefit the local community by reducing unemployment and crime.

- 6.2 Workforce  
None at this stage, although it should be noted that the proposal to

relocate the TIC Leek would have implications to the Nicholson Museum and Art Gallery staffing.

Regeneration team to provide tourism delivery in the short term with experience and expertise in delivering projects, events and tourism officer skills. The Strategy requires the right kind of support in place to grow tourism sustainably working in partnership with other organisations. Ensuring that marketing is delivered primarily via the DMO's.

### 6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

The draft Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Diversity and Equality Policies.

### 6.4 Financial Considerations

Continuing DMO support/contribution will be required to develop and deliver the marketing elements of the Strategy. Specific projects and activities will require funding either external to the Council or internal resources.

### 6.5 Legal

The report is to approve the draft Tourism Strategy and action plan and work carried out so far by Blue Sail Consultants.

Legal advice will be sought to review the current arrangements with DMO's and to consider available options for partnership arrangements with DMO's for delivery proposals.

### 6.6 Climate Change

The draft Strategy has been developed with consideration given to the local and regional plans to support Climate Change, further details and national plans can be found on page 61 of the baseline report. (Appendix B).

- Local Plan 2020,
- Staffordshire Moorlands Corporate Plan 2019-2023
- Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy 2018
- Staffordshire Moorlands Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2020
- Churnet Valley Master Plan 2014
- Growth Strategy for Staffordshire Moorlands 2018
- Peak District Management Plan 2018-2023

### 6.7 Consultation

Appendix B and C outline the consultation carried out to date in the development of the draft Tourism Strategy.

Consultation has been carried out with a wide range of public, private and third sector stakeholders. Consultation took place face to face, by telephone or online from mid-May to end of June 2022. A Business Survey was carried out from mid-June to mid-July, these results can be seen in the Baseline Data Report (Appendix B).

A series of 'Town Hall' meetings and one Parish Council meeting held with Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph Town Councillors and clerks

and other key tourism stakeholders, these meetings took place face to face in October and November 2022. The feedback from these meetings can be seen at Appendix C.

- 6.8 Risk Assessment  
None at this stage.

Neil Rodgers  
**Executive Director (Place)**

## 7. **Background and Detail**

- 7.1 Tourism is a significant economic sector employing approximately 6000 people or around 18% of all jobs in Staffordshire Moorlands. Visitors spend almost £335m, with about 42% generated by staying visitors who account for almost 10% of all visits. Half of all spend is on shopping, and food and drink - facilities and services which benefit and are used by residents as well as visitors.
- 7.2 The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector with total visits to the Staffordshire Moorlands down approximately 49% on 2019 figures with economic benefits down by over 50% on 2019 values. National forecasts are now suggesting that it will be the end of 2022 before domestic tourism recovers to 2019 levels. Given the reduction in visitor numbers, this Strategy is required to help the Council capture new markets, using the area's cultural and natural assets to fuel growth and capitalise on the staycation demand and people's desire for escape to and exploration of "the great outdoors". The key to success of the Strategy will be increasing overnight stays to maximise visitor spend in the Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 7.3 In February 2022 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council issued a tender to appoint consultancy services for the preparation of a five-year Tourism Strategy and action plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. In addition to this work a full review of the current tourism service for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council was commissioned to understand how it can help support the emerging Strategy and drive forward a modern tourism offer.

## 7.4 **Specific Requirements**

The tender was to develop a new Tourism Strategy and action plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. The Strategy to cover a 5-year (2022 – 2027) vision and framework for delivery and address the following objectives:

- Provide a long-term strategic vision that clearly demonstrates growth ambitions for the visitor economy.

- Define the priority actions for delivery at a district and regional level, identifying opportunities for collaboration and partner destination Management Organisations and key stakeholders.
- Identify the sector's current positioning and consider emerging trends, opportunities and challenges in each district. This included a review of the evidence base including sector performance; recent growth trends and future forecasting; new and planned investments of significant scale.
- Identify opportunities to embed performance and evaluation monitoring at an early stage.

## 7.5 Outputs

7.5.1 **A Tourism Strategy and action plan** for the next five years that reflects and builds upon work already achieved and aims to:

- Develop the Staffordshire Moorlands as a destination and a brand.
- Promote the area nationally and internationally.
- Deliver long term sustainable growth in the value of the Staffordshire Moorlands' visitor economy.

### 7.5.2 Staffordshire Moorlands Tourism Service Review

- A comprehensive review to be carried on the current service. This review will need to identify what support services are needed to deliver the Tourism Strategy and the potential role and function of the TIC within the service.

7.6 An open tender call was published on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and closed 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022, with 22 expressions of interest and six tenders received. The tender was awarded in accordance with the Procurement Policy and Blue Sail Consultants appointed.

7.7 Work commenced in April 2022 with Blue Sail Consultants with the first inception meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

7.8 Following this meeting a project timetable was developed with some suggested dates for key points in the project. (Appendix A)

7.9 On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022 Blue Sail Consultants provided a Consultation Workbook. This workbook included detail on all consultees including tourism businesses, Parish Councils, key tourism contacts and Enjoy Staffordshire Award Winners 2022. Further consultation detail is provided at 6.7 of this report.

7.10 Blue Sail conducted site visits in the Staffordshire Moorlands on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022, this included Cheadle to Alton, Ilam, Hulme End, the Roaches and Tittesworth with an overnight stay at Rudyard Hotel. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Leek, Nicholson Institute and Tourist Information Centre to Rudyard, Biddulph and Froggall.

