



East Northamptonshire Council

Policy and Resources Committee - 9 December 2009

Draft Tourism Strategy 2010-2015 for approval for external consultation

Summary

This paper introduces a draft Tourism Strategy to complement and support the Economic Development Strategy agreed earlier this year. It recognises the importance and potential of tourism within the local economy and provides for a sustainable focus for development over the next five years.

Attachment(s)

Appendix A - Tourism Strategy 2010-2015 - Consultation Draft

1. Introduction

1.1 In January 2009 the Council approved an Economic Development Strategy (minute 314 refers). At this time concern was expressed by some Members that the role of tourism within the District was understated in this overarching strategy.

1.2 The last dedicated Tourism Strategy was produced in 2004/5. This aimed to:

- Promote East Northamptonshire as a recognised destination with a sharper image and identity in the market place.
- Develop a reputation for the unique character of the countryside, natural and built heritage.
- Ensure a collaborative tourism industry which takes a co-ordinated and responsive approach to meeting the needs of its customers.

It also included a commitment to environmental principles.

1.3 Since then, a combination of the following factors make it opportune to review how the tourism agenda contributes to the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Economic Development Strategy:

- development of the North Northamptonshire Growth Agenda and the Core Spatial Strategy
- the possible impact of the Olympic Games and direct EuroStar train links in terms of international and national tourism
- the development of the Destination Peterborough TIC and franchised TICs elsewhere in Northamptonshire
- the prospect of a tighter local authority budgetary situation.

1.4 The challenge therefore is how the Council and local businesses can work together to use tourism to assist the sustainable development of the local economy and contribute to the following outcomes:

- Regenerated Town Centres
- Effective support for existing businesses and micro-enterprises
- Increased skills levels
- Increased tourist spending.

1.5 If the Council does nothing to promote tourism then there is the possibility that some or all of the features that are cherished about the area will be lost – for example the facilities in smaller villages such as shops or pubs or the character of the landscape

as farming becomes less profitable in its own right.

In addition there is the risk if we do not produce a coherent vision for tourism that the Council will be unable to ensure that all our policies from planning to grant-aid support for tourism act in a holistic manner and we may make decisions that unnecessarily and adversely impact on local communities and the local economy.

2. Background

2.1 Economy

The tourism industry is an important part in our local economy.

- Approximately 1.9 million people currently visit the East Northamptonshire Area each year, mostly as day visitors. Tourists add approx £74.5m to the local economy each year
- The 2 million visitors to East Northamptonshire support in the region of 1,238 FTE in jobs, both for local residents from those living nearby
- The main beneficiaries of the visitor spending are shops, hotels, guesthouses, B&B's, cafes / restaurants, pubs, attractions / entertainment, garages / transport. In 2008 the accommodation sector received around £3.5 million in business turnover from visitor spending, retailers around £18 million and catering £13.4 million.

2.2 Image

- East Northamptonshire is generally considered to be an 'undiscovered' Cotswolds with beautiful countryside and attractive villages, particularly in the north of the District.
- There is a variety of countryside parks, woodlands, nature reserves and waterways throughout the district, linked by a network of public foot and cycle paths. Red Kites are the most obvious distinctive feature of local wildlife
- The natural and architectural heritage is augmented by strong seasonal activity in the towns and villages with a strong tradition of village fetes often linked to village 'open garden' schemes, WI's offering cream teas in high season and limited opening of the area's private historic houses.
- Two festivals attracting international visitors are held each year in the District – the Oundle International Festival (mostly musical) and the Ashton Conker Championships.
- This activity is complemented by two regular farmers markets, a number of farm shops and pubs/restaurants serving local produce. There is also a range of artists and craftspeople who open their studios annually as part of the Open Studio event.

2.3 Potential

- Nearly 1m people live in East Northamptonshire and the adjacent District/Unitary Council areas. Over 90% of England's population live within 100 miles of the North Northamptonshire area.
- The growing 'Greenway' project is providing links from the towns in the south of the District into the Countryside and via the River Nene Footpath to the northern half of the district.
- There is growing interest in the River Nene as an attraction in its own right, with the Environment Agency seeking to increase pleasure boat use and other companies interested in increased canoe use and marina potential within the district.
- To complement the growing national interest in more active lifestyles and leisure, there is also interest being shown in development of active but environmentally friendly facilities such as Stanwick Lakes, the Frontier Centre and 'log cabin style' holiday centres.

2.4 Risks/Issues

- East Northamptonshire has generally poor public transport links, particularly in the

north of the district. It is important that development of tourism in the area works to increase 'green/public transport' links which should have the twin benefit of helping visitors access the area without 'spoiling' it by increased car use (as has happened with parts of the Cotswolds) and also providing access to neighbouring towns for local residents.

