

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 17th January 2024

TITLE:	Tourism Strategy - Update
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Matt Swindlehurst – Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Tourism
CONTACT OFFICER:	Lorraine Wright – Head of Regeneration
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached – None

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update on the Tourism Strategy and action plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. It also provides detail on UKSPF activity to support tourism and background on the Local Visitor Economy Partnership work with Enjoy Staffordshire and Visit Peak District, Derbyshire and Derby.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel discuss and note the content of this report and the progress made since approval of the Tourism Strategy.

3. Executive Summary

Background – Tourism Strategy

- 3.1 In terms of context, the Strategy highlights 'located close to Stoke-on-Trent and with one third of the district in the Peak District National Park, Staffordshire Moorlands attracts ~5.6million visitors each year.'
- 3.2 Consultees suggest opportunities lie in:
- Generating more staying visitors/longer stays;
 - Focussing on family groups and adult couples;
 - Using canals and former railways to expand greater green infrastructure;

- Helping current experiences to develop and grow to create more impact;
- Providing more variety and choice in visitor accommodation; and
- Elevating local food and drink experiences, creating a stronger, more-rounded offer in the towns

3.3 The Strategy set out the following 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. Staffordshire Moorlands is fortunate to have a wealth of attractions and experiences with Alton Towers being nationally significant. Further investment in attractions and accommodation will help Staffordshire Moorlands to become a year-round destination attracting higher value visitors that create quality jobs. Green and active experiences in an outstanding landscape are evident. Adding to these, expanding their appeal and joining them up as an integrated network will grow the destination's reputation and give visitors a reason to stay longer. The towns will become stronger, coherent visitor hubs providing essential services and a reason to dwell.

3.4 The Strategy identifies priorities for growth / areas of opportunity:

- Action Area 1 – Alton Towers - unlocking investment to create a year-round driver of visits
Support aspirations to develop Alton Towers as 365 day a year resort unlocking major private sector investment and generating new jobs and benefits for the local economy.
- Action Area 2 - Towns & Villages – animated hubs with distinct food & drink to increase dwell times
Ensure Cheadle, Biddulph and Leek strengthen their role as visitor hubs delivering animated places with a warm welcome, rounded visitor services with benefits for local businesses and communities. Produce bespoke plans for each town which show how each place will support the delivery of the Staffordshire Moorlands Tourism Strategy and meet the needs of visitors.
- Action Area 3 – Active Experiences – developing cycling and walking routes, trails and events
Develop and expand cycling and walking experiences across Staffordshire Moorlands to encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more and dig deeper into what the area has to offer, and which establishes a reputation as a place to get active in the great outdoors.
- Action Area 4 – Accommodation - – expand, improve and encourage investment
Expand, improve and encourage the development of accommodation to attract visitors to stay overnight and keep their spending in the local area rather than losing it to neighbouring regions. Unlock private sector investment with a clear policy environment that encourages suitable accommodation development and improvement in Staffordshire Moorlands.
- Action Area 5 – Underpinning

Ensure the right kind of support is in place to deliver the Strategy and grow tourism sustainably, work in partnership with other organisations to influence, ensure alignment, efficiency and effective delivery of the Strategy and support for tourism sector.

Monitoring and Evaluation

3.5 Monitoring and evaluating progress of the Strategy will be on the achievements within each of the Action Areas detailed above and the overall progress on outcomes as detailed in the five key performance indicators as shown in the table.

WHAT	HOW	WHY
Sector Growth (% annual increase in visitor spend)	Economic Impact Study e.g. STEAM, Cambridge	Once the national surveys recommence a target annual growth rate will be set to monitor progress and benchmark against other areas.
Proportion of visits that are 'staying' visits (overnight)	Visitor survey	Staying visits currently account for 10% of visits and 40% of spend. Growing staying visits will have a larger overall benefit to local communities.
Average length of stay and spend per visit (holiday visits)	Visitor survey	Longer stays and spend during a visit will contribute economic impact, business profitability and sustaining jobs.
Business Growth (% annual increase in turnover)	Local business survey	Monitors how businesses are doing overall as well as gathering intelligence on investment plans, challenges etc to inform policy.
Visitor Satisfaction (from a visit)	Sentiment research	Measures and tracks actual experience of visitors measuring satisfaction, likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

3.6 UK Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has been allocated funding through the UKSPF for the purposes of:

- The development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit - £144,000 under Investment Theme E8
- The development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy - £180,863 under Investment Theme E17

Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

3.7 In November 2023, VisitEngland approved Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's joint application to become an accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP).

