



EXECUTIVE 18th January 2024

Report Title	Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy and Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northamptonshire
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Lead Member	Cllr Helen Howell – Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

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Appendix A: Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy 2023 - 2030

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report introduces the Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy for the whole county. It has been co-produced with both Council’s strategic partners and with contributors from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.
- 1.2. The report also sets out the intention to develop a new private sector- led Local Visitor Economy Partnership Strategy to oversee and drive the delivery of the Strategy.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Strategy sets out to transform the fortunes of the visitor economy; currently one of Northamptonshire's unsung economic heroes. Developed over an 18-month period, and working closely with West Northamptonshire Council, the Strategy covers the whole county and has drawn on a wide range of evidence and insight, together with numerous contributions from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.
- 2.2. The Strategy has four principal goals. With a timeframe to 2030, these include a focus on:
- Visits and Value
 - Great People
 - Better Business
 - Inspirational Places
- 2.3. It is also proposed to establish a new private sector-led Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), made up of a representative group of senior industry figures, drawn from both West and North Northamptonshire, to steer the delivery of this plan. This Board will focus on four clear objectives:
- Collaboration
 - Dynamic & Tailored Marketing
 - Planning for the Future, and
 - Improving Quality & Skills

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:
- a) Approves the Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy for adoption;
 - b) Supports the proposal to continue to work closely with colleagues in West Northamptonshire and put in place the Local Visitor Economy Partnership by implementing a new Community Interest Company to ensure good governance. A future report will be brought to the Executive which will set out detailed implementation plans and financial implications related to the development of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership.
 - c) Delegates authority to the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism, in consultation with the Director of Public Health and Wellbeing to undertake any activity to develop the plans for LVEP development, ahead of these being brought back to the Executive for approval.

3.2. Reasons for Recommendations:

- The Strategy seeks to improve the county's visitor economy. If Northamptonshire's visitor economy had grown at the same pace as our neighbours in Cambridgeshire over the past decade, it would have resulted in £36m more spending by overnight visitors and some 660 jobs either safeguarded or created.
- To maximise the potential for the county's visitor economy in the future by implementing an agreed and focussed plan where North and West unitary authorities can work together and in close partnership with industry, education and other stakeholders.
- To take advantage of the new national framework that has been developed by Visit England that sees circa 40 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) across England delivering national tourism policy as set out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in its response to the de Bois Review. There is an initial leadership role for both councils to support the development of an impactful and industry driven destination management organisation focussed on Northamptonshire.

3.3 Alternative Options Considered:

- 3.3.1 The alternative option would be to not have a Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy. However, this would not be a recommended approach as both councils wouldn't have a clear direction or plan to address the challenges associated with the visitor economy in Northamptonshire. Without a dedicated strategy, the county might miss out on valuable opportunities to attract more visitors, generate increased spending, and create jobs.
- 3.3.2 Additionally, without a coordinated effort through a joint strategy, the potential for collaboration with industry, education, and other stakeholders may remain untapped. The alternative of not having a strategy could result in a fragmented approach, where each authority operates independently, possibly leading to duplicated efforts, inefficiencies, and a lack of a unified vision for the development of the visitor economy.
- 3.3.3 By not adopting a Visitor Economy Strategy, Northamptonshire might also miss the chance to align itself with the national framework set by Visit England and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport. The absence of a strategic plan may hinder the county's ability to establish a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) and a destination management organisation, both of which are crucial for implementing effective policies and initiatives at the local level.
- 3.3.4 In summary, not having a Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy could result in missed economic and developmental opportunities, lack of coordinated efforts, and an inability to leverage the national

