

## **ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **30 NOVEMBER 2022**

## **TOURISM**

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### **Summary**

1. The Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an overview of how the Council supports and promotes tourism in Worcestershire.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the Assistant Director for Economy have been invited to the meeting to respond to any queries the Panel may have.

### **Background**

3. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) took over the running of Visit Worcestershire (the County's Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO)) from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce in April 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the impact of the pandemic on the sector and the ambition to move to a more strategic destination marketing organisation, as part of the transfer the membership model was removed.
4. This paper will set out the importance of the sector to the County, the extensive work programme already delivered and the future plans for the service. Since taking on the service, a number of immediate actions have been taken:
  - a. Rebrand of the service in-line with One Worcestershire
  - b. Establishment of a partnership working group with Worcestershire local authorities
  - c. A focus on social media including the creation of an active Instagram account which now has over 5,500 followers
  - d. Support for local tourism businesses; through the Here2Help Business programme and wider economic business support programmes the Council was able to focus support on the sector supporting over 120 businesses of which over 60 businesses received grant support totalling over £230,000.

### **The Visitor Economy**

5. Visit Worcestershire (VW) is the County's DMO and plays an important role supporting the County's £990m tourism economy (pre-pandemic figure). In addition to visitors, it also provides an information service for residents. Visitors are looking for a diverse comprehensive wide-reaching variety of activities and attractions that only the whole County can provide.
6. The tourism and hospitality industry were heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and whilst now returning to a new 'norm', the landscape still looks very different, in particular with staff shortages causing a common problem throughout and concerns over raised energy costs. Office for National Statistics (ONS) Data

from April 2021 illustrated the impact by the fact that 35% of tourism businesses had seen their turnover fall by 50% or more, the highest of any economic sector (an average of 9% have experienced this across other sectors).

7. According to the latest Economic Impact of Tourism study (November 2022 – which reports on data from 2021), the total tourism value in Worcestershire in 2021 was £747m, which is 25% down on 2019 figures. Worcestershire has fared better than some areas, but this is still a significant reduction. 14 million trips were taken across Worcestershire in 2021, which is considerable given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic but still 24% lower than in 2019. This breaks down to 13.2 million day-trips and 0.9 million overnight visits. This equates to 2.6 million nights in the area as a result of overnight trips, these visitors generated around £42 million a month for the local economy.
8. The tourism sector employs 16,630 people which is around 12,190 direct jobs and 4,440 non-tourism related. The sector continues to play an important role in the Worcestershire economy.
9. Since taking on responsibility for VW, the work programme has focussed on developing the three core areas set out below:

#### Strategy & Strategic Relationships

10. After securing £14,000 from the Local Government Association, VW was able to develop a short-term strategy with input from partners and key tourism businesses.
11. A programme of business engagement has taken place to enable the team to build solid relationships with key tourism assets, local producers, accommodation providers and attractions.
12. VW has now established regular meetings with key partners which includes meeting the 6 district councils monthly to support the co-ordination of activity and to support the promotion of local events and attractions elevating the campaigns and messages for a County audience. Links with Visit England have also been established to ensure Worcestershire is well positioned.
13. VW has entered into an agreement with Great Western Railway to promote the rail service as the sustainable travel partner to and from Worcestershire and to work on joint campaigns promoting the County. A similar arrangement with Cross Country trains is currently being negotiated.

#### Visitor Engagement

14. Developing the Worcestershire brand has been key to decision making in relation to new campaigns and the VW website. In summer 2022 the new look brand and marketing launched, which saw a step back from trying to define Worcestershire with a slogan or tag line and a move to embracing the most recognised and attractive assets that are associated with Worcestershire.

15. Campaigns have been the backbone of the new approach to VW messaging. In summer 2021 the 'Discover More' campaign celebrated the breadth of activities and attractions in the County from culture, history and enjoying the outdoors.
16. For 2022 the focus is on the key tourism assets that the Council wants Worcestershire to be 'known for' – with the tag line 'Make Worcestershire part of your story'. Over 7 million people saw the campaign across social media channels, out of home and other associated advertising.
17. The 2022 summer campaign saw a positive impact over 2 months with over a 25% increase in web traffic for this period compared to the previous year.
18. VW supported the coordination of the Queen's Baton Relay in the County ahead of the Commonwealth Games. This drew large social media interest ahead of the games and helped put Worcestershire on the map as a location for those visiting the Games.
19. With ambitions to put Worcestershire in front of a larger audience in 2023, three TV adverts have been filmed, focusing on families and couples which will be on Sky Adsmart in Spring and Summer 2023 targeting key areas of Bristol, London and the West Midlands conurbation.
20. The new website launched in October 2022, the website is the window to the County, and has much improved useability and accessibility as well as new fresh and relevant content. The second stage of development will be to have a booking functionality, bespoke itineraries and a trade section that offers group travel options; a first for the County.
21. Website traffic is up 300% on April 2020 and there are approximately 40,000 unique visitors each month. Current web visitor numbers for the year from January 2022 stand at 260,000.
22. Year on Year data illustrates a positive impact in web visitors comparing 2020-21 to 2020-21 to 2021-22 there has been:
  - 50% increase in Google searches
  - 30% increase in direct clicks to the website
  - 131% increase in web visitors from London
  - 34% increase in web visitors from Birmingham
23. The social media following has grown to over 34,000 across all platforms with Facebook being the primary core marketing tool. The VW Tik Tok channel was introduced in March 2022, launching with our 'How to Pronounce Worcestershire' video which was a big hit in English Tourism Week.
24. VW have been trialling new methods of social media activity this year using the growing trend of 'Influencers'. Two influencer campaigns generated 202k views from individuals who ordinarily may not have seen or heard of Visit Worcestershire.
25. To date, 2,000,000 people have seen the VW activity across all social media platforms since January 2022.

26. A bi-monthly newsletter showcasing the best of Worcestershire places to stay and things to do is issued to over 4,000 registered subscribers.
27. VW have also just published a Visitor Guide, with 50,000 copies being distributed around the region in Tourist Information Centres, service stations and accommodation packs. They have been very well received and the sale of advertising for 2023 has already begun.

### Sector Development

28. The Tourism Awards have been a huge success for the County. The first competition had just over 100 applications, with 13 winners being crowned on the night. Most recently, three local winners progressed forward to the national Visit England awards in June 2022 picking up two bronze and the highly acclaimed