3.8 As we move forward, it will be a priority to link the SMDC Tourism Strategy, including the Tourism Partnership Forum, to the work of the LVEP.

Moving Forward – Tourist Information Provision

- 3.9 Leek Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is located in the Nicholson Institute. Two tourism officers are employed to operate the Leek Tourist Information Centre (TIC) located in the Nicholson Institute and support other activity connected with the Museum and Gallery, including providing cover for Cultural Services, as required.
- 3.10 Over recent years, there has been a marked shift in customer habits related to tourism. The role of digital and social platforms has become a far more important a factor influencing planning and booking trips than traditional media, TICs and brochures.
- 3.11 The Nicholson Institute is undergoing a refurbishment later this year, supported by grant from the Levelling Up Fund. The scheduled refurbishment is an opportunity to evaluate the changing landscape in relation to the provision of tourism and visitor economy services and consider what model would be most appropriate for the future.
- 3.12 Over recent months, the Council has taken a more holistic and agile approach to support tourism and the visitor economy district-wide to reflect the change in customer behaviour. This includes focusing more time on developing digital platforms as well as investing time in promoting a clear narrative for Staffordshire Moorlands – what makes us a unique destination for visit.
- 3.13 It is proposed that the Tourist Information Centre will not re-open following the refurbishment. It is considered that staff resource would have greatest impact being directed into relationship management of tourism / hospitality businesses and key stakeholders, marketing material including digital content and social media activity and development of events and itineraries. It is proposed that the existing staff will continue to be accommodated within the Nicholson Institute post-refurbishment, in back-office accommodation. This will help to ensure the ongoing alignment of tourism and cultural services and supportive arrangements in place to provide cover are maintained, as required.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Tourism Strategy supports delivery of the following aims of the Corporate Plan:
- Aim1: Help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.
 - Aim 2: Effective use of resources and provide value for money.
 - Aim 3: Help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages.
 - Aim 4: Protect and improve the environment.

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 The report does not seek a decision from the Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Panel. As such, there are no alternative options to consider.

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. The TIC is operated by two tourism officers, employed by SMDC, through the Regeneration Service. A decision to close / not re-open the TIC following refurbishment of the Nicholson Institute would not affect staffing numbers. As set out, the staff would remain in employment and undertake tourism duties including relationship management of tourism / hospitality businesses and key stakeholders, marketing material including digital content and social media activity and development of events and itineraries. The Job Description and Person Specification for the role would be reviewed as roles and responsibilities develop.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

This Tourism Strategy prepared in accordance with the Council's Diversity and Equality Policies.

6.4 Financial Considerations

There are no budgetary implications connected to this report. There is no reduction or increase in staffing resources as a result of this report.

6.5 Legal

None at this stage.

6.6 Climate Change

The Tourism Strategy has been developed with consideration given to the local and regional plans to support Climate Change.

6.7 Consultation

Key stakeholders were consulted in the development of the Tourism Strategy.
Staff affected by and changes to location or roles and

responsibilities would be consulted in line with HR procedures.

6.8 Risk Assessment

None at this stage.

Mark Trillo **Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)**

Web Links and Background Papers	Location	Contact details
Tourism Strategy	Moorlands House, Leek	Mark Trillo Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)

7. **Detail**

7.1 **Tourism Strategy Progress Update**

7.1.1 Towns and Villages

Towns and villages are key to the success of the Tourism Strategy.

The Strategy advocates the development of bespoke plans for each of the three main towns of Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph which will show how each town can support the delivery of the Tourism Strategy, meet visitor needs and benefit local communities. As part of the development of the Strategy, each town agreed high level objectives following feedback provided by the local community and businesses.

Town Action Plan Groups have now been set up to include town council representatives. Further monthly town meetings have been established with Biddulph Town Council and the recently formed Cheadle Town Council Committee (BTEC – Business, Tourism and Environment Committee). Following the last meeting with Leek Town Council, it was agreed that a sub group would be set up to feed into this meeting and tourism strategy action plan.

7.1.2 Tourism Partnership Forum

The aim of the Tourism Partnership Forum is to ensure that stakeholder and key organisations involved in Staffordshire Moorland's visitor economy work together. It will aim 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.

Cllr Matt Swindlehurst will chair the Forum and Cllr Mike Gledhill will be the Vice Chair. The Forum will commence in Spring 2024; the Terms of Reference have been developed and a calendar of quarterly meetings to be agreed in the new year.