- With the exception of Stanwick Lakes (which is starting to attract a regional audience) and the festivals noted above, East Northamptonshire does not have a significant/major attraction on which to piggy back a national/international marketing campaign.
- The District is also short of quality overnight accommodation, with only 33 accredited accommodation providers. Again, because extensive development would spoil the attractive character of the District, the opportunities to significantly increase provision are limited, although recent investment in existing facilities such as Oundle Mill appear to be reaping benefits.
- Funding opportunities will be limited in the short-medium term as a result of the recession so small businesses should be encouraged to apply to the new Rural Development Programme funding programme aimed at boosting the economy in North Northamptonshire over the next four years.

3. Approach

3.1 A multidisciplinary officer team has been brought together to help shape the draft strategy together with input from Members involved in the development of the Economic Development Strategy. The first task was to agree a draft vision and then see how it translated into a series of outcomes with action plans.

3.2 The proposed vision is:

“To build the visitor economy in East Northamptonshire in a sustainable manner to maintain and improve the quality of life for all our residents because it will help

- *support and develop rural infrastructure*
- *sustain and regenerate our market towns*
- *maintain the built and natural heritage of the district”*

3.3 It is proposed that this will be delivered via a three stage approach:

3.3.1 **A Taste of the Country (2009-11)**

This will see more effective marketing of existing tourism related 'products' and businesses, using existing council resources to promote to the residents of East Northants and its neighbouring council areas. One strand will promote country food outlets whilst the other will promote village events – linking both to opportunities for open air activities.

Because of the increasingly limited opportunities to display leaflets in other venues, the key to success will be to interest journalists from regional newspapers and magazines in writing articles round a package of activities to form a day/weekend away e.g. walk, cream tea and farm shop or pub lunch, village fete and open garden event. Particular attention will be given to attracting existing groups who use public or group transport e.g. rambler and coach trip operators. Use will also be made of websites at local and sub-regional level (such as the proposed NNDC Place marketing website) to promote opportunities for visits.

This approach will capitalise on nostalgic appeal for 'the good old days' at a time when the recession is making 'holidays at home' more attractive. It will provide a good bridging strategy whilst marketing plans are being developed and funding secured for the next phase of the strategy. It will also allow the next phase to be refined in the wake of master plan production for the towns in the south of the District.

It is anticipated that the Taste of the Country strand will probably have a life of no more than 2-3years but certainly no more than 10 due to changing demographics of the sub-region and the associated likely demand for such activities.

3.3.2 ***The Green and Blue (River Nene) Ways – Active enjoyment of East Northamptonshire (2011-2015)***

It is proposed to build a new tourism image for East Northamptonshire for medium – long term use which builds on the area's natural heritage and the growing interest in healthy lifestyles and leisure activities. It will seek to both link existing activity bases such as Stanwick Lakes with the growing Greenway and other footpaths with increased leisure use of the River Nene with development of existing and new active leisure centres being considered for the area. This approach will need to be underpinned by commissioning research into the market for 'Green Active' tourism which can be used by businesses in partnership with the Council to attract sympathetic supporting attractions/activities. The approach will include links with local food outlets and accommodation to extend the visit to the area.

An initial 'brand' based on green and blue ways will be developed for the 2011 season (to overlap with the 'Taste of the Country' strand) with growth over the following three seasons. The success of this approach will depend on the partnership with relevant local businesses and links with public transport providers to improve links to the Green and Blue Way products.

3.3.3 ***Review and Expand promotion beyond sub region (2015-2020)***

It is proposed to review the effectiveness of the previous two stages in 2014 to check that Council tourism activity is adding value to the local economy, and if positive, to shape the next tourism strategy. It is anticipated that at this stage the sustainability of the approach will be endorsed by local businesses and residents and evidence gathered for more significant supporting investment in green and public transport improvements.

4. Consultation

4.1 For this strategy to work it must be owned and implemented not just by the Council but by all key stakeholders. These include -

- Local residents
- Town and Parish Councils
- District Tourism Related Businesses
- Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited (NEL)
- Other local authorities and North Northants Development Company (NNDC)
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

4.2 It is particularly important that partners buy in to the strategy so that we minimise the risk of conflicting or inappropriate actions and maximise the funding opportunities available to local tourism related businesses. The draft strategy provides a clear link to their strategies (see Appendix 4 of Draft Tourism Strategy).

4.3 This approach to tourism is to build slow but sustainable growth. It is important that the Strategy does not create unrealistic expectations of Council support or quick increases in visitor numbers. It is important that this message is conveyed during the consultation period, particularly to local residents and communities who wish to retain the current special character of the area and who may feel their enjoyment would be impaired by additional use e.g. anglers from increased leisure use of the rivers.