- 7.11 The Strategy has been developed with engagement from a wide range of public, private and third sector stakeholders to set out a clearly articulated, refreshed vision for driving sustainable, innovative, resilient and inclusive sector recovery and growth. In addition, a full review of the current tourism service for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has been carried out to understand how it can help support the emerging Strategy and drive forward a modern tourism offer.
- 7.12 From the research, consultation and analysis conducted in the development of this Strategy there are, naturally, areas of strength and opportunity to capitalise on. And areas of weakness and threat to try to address. The full SWOT analysis can be seen on page 6 of the draft Tourism Strategy (Appendix D). In summary the strengths of the Staffordshire Moorlands lie in the combination of successful visitor attractions and a landscape for being active in. Opportunities are about exploiting the growth plans of existing assets and making more of the area including the food and drink offer. On the downside it's constrained by a lack of destination awareness, poor public transport (into and around) a lack of investment in accommodation and towns which underperform. The complexity of different layers of tourism support (county, destination management organisations (DMO), district, towns) requires more joining up and better engagement with businesses.
- 7.13 Strategy Vision - Over the next five years Staffordshire Moorlands will become a stronger destination, unlocking its potential with an improved offer and a better reputation that results in more value from visitors.
- 7.14 Baseline Data research carried out in the development of this draft Strategy indicates that day visitors dominate accounting for about 90% of the 5.6m visits but just 58% of the £335m spend. Staying visitors however account for 42% of the total spend despite just being 10% of visits. This highlights the importance of overnight visits and extending the duration of visits. The growth over the period 2014-2019 in visits shows there has been similar growth rates for day (10%) and staying (8%). Alton Towers is an important driver of the Staffordshire Moorlands tourism economy accounting for a third of all visits and economic impact. Visiting an attraction is the primary reason for 48% of visitors to the Staffordshire Moorlands followed by walk/hike at 23%.
- 7.15 Market Trends suggest there is uncertainty in the travel market, but discernible trends and related opportunities are emerging. Five macro trends likely to influence travel patterns in the longer term have been identified along with their implications for the Staffordshire Moorlands as a destination. Further detail on the implications for tourism in the Staffordshire Moorlands can be found on page 11 and 12 of the draft Tourism Strategy (Appendix D).
- The Pursuit of Real
  - Fresh Adventures
  - Going Digital
  - All About Value
  - Journey to Net Zero



7.16 Six areas of particular focus formed the basis of the best practice examples which inform this Strategy are:

- Active outdoors culture
- Strategic events
- Town centre development
- Transport and cycling infrastructure
- Alternative accommodation
- Sustainable destination development

7.17 Focussing on a small number of priorities is much more likely to lead to positive outcomes. Four areas of opportunity will provide that focus for the Staffordshire Moorlands. These four areas are based on the strengths of Staffordshire Moorland's tourism offer and the analysis of market prospects. They are not everything that can or will happen, rather they provide a focus for investment and development to unlock growth. The four areas of opportunity are:

- Alton Towers – unlocking investment to create a year-round driver of visits
- Towns & Villages – animated hubs with distinct food & drink to increase dwell times
- Active Experiences – developing cycling and walking routes, trails and events
- Accommodation – expand, improve and encourage investment

7.18 Underpinning the above four areas of opportunity is vital in that the right kind of support needs to be in place to deliver the Strategy, grow tourism sustainably and approach this work in partnership with other organisations; to influence, ensure alignment, efficiency and effective delivery of the Strategy and support for the tourism sector. We need to use these partnerships to ensure the quality of the visitor offer is improved and standards are maintained.

7.19 It is recommended that a Tourism Partnership Forum is set up to ensure that the key organisations involved in the Staffordshire Moorland's visitor economy work together. It will help to align priorities, programmes and activities, identify and take opportunities to enhance and build on what each organisation is doing, work to avoid duplication, and potentially establish new collaborations or projects which cut across geographical or organisational boundaries. Areas of focus for this Forum to include:

- Marketing
- Visitor management – including transport, dispersal, pressure points etc
- New capital or infrastructure developments
- Business support and engagement
- New funding streams, bids and opportunities for larger scale initiatives and projects.

7.20 Monitoring and evaluating progress of this Strategy will be carried out in two ways. The first by evaluating the outputs of each Action Area listed in this Strategy, these outputs can either be quantitative or qualitative.

7.21 The second method is to monitor and evaluate the five key performance indicators in the draft Strategy, detail how they will be measured and to evidence why it's important to measure the outcome. Further detail can be found on page 24 of the draft Tourism Strategy (Appendix D). Baselines for each of these performance indicators will be established in spring 2023 through STEAM data. The five key performance indicators are shown here:

- Sector Growth - Proportion of visits that are 'staying' visits (overnight)
- Average length of stay and spend per visit (holiday visits)
- Visitor survey - Longer stays and spend during a visit will contribute to economic impact, business profitability and sustaining jobs.
- Business Growth (% annual increase in turnover)
- Visitor Satisfaction (from a visit)

7.22 On approval of the draft Strategy and individual town high level objectives as detailed at 3.8, the Strategy will be published online and shared directly with key stakeholders including DMO's, Town Councils, County Councils and other key consultees.

Further development work to continue on the tourism service review.