Areas of focus 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

Membership of the Board is summarised below:

- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Staffordshire Moorlands Chamber of Commerce
- Staffordshire Moorlands Partnership Board
- Support Staffordshire
- Destination Staffordshire
- Visit Peak District & Derbyshire
- Peak National Park Authority
- Buxton & Leek College

7.2 **STEAM Data**

7.2.1 STEAM stands for Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor.

STEAM Data provides a destination with annual tourism data on areas such as visitor numbers, spend, overnight stays, numbers employed in tourism sector and importantly the economic impact of tourism to a Destination.

STEAM data 2022 shows a significant impact on the tourism sector. Recovery has however been extremely positive in the SMDC area and much of this can be attributed to the 'outdoor offer' we have and visitors still wanting to explore the outdoors following the pandemic.

Headline results comparing 2021 with 2022 results:

- Number of visitors - 5.9 million in 2022 showing 86.3% increase on 2021 and 3.5% up on 2019 pre pandemic. (5.72 million visitors in 2019, 5.92 million visitors in 2022).

- Economic Impact of the visitor economy in 2022 - £498million, up by 62.5% on 2021. To compare this figure to pre pandemic figures (2019) for a more realistic comparison we have seen an increase of 19.2% on economic value. These figures exceed the County average of 15.6% increase.
- Jobs (both direct and indirect) are up 46.5% on 2021 and up 3.3% on 2019 pre pandemic.

In addition, staying visitor figures are up 18.3% on 2021, with an average stay of 2.5 days. Comparing against 2019 pre pandemic figures, STEAM data shows an increase of 6.7% on all staying visitors.

7.3 UK Shared Prosperity Fund

7.3.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has been allocated funding through the UKSPF for the purposes of:

- The development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit - £144,000 under Investment Theme E8
- The development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy - £180,863 under Investment Theme E17

7.3.2 Enjoy Staffordshire were the successful consultant appointed to deliver the outcomes and outputs of the UKSPF which are set out in the tables below:

2023/2024

UKSPF Intervention	Number of people reached	Number of businesses receiving non-financial support
E8 Funding for the development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit	2500	0
E17: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy	5000	5

2024/2025

UKSPF Intervention	Number of people reached	Number of businesses receiving non-financial support
E8 Funding for the development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit	2500	0

E17: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy	5000	5
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UKSPF Outcomes to date: Business Support

7.3.3 Five tourism businesses were supported by Staffordshire Environmental Quality Mark – two of these businesses will be presented with an award at the Staffordshire Tourism Conference in January - The Black Lion Inn and Winnow Barns. Other businesses supported include:

- Cathy Bower Photography
- Studio One, Foxlowe Creative Hub
- The Foxlowe Arts Centre
- Upper Hurst Farm, Hulme End (Camping and caravan)
- Foxtwood Cottages, Froghall (Self-catering)
- Peak Wildlife Park

Staffordshire Tourism Conference 19th January, Alton Towers

7.3.4 The Staffordshire Tourism Conference will be held on the 19 January 2024 at Alton Towers. The event is aimed at tourism business to learn all about how Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are working directly with VisitEngland as a newly accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership. The day will offer workshops, including the UKSPF programme and activities planned to support the hub towns of Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek, attract more visitors to stay longer, enjoy more and return often.

7.3.5 The Conference will include two business workshops and will launch of the campaign graphics and business toolkits High street visits will be carried out to encourage businesses to sign up to Enjoy Staffordshire membership, this will commence 11 January 2024.

7.3.6 To date, 44 tourism businesses have registered attend; 22 of these are Staffordshire Moorlands based tourism businesses and listed below:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hales Hall • Tittesworth Water • Blackshaw Grange • Madrenaline • Ballfields Barn • Cottage Delight • Simply Great Britain • The Beehive, Oakamoor • Winnow Barns • Outside Arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tawny • Rose Cottage • Cheadle Arts Festival • Peak Gift Experiences • Cathy Bower Photography • Foxfield Railway • Foxtwood Cottages • Swainsley Farm • The Black Lion Inn • Peak Wildlife Park
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• Top Dog Days	• Alton Towers
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The event is almost at full capacity with 168 people registered (against a maximum capacity of 180).

Marketing Activity (UKSPF)

7.3.7 Enjoy Staffordshire have been consulting a range of stakeholders (including Staffordshire Moorlands Walking Festival, high street retailers and businesses and representatives from the three Town Councils) to collate walking and cycling content. They are preparing to have all this content uploaded onto the Enjoy Staffordshire website, including the campaign landing page by February 2024.