4.4 One of the key risks associated with this approach to tourism is that it will ultimately rely on improvements to the green transport infrastructure in the area as otherwise it will result in more car use in the District. A key strand of consultation will be early contact with transport providers and the county council to explore opportunities. There will also be research into rural safari/rambler bus schemes elsewhere in the country which seek to provide wider access to the countryside without cars.

4.5 It is proposed that consultation on the draft strategy takes place in January and February 2010, including visits to appropriate stakeholder group meetings such as the

North Northants Rural Action Partnership and a special workshop of partners who could link products to the Taste of the Country promotion.

5.0 **Implications for 2010/11**

5.1 ***Oundle Customer Services Centre/ TIC function***

5.1.1 Linking to the proposed tourism strategy is the ongoing review of the Council's leased premises in Oundle. Originally established purely as a Tourist Information Centre, over the past two years the premises have taken on significantly more Council customer services and are now branded more as a Customer Services Centre. Given the more sub-regional marketing thrust of this draft strategy it is considered inappropriate for the Council to finance the operation of a nationally focused tourist destination on this site and it is therefore proposed to withdraw from participation in the national TIC network from January 2010. This will mean ceasing to providing UK holiday information services and visitor guides. We will also cease provision of National Express bookings.

5.1.2 It is proposed that for 2010 the Oundle Centre will focus on the provision of Council services and the promotion of East Northamptonshire/very near neighbour attractions/ places to visit in line with the draft Strategy. It will continue to provide a local accommodation booking service to visitors contacting the centre in person/or by telephone in 2010 and to provide a limited ticket sale service in 2010 for other partner/complementary services such as the Oundle Literature Festival, Key theatre and Shaws coaches.

5.1.3 It should be noted that the Oundle International Festival has acquired premises in the town centre and will be handling its own ticket sales from this location from Jan 2010. The Council will continue to work with the Festival to promote it more widely as this is exactly the type of existing tourism product the draft strategy aims to support and build upon.

5.1.4 There is an option to break the lease on the current premises in Oundle after 3 years in August 2010. (If the lease is not broken at this point it will run until August 2011). It is hoped that this break point can be extended to December 2010 to provide more time to consider how customer services in the North of the District should be provided in the short-medium term.

5.2 ***Policies and Grants***

5.1.1 A key task in 2010 will be to review the Council's plans and policies that link to tourism to ensure that these are consistent with the draft Strategy. These plans and policies will include -

- Targets for increase in tourist numbers and spend which may need to be revised
- Focus for economic development and third sector grants towards tourism related businesses that link to the strategy
- Working in partnership with the County Council and others to pilot/pump prime green transport schemes that support the draft Tourism Strategy

5.1.2 Another key task will be to promote the availability of Rural Development Plan funding for tourism related businesses in the area and to secure some of this funding for development of the Green and Blue ways.

6. **Summary & Recommendations**

6.1 It is recommended that Members –

- i) note the contents of this report, in particular the implications for 2010 in section 5; and
- ii) approve the draft strategy attached for stakeholder consultation.

Implications:					
Corporate Outcomes or Other Policy/Priority/Strategy					
Good Quality of Life		<input type="checkbox"/>	Good Reputation		<input type="checkbox"/>
Good Value for Money		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	High Quality Service Delivery		<input type="checkbox"/>
Effective Partnership Working		<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Community Leadership		<input type="checkbox"/>
Effective Management		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Knowledge of our Customers and Communities		<input type="checkbox"/>
Employees and Members with the Right Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours					<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:					
Decision(s) would be outside the budget or policy framework and require full Council approval					
Financial	There are no financial implications at this stage				<input type="checkbox"/>
	There will be financial implications – see paragraph 2.1.2				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	There is provision within existing budget				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Decisions may give rise to additional expenditure at a later date				<input type="checkbox"/>
	Decisions may have potential for income generation				<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management	An assessment has been carried out and there are no material risks				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Material risks exist and these are recorded at Risk Register Reference - inherent risk score - residual risk score -				<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff	There are no additional staffing implications				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Additional staff will be required – see paragraph				<input type="checkbox"/>
Equalities and Human Rights	There will be no impact on equality (race, age, gender, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation) or human rights implications				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	There will be an impact on equality (see categories above) or human rights implications – see paragraph				<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal	Power: S111 Local Government Act 1972				
	Other considerations: Specific guidance on collection of Council Tax and NNDR				
Background Papers: Economic Development Strategy					
Person Originating Report: Sharn Matthews & Mark Lovell, Executive Directors,					
Date: 24/11/09					
CFO		MO		CX	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 19)