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Item

Public



Shropshire Destination Management Plan 2023-2025

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1. Synopsis

The Shropshire Destination Management Plan (DMP) is a blueprint tourism strategy for the next three years (2023 – 2025). Following a public consultation priorities and related actions have been identified to include a new tourism partnership that will help to further transform Shropshire into an important visitor destination.

2. Executive Summary

The draft Shropshire DMP provides key information to communicate how the county intends to manage its visitor economy between 2023 and 2025. Under the leadership of Shropshire Council, the draft plan was created by organisations with a stake in future visitor economy success. It is designed to support a partnership approach across public, voluntary and private sectors.

2.1. The DMP importantly will support delivery of The Shropshire Plan 2022 priorities as follows:

2.2 Healthy Economy

We will develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination that attracts people to want to live in, work, learn and visit. The Shropshire DMP will provide impetus and direction for future growth from tourism, helping the sector to gain credibility and recognition as

an important driver of the county's economy. Increased spend from visitors would mean higher revenue and profit which businesses can reinvest, creating better quality experiences for visitors and more jobs for local people. It will support the development of Shropshire as a vibrant destination where people will want to live, work and visit.

2.3 **Healthy People**

Health and wellbeing are connected to enjoyment of the outdoors, access to green spaces, and opportunities for exercise, as is exposure to stimulating and inspiring cultural places. The DMP's emphasis on providing special experiences, development of Shropshire's offer to visitors, protecting and managing our landscape assets and improving accessibility to outdoor spaces will benefit the resident population as well as visitors helping to support early intervention and prevention in health care.

2.4 **Healthy Environment**

Future tourism strategy will seek to maintain, protect, and enhance our outstanding natural environment, promoting positive behaviours and greater biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

2.5 **Healthy Organisation**

Shropshire Council's Culture, Leisure and Tourism team will work with partners to develop and better communicate what Shropshire has to offer as a high-quality tourism destination and what it is the council directly delivers to residents and visitors alike through its own venues and cultural offer.

2.6 The draft DMP 2023 -2025 aims to use best practice from elsewhere whilst retaining a keen sense of what will be right for Shropshire. It details a proposed visitor economy strategy and a set of priorities agreed by stakeholders. The plan will also form a reference document for future funding and a basis for future bids into government programmes. It can be used by developers and tourism businesses to shape their investment. It will inform, guide, and influence how resources are used and allocated.

2.7 It is proposed that the delivery of the DMP will be through the development of a new Tourism Partnership, which will aim to apply for Local Visitor Economy Partnership status through VisitEngland.

2.8 The plan complements national, regional and neighbouring plans and reviews (such as the national Tourism Recovery Plan, De Bois Review, West Midlands Combined Authority Tourism Strategy, Marches LEP Tourism Strategy and others outlined in section 3 of the draft document). It has been created to work in conjunction with Shropshire Council's wider strategic plans, including the Shropshire Plan 2022-2025, Vibrant Shropshire, Cultural Strategy 2021-31 and the Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027.

2.9 The DMP also aligns with Core Strategy Policy CS16, which sets out a positive approach to tourism, leisure and recreation development that balances the benefits to the economy with the need to protect the qualities of Shropshire, and MD11 of the SAMDev Adopted Plan, which applies to tourism, leisure and recreation development proposals.

2.10 The consultation on the draft DMP was designed to gather feedback from a wider range of stakeholders, beyond those already involved in its creation, and also to seek

the views of members of the public and others interested in tourism and the local economy. The consultation ran from 6th February to 31st March 2023 (8 weeks).

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To approve and publish the Destination Management Plan..
- 3.2. To approve the Council facilitating the creation of a new tourism partnership, with clear governance and terms of reference, comprised of private and public stakeholders including Visit Shropshire, the county DMO, to manage delivery of the DMP action plan. Responsibility for this work is delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Digital and Culture.
- 3.3. To approve that Shropshire Council work closely with Telford & Wrekin Council, who are about to commence work on a DMP for their unitary area, and to identify where the obvious points of contact and opportunities for cross-border working will be.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The key risks and mitigations are outlined below:

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to publish a Destination Management Plan (DMP).	DCMS has developed a new approach to Destination Management, which includes gaining agreement for a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) in each key geographical area. To be eligible to become a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, the area must have a DMP. The DMP has now been completed and by publishing this, the area will have started the process to become eligible for a LVEP.
Failure to establish effective tourism partnership capable of delivering the action plan	There is a willingness from all parties to ensure a new partnership is successful, as this will play a key part in the development of a LVEP, to enable the area to become part of the Visit England approach to destination management, and therefore be eligible for funding in the longer term. The development of a new partnership relies on the further development of strong working relationships with key organisations.
Non – engagement of visitor economy stakeholders and Shropshire residents	Stakeholders have already been involved in the development of the DMP and it has been to public consultation. Further engagement will be needed as part of the delivery of the DMP.
Inability to finance development of the eight priorities identified.	With little Council budget available to deliver the DMP, other sources of finance will need to be explored. This will be done through the partnership and could include external grant funding or a levy mechanism.