framework designed to support and enhance the tourism sector. The proposed strategy aims to address these concerns and position Northamptonshire for a more prosperous and sustainable future in the visitor economy.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. The support given by the former councils across Northamptonshire to the county's visitor economy reduced after the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies 2010, There followed the subsequent merger of the *Explore Northamptonshire* Destination Management Organisation (DMO) into the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership.
- 4.2. A 'DMO' plays a crucial role in promoting and marketing specific destinations within the country to attract tourists. Visit England, as the national tourism agency, focuses on showcasing the diverse attractions, cultural heritage, and experiences offered by different regions across England. These DMOs work on developing and implementing strategic marketing initiatives to boost tourism, support local businesses, and enhance the overall appeal of the destinations they represent. Their efforts contribute to the economic growth of regions by attracting visitors and fostering a positive image of the destination both domestically and internationally.
- 4.3. Since 2016 a private sector-led consortium has operated *Northamptonshire Surprise*, which has delivered promotional activity and maintained a website. This organisation has also run recent marketing campaigns on behalf of the two Councils and has been consulted in the preparation of the Strategy. Other organisations, such as the Business Improvement Districts and Destination Nene Valley, Love Corby and Love Northampton, continue to deliver a range of destination-level activity.
- 4.4. In March 2021, the government announced an independent review to assess how Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) across England are funded and structured, and how they perform their roles, in order to establish whether there may be a more efficient and effective model for supporting English tourism at the regional level, and if so, what that model may be. Its report and consultation response analysis were published in September 2021.
- 4.5. The review was led by Nick de Bois, Chair of the Visit England Advisory Board, acting in an independent capacity. The review examined the extent to which the current DMO landscape:
 - is economically efficient, effective and sustainable (with regard to funding, structure and performance).
 - best enables the government to meet its leisure and business tourism policy objectives at a national, regional and local level.
 - engages within the wider local and regional economic landscape, and the current focus on English devolution and levelling up.

- 4.6. With a view to making recommendations about:
- whether DMOs might be structured or funded differently, and if so, how any proposals might maximise post-COVID recovery and long-term success
 - what the role of DMOs should be, bearing in mind existing other local structures such as local enterprise partnerships, mayoral combined authorities, local authorities and other similar local/regional bodies; and where these might intersect
 - how DMOs should best engage with, and be engaged by, VisitEngland, VisitBritain and DCMS, as well as wider government/public bodies where relevant
- 4.7. The review makes 12 recommendations in total, six of which are directed at the government, four at DMOs themselves and one each for local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities.
- 4.8. One of the key recommendations which was validated in the UK Government's response to the de Bois Review, was the establishment of accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships. Visit England worked in close consultation with DMOs to develop the initiative, holding a series of roundtables across England in autumn 2022 with more than 100 participants.
- 4.9. Visit England is creating a portfolio of nationally supported, strategic and high-performing Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). These LVEPs will provide strong local leadership and governance in tourism destinations all over the country. The new LVEPs 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.
- 4.10. LVEPs will work closely with Visit England, with ongoing support from a team of five new Regional Development Leads. As well as having nationally recognised status, LVEPs provide strong leadership and management of their destinations. They will help to shape and deliver national strategy and activities. Their important role is promoted across government and national agencies, ensuring the local visitor economy is an active and valued contributor to Levelling Up and the wider economy. LVEPs are able to access expert advice, specialist toolkits and training programmes from Visit England in areas ranging from commercialisation, distribution, accessibility and sustainability to business support and marketing. An important strand of support will be highlighting available Government funding streams as well as developing and providing a 'toolkit' to help LVEPs with bids to those streams.
- 4.11. Both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils agreed that a new Visitor Economy Strategy would be required following the local government re-organisation. In January 2022, the procurement for this strategy took place and Tomorrow Tourism was successfully appointed and work commenced at the beginning of February 2022.

- 4.12. It is recommended to adopt this strategy covering the entirety of Northamptonshire as a strategy covering a substantial geographical area is needed for a Local Visitor Economy Partnership. This strategy is a tool to work with Visit England and secure support and future Government funding for tourism, which Government have stated must be at a size larger than West or North Northamptonshire individually.
- 4.13. North Northamptonshire Council, the same as West Northamptonshire Council, will still deliver specific activities at a local level, but would work with wider partners for larger initiatives when appropriate and necessary, as set out within the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy.
- 4.14. The Strategy seeks to stem the recent and relative decline of the county's visitor economy. If Northamptonshire's visitor economy had grown at the same pace as our neighbours in Cambridgeshire over the past decade it would have resulted in £36m more spending by overnight visitors and some 660 jobs either safeguarded or created.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The justification for collaborating with West Northamptonshire Council to develop a county-wide strategy aligns with the requirements of the new LVEP's, which neither local authority area would be large enough to apply for singularly.
- 5.2. Furthermore, the evidence sourced to develop the strategy outlined the lack of awareness or differentiation between North and West Northamptonshire from a consumer/visitor perspective, meaning the offer is stronger and clearer as Northamptonshire. Given the similar identity, perception and offer, it is therefore logical to develop the strategy and the future Local Visitor Economy Partnership as Northamptonshire.
- 5.3. However, this does not mean that neither North Northamptonshire Council or West Northamptonshire Council cannot and will not deliver local initiatives specific to North or West Northamptonshire.
- 5.4. The agreed aims for creating this strategy are:
 - **Increased Visits and Value:** Increase the number of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home.
 - **An Inspired & Skilled Workforce:** Develop local talent into a motivated workforce to fill vacancies, boost hospitality standards and increase pride in the place.
 - **Business Growth & Collaboration:** Support and raise awareness of our visitor economy businesses, empowering them to collaborate locally and compete nationally.
 - **Inspirational Places:** Promote the county as a destination for investment and tourism, attracting and expanding on our unique, diverse and contemporary offer.