7.3.8 'RH Advertising' have been appointed by Enjoy Staffordshire to run a marketing campaign. They have started to collate some video content and photography for key towns. The bulk of the photography and videography will be done in the new year when the weather improves and the Christmas decorations have gone to give the footage longevity.

7.3.9 Further, recruitment has taken place for a consumer panel to give feedback on the campaign. The feedback from the panel will help to shape marketing plans moving forward.

7.3.10 The core marketing messages are set out below:

- Promote the festival events Staffordshire Moorlands April 2024 - September 2024.
- Showcasing the range of walks and cycle trails.
- Encouraging visitors to start their walks from key towns and villages, driving footfall to those high streets and raising awareness of 'hidden gems'.
- Highlighting the walking and cycling offer creating a campaign that can be shared with local businesses.
- Promote the destination as a great place to 'get active' - promoting the wellbeing and mindfulness benefits of outdoor activities.

7.3.11 The following monitoring will be undertaken as part of the activity:

- Measure web searches, reach & engagement
- STEAM data to monitor visitor spending - spring 2024
- mobile data to monitor visitor numbers and footfall evidence

7.3.12 Key dates / milestones are set out below:

- Jan-Feb 2024 Toolkit will go out to businesses
- Mar 2024 Walking Festival launch
- Apr 2024 Digital marketing to start
- Jan-Mar 2025 Evolving walking festival branding and marketing collateral to include a wider outdoor offer

7.4 Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

7.4.1 In November 2023, VisitEngland approved Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's joint application to become an accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP).

7.4.2 As well as achieving a nationally recognised official status, LVEPs will provide strong leadership and management of their destinations, taking responsibility for the growth, prosperity and sustainability of the visitor economy. The partnerships will work together with the public and private sector and help shape and deliver national strategy and activities.

7.4.3 LVEP is a Partnership between the Destination Management Organisations and District Councils. It will work in collaboration locally, regionally and nationally on shared priorities and targets. Their mission is to support and grow the visitor economy through robust destination management, strong stakeholder relationships and clear planning.

7.4.4 Recruitment of a Chair is underway. This is a voluntary role and will be announced in January, to coincide with the Staffordshire Tourism Conference. There will also be a Partnership Agreement completed, setting out the scope of the LVEP activity.

7.4.5 Moving forward, it will be a priority to link the SMDC Tourism Strategy, including the Tourism Partnership Forum, to the work of the LVEP. As a District, we can nominate / identify strategic operators for the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Star Operators Group.

7.5 Tourist Information Provision

7.5.1 The Tourism Service sits within the Regeneration Service at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. Two tourism officers are employed to operate the Leek Tourist Information Centre (TIC) located in the Nicholson Institute and support other activity connected with the Museum and Gallery, including providing cover for Cultural Services, as required.

7.5.2 The function of the service is largely centred on the delivery of tourist information and is largely servicing visitors who are already in the destination. The tourism officers also work with local tourism businesses providing support in the form of links to funding or training opportunities, leaflet requests, capturing event information and disseminating it via the respective Destination Management Organisation (Destination Staffordshire and Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire).

7.5.3 Over recent years, there has been a marked shift in customer habits related to tourism. The role of digital and social platforms has become a far more important a factor influencing planning and booking trips than traditional media, TICs and brochures. Given the growth in mobile devices that trend is only going to grow and market research shows that the majority of information is obtained online. Hence, it is important to ensure that staff resources are targeted on activities which will have the greatest impact. As set out in this note, over recent months, we have taken a more holistic and agile approach to support tourism and the visitor economy district-wide to reflect the change in

customer behaviour. We have started to focus on developing digital platforms (the microsite), are investing time in promoting a clear narrative for Staffordshire Moorland and creating content about things to see and do, unique experiences, events, news stories and amazing imagery as well as developing itineraries for different audiences (walking and cycling routes; Walking Festival).

7.5.4 The Nicholson Institute is undergoing a refurbishment later this year, supported by grant from the Levelling Up Fund. The scheduled refurbishment is an opportunity to evaluate the changing landscape in relation to the provision of tourism and visitor economy services and consider what model would be most appropriate for the future.

7.5.5 It is proposed that the Tourist Information Centre will not re-open following the refurbishment. It is considered that staff resource would have greatest impact being directed into relationship management of tourism / hospitality businesses and key stakeholders, marketing material including digital content and social media activity and development of events and itineraries. It is proposed that the existing staff continue to be accommodated within the Nicholson Institute post-refurbishment, in back-office accommodation, to undertake the activities outlined thereby ensuring the continued alignment of tourism and cultural services and supportive arrangements in place to provide cover, as required.