Reputational risk if funding is not secured to further develop this work.	Gaining Local Visitor Economy Partnership status will be essential to ensure Shropshire is seen by Visit England and DCMS as a viable destination, and to enable funding to be secured if made available through DCMS in the longer term. The reputational risk will therefore be greater if the DMP is not published.
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5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no immediate implications for Shropshire Council funding.
- 5.2. There is broad recognition from the visitor economy sector that Shropshire Council is not in a position to provide core funding for delivery of the DMP. Shropshire Council will need, however, to support grant-funding applications in partnership with key stakeholders.
- 5.3. Support for the development of a new partnership and a partnership approach to DMP delivery will be delivered by existing staff within the Culture, Leisure and Tourism team.
- 5.4. The UKSP fund is an identified grant-funding source relevant to the support of the visitor economy. Visit Shropshire are recognised by VisitEngland as the county Destination Management Organisation (DMO), DMOs take a lead role in managing and developing tourism in an area, providing marketing opportunities, training courses, networking events and industry expertise to help develop the sector. Visit Shropshire is applying for funds to support their work and relevant Shropshire Council departments will support their application as appropriate. In addition, the Culture, Leisure and Tourism team are exploring potential future working arrangements with their counterparts at Telford & Wrekin Council with a view to applying for the new Visit England DMO accreditation scheme which may in time result in central government funding.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The principles of sustainable tourism are important to all places that aspire to attract and welcome visitors, but they are particularly relevant in a county where the natural landscapes and built heritage are central to the visitor offer. Growth which damages the central product or affects residents' quality of life or costs more than it contributes will erode the visitor offer, undermine the visitor experience and adversely affect those who live, work, invest and run businesses in Shropshire. Sustainable tourism, or 'wise growth' as it is sometimes known, uses a framework known as VERB.
- 6.2. This ensures that development is balanced between the needs of the Visitor, the Environment, Residents and Businesses. Concepts of accessibility and inclusion are inherent in achieving this balance. These principles have influenced the priorities and actions in this plan to a considerable degree and should be integral to any future thinking or plans for visitor economy development and promotion. Supporting businesses to adopt sustainable practices will make them more attractive to visitors with an environmental conscience and burnish Shropshire's credentials as an environmentally responsible destination.

6.3. Energy and fuel consumption- positive effect

The DMP sets out actions to:

- Develop visitor friendly public transport options that connect the county's main visitor attractions (especially car only areas) to its gateways and main visitor centres.
- Develop visitor friendly information and payment methods for the county's bus network.
- Increase the number of EV charging points across the county, particularly outside the main towns.
- Ensure that parking information that offers viable alternatives to the car post arrival is widely available.
- Review Park and Ride provision from the visitor perspective and make changes as needed e.g., frequency, operating hours, information, sites.

6.4. Renewable energy generation- positive effect

The DMP sets out actions to:

- Clarify the most relevant sustainability practises for tourism businesses.
- Clarify sustainability measures that influence consumer choice.
- Create and implement a B2B campaign highlighting the benefits of sustainable business practice.
- Design and deliver an environmental efficiency programme for visitor economy businesses.

6.5. Carbon offsetting or mitigation- potential positive effect

Carbon offsetting or mitigation will be considered alongside the development of these programmes as the DMP is delivered.

6.6. Climate change adaptation- positive effect

Climate change adaptation will need to be considered by outdoor attraction providers as they develop their offer. This can be facilitated by training for relevant businesses and sharing good practice from other areas.

7. Background

- 7.1. Tourism is an important sector in Shropshire. According to the ONS Business Register & Employment Survey in 2020 there were estimated to be 1340 businesses and 12200 employees in the sector in Shropshire. According to ONS Regional Gross Value Added, the contribution to the GVA of Shropshire was in 2019 estimated to be £282m and the rate of year-on-year increase was estimated to be around 7%.
- 7.2. When last assessed the total number of trips to Shropshire was 13 million a year, with 9 out of 10 being day trips. The average length of stay for overnight trips was slightly above the national average with the majority being made by UK residents. As a result of the dominance of the day visit market the contribution of visitors to the economy is lower than in other destinations. The average day visitor spends £24.45 compared to an England average of £34.65 and trip spend is £173 versus £187.
- 7.3. The Shropshire Destination Management Plan (DMP) is the blueprint for how the county intends to manage its visitor economy between 2023 and 2025. Shropshire has not had a whole county plan for some years and the DMP is a fresh start for

Shropshire. It provides impetus and direction for everyone in the county with a stake in the sector. It helps the sector to gain credibility and recognition as an important driver of the county's economy. It articulates visitor economy priorities to be fed into local and regional plans. It draws on best practice from elsewhere but also tries to retain a keen sense of what will be right for Shropshire. It is an important reference document for future funding and a basis for future bids into government programmes. It can be used by developers and tourism businesses to shape their investment and it will inform, guide, and influence how resources are used and allocated. This is intended to be a living document that is periodically reviewed and adjusted to take account of the operating environment (political and financial), the needs and expectations of consumers, businesses and communities, as well as opportunities to develop new products and propositions. The list of priorities and actions is intentionally short so that success can be easily tracked and attributed.