5.5. A comprehensive evidence base has informed this strategy. This includes:

- A full audit of all visitor economy assets in the county including accommodation, visitor attractions, food & drink, event and retail;
- An assessment of demand, particularly relating to consumers, their perceptions of the county, propensity to visit and key drivers as well as a market review to identify broader trends and visitor insight;
- A range of workshops, surveys, consultations and presentations to ensure that businesses and other stakeholders have had ample opportunity to contribute to the strategy along with a review of delivery models and governance structures.

5.6. A number of key factors and insight from the research have provided the basis on which the strategy is built:

- The county has a wide-ranging array of natural and built assets and a particularly strong visitor attractions base which can be a foundation for driving new and repeat business.
- However, there is also a need for new investment, in, for example, accommodation, with improved accessibility and better linkage through path networks and new travel options.
- Visitor perceptions of the County are generally positive, but awareness is low.
- Partnership marketing is a key that can help unlock the potential; and stronger collaboration is critical to progressing all four strategic goals.
- Sustainability and accessibility are principles that must be woven into the strategy from the start, underpinned by the United Nations Sustainability Goals and best practice access principles.
- Improving the skills of our residents and helping the future workforce to secure employment within the tourism and visitor economy sectors is a fundamental cornerstone for future success.
- Support for businesses in their journey towards being ambassadors for the place will help ensure visitors return time and again.

5.7. A wide range of options have been debated to inform the development of this strategy. A series of Roundtable meetings were held with different stakeholders including those representing education, natural resources, town councils, the VCSE, culture, heritage and the tourism industry. As a result, the final strategy reflects these broader perspectives and can be seen to represent a consensus amongst the sectors.

5.8. The aims will be delivered with reference to four central objectives relating both to activities and to ways of working:

- 5.8.1. **Dynamic and tailored marketing** – this is fundamental to increasing visitor numbers and activity will naturally focus on attracting visitors from outside of the county particularly on short breaks for both leisure and business. Activity will also engage those that already live and work in Northamptonshire as there are many opportunities and benefits for residents to also enjoy what is on offer. Research indicated a major interest from residents to visit local tourism attractions, for example, and that helps to sustain an offer which is notable in both its quality and diversity.
- 5.8.2. **Improving Quality and Skills** – this remains a national challenge post-Brexit but is perhaps more pronounced in Northamptonshire due to intense competition from other growing sectors like logistics. Jobs in the visitor economy can lead to good prospects and rapid promotion for motivated local people. The county has an in-built advantage given its leadership on tourism studies with over 25 courses offered by the University, Northampton College and other providers. With these foundations, there is a real opportunity for the county to be a national exemplar that can support local people in receiving the skills they need and help growth businesses recruit staff. In addition to providing a pipeline of skilled recruits, our small businesses need support in key areas such as accessibility, action on net-zero and digital advancement. This part of the delivery programme will tackle these priorities to provide a boost to quality and productivity.
- 5.8.3. **Planning for the Future** - there is a lot already going on with major regeneration schemes reshaping our town centres and new green and blue routes providing compelling new leisure and tourism opportunities which businesses can get behind. These opportunities need be joined up and developed as part of the 'tourism product' on offer, connected to the travel trade and promoted by the new Northamptonshire LVEP. Without doubt there are other investments that can help raise the profile of the county and create additional reasons to visit. These opportunities may be leisure or business focussed, rural or urban-based, linked to existing regeneration schemes or completely new. For example, an increase in higher end hotel accommodation is one asset that would undoubtedly help the county grow its visitor economy.
- 5.8.4. **Collaboration** – this is also a key objective in its own right and is embedded across the Strategy. New and innovative ways of working will be developed to embed the strategic leadership that has started to develop over the last 18 months. The complexity of the sector also demands that effective partnerships are forged to guarantee longer term success. While the LVEP will lead this ambition, the two Councils will need to provide some early leadership in support of the wider objective.
- 5.9. This Strategy runs from 2023 to 2030 with the delivery of much of it to be coordinated by a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northamptonshire. Anticipated outcomes following the adoption of this strategy and the associated action plan include the following:
- Increased value of staying leisure visitors
 - Increased overall visitor spending

- Creation of new jobs
- Improved accommodation offer and standards
- Creation of new businesses
- Reduced carbon emissions
- Increased inward investment
- Increased pride in place
- Increased Gross Value Added

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Both local authorities to consider the Northamptonshire strategy at their respective Executive meetings with the intention to launch publicly, engaging with partners, stakeholders and local businesses.
- 6.2 To begin working collaboratively with the private sector, with the support and guidance of Visit England, to develop a proposal for a Northamptonshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership. Once developed, both local authorities to provide detailed plans and financial implications to be mutually agreed by the relevant bodies ahead of submitting to Visit England for LVEP accreditation.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1 The development of this strategy has been funded utilising Shared Prosperity Funding.
- 7.1.2 At this stage the Strategy does not include any reference to future costs and there are no immediate resource of financial implications arising from the recommendations. This reflects the fact that it is a joint-Council initiative and because the delivery arrangements and the proposals for the LVEP are yet to be put in place.
- 7.1.3 The strategy is likely to give rise to expenditure at a later date. For example, seed-funding for the LVEP and/or contributions towards a strategic fund that will deliver key elements of the strategy, either through the new LVEP body or via complementary activities that will realise the strategic aims.
- 7.1.4 Maximising the use of existing resource, such as both Councils' tourism assets and staff, and measures to support local businesses, will also play an important role.

7.2 Legal and Governance

7.2.1. The establishment of an arms-length LVEP is likely to give rise to some legal advice needed to ensure the interests of both Councils are protected. There are no other specific legal implications arising from the proposals.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1 The North Northamptonshire Councils Corporate plan adopted in 2021 has key commitments which are key to this project. These include:

- Active, fulfilled lives :- supporting people to live healthier more active lives. Access to a range of leisure opportunities improves mental health and wellbeing.
- Safe and thriving places:- thriving economy that shapes great places to live, learn work and visit which can be achieved through the delivery of this strategy.
- Green, sustainable environment:- the strategy has the 8 core United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at its core, one of which is creating sustainable cities and communities.

[Corporate plan | North Northamptonshire Council \(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/corporate-plan)

7.4 Risk

7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.5 Consultation

7.5.1. An extensive range of stakeholders have been engaged and consulted during the development of this strategy, from across the Visitor Economy sector including private, public and Voluntary sector organisations.

7.6 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1 The draft Strategy was considered by the Active Communities Executive Advisory Panel on 9th June 2023, who were supportive of the emerging strategy.

7.7 Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1 This report has not been considered by Scrutiny.

7.8 Equality Implications

7.8.1 There are no direct equality implications from this report. However, 3 Accessibility Pillars have been considered in the development of this strategy:

- Easily understandable information is available prior and during visitor's trips to tourism destinations.
- Places and their facilities are accessible.
- Customer service is equitable for all visitors.

7.8.2 A priority cross-cutting theme of the strategy is being better at welcoming all types of visitors who may have differing needs, whether that's a parent with a pushchair, a wheelchair user, an older person or a visitor with dementia. Northamptonshire will aim to become a UK inclusion exemplar, encouraging all businesses that welcome visitors to create their own accessibility guide, both because it's the right thing to do and because of the scale of the opportunity. With a market that is 19% of the total population, with total spending power of over £15bn a year, and who stay longer than average, this is one key to unlock new visitors to the county.

7.9 Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1 In shaping our Northamptonshire tourism strategy, we've integrated UN Sustainable Development Goals for a purposeful approach. Our initiatives align with economic growth (Goal 8) and sustainable infrastructure (Goal 9), while also emphasising responsible tourism practices for community well-being (Goal 11) and environmental stewardship (Goals 12 and 13). By reducing carbon footprints and fostering inclusivity, our strategy not only enhances the region's appeal but reflects a commitment to global sustainability goals and responsible travel practices.

7.10 Community Impact

7.10.1 Delivery of this strategy will have many positive impacts for residents across Northamptonshire. It is a countywide approach designed to start us on a positive journey to managed growth, supported by both Councils working closely together, and seeking a strong and collaborative approach with the industry, key stakeholders and other public sector partners, taking account of a broader development agenda, encompassing innovation and best practice to make Northamptonshire stand out - not just as a great place to visit but also as a place to live, work, to run a business.

7.11 Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1 None identified

8 Background Papers

8.1 De Bois Review – September 2021