- 7.4. The Shropshire Destination Management plan exists in a national, regional, and local context that is constantly changing. Government initiatives designed to kick in at the beginning of this decade included the Tourism sector deal and the tourism chapter of the Industrial strategy. However, the Covid pandemic set aside these plans.
- 7.5. Replacing them is the Tourism Recovery plan published June 2021 and the De Bois Review into England's DMO (destination management organisation) landscape. The De Bois Review, was welcomed by the sector for its forensic analysis of the sector and its pragmatic approach to future structures and funding. It prioritises aggregation of DMOs, collaboration between DMOs both geographically and thematically, and a much tighter regime of accreditation. Implementation depends on funding from central government.
- 7.6. The opportunity for Shropshire's visitor economy is to present a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) application to VisitEngland and to gain accreditation status. This must be done in collaboration with public, voluntary and private sector partners for any chance of success.

8. Additional Information – Consultation and engagement

- 8.1. The development of the DMP involved twenty-four 1-1 interviews, two days of stakeholder workshops, an online industry survey that elicited 121 responses, a stakeholder seminar, a desk review of national, regional and local policies and plans and a comprehensive analysis of county plans covering the economy, outdoor spaces and cultural provision.
- 8.2. A public consultation on the draft DMP ran from 6 February to 31 March 2023 (8 weeks). There were 29 responses which was smaller than anticipated and reflects the extensive collaborative development of the DMP and the opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the draft at an earlier stage. The feedback below focuses on the results of the public consultation.
- 8.2. The majority of respondents (62%) supported the proposed vision for Shropshire's visitor economy contained within the draft DMP and on average 13 of the 29 respondents agreed with the aims and contents of the draft plan with an average of 8 disagreeing. There is fairly widespread agreement that the draft plan clearly sets out the value of the visitor economy in Shropshire.

8.3 The two areas where there is most disagreement are whether the plan sets out clear actions for local areas and whether the plan reflects local needs and challenges

8.4 Plan priorities

- There are eight priorities included in the draft DMP and there were high levels of support for all priorities. The priority supported most was improving digital infrastructure (79%) followed by increasing the appeal of the county for visiting families.
- The priorities supported least were adopting an attract and disperse approach to regional and national marketing and adjusting the ratio between day and staying visitors from 90:10 to 80:20 which is odd as both of these priorities are about increasing income growth, prolonging stays and sharing visitors across the sector/geography.

8.5 Positive feedback

- The feedback on the draft plan is mixed but there appears to be some agreement that the plan is important and necessary.
- There are positive comments on the ambitions and the fact that the plan is a more united approach, engaging partners across sectors for the benefit of the whole county.
- Comments highlight support for future engagement and a particular theme includes engaging with rural businesses and existing key contacts for tourism including Visitor Information Centres, Visit Shropshire and key attractions (NB The latter two examples were involved in the creation of the draft DMP).

8.6 Negative feedback

- Some comments express strong negative emotions towards the plan (*'This is an evil plan, evil plan'*) and others are more constructive in nature (*'Nothing here says who is to take on the various tasks involved'*).
- Comments are varied but there are a few common themes including more information required on implementation of the plan (e.g. resourcing, roles and responsibilities), concerns about impact of visitors on environment, parking, roads etc and need to meet the needs of small businesses (particularly accommodation providers).

8.7 As a result of the feedback, the following changes have been made to the draft DMP:

- Inclusion of active travel and minimising visitor impact on countryside, including the promotion of the Countryside Code.
- More emphasis on accessibility and provision for those with additional needs.
- Increased emphasis on mitigating climate change and nature recovery principles.
- Referencing that the resourcing, roles and responsibilities will be allocated as part of the delivery of the plan.
- Emphasising that the meeting the needs of small businesses, including those in rural areas, will be essential, working in partnership with Visit Shropshire and the Marches Growth Hub.
- Emphasising the wide range of attractions across Shropshire.
- Checked spelling and ensured attraction names etc. are corrected where necessary.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Consultation on the draft DMP is broadly supportive of the plan's priorities and ambitions and recognises the need for a plan and a united approach. It also recognised the need to get involved in detailed delivery planning and confirm resource, roles and responsibilities. The DMP has been amended to incorporate key feedback.
- 9.2 Delivery of the DMP will require the establishment of a county-wide strategic tourism partnership, comprising private, voluntary and public stakeholders, to develop the action plan and steer delivery and implementation of key priorities. This is something Shropshire Council can help facilitate but will also require a key role to be played by the Destination Management Organisation.
- 9.3 Participation in the establishment of a Local Visitor Economy Partnership is critical for the future strategic development of Shropshire's visitor economy, for capitalising on funding opportunities and for inclusion in the emerging national tourism landscape under VisitEngland's governance structures. Publishing a DMP for the area is a key requisite for this application.

Local Member:

All

Appendices

Appendix 1- Shropshire DMP 2023-25 Final draft

Appendix 2- Destination Management Plan Consultation Results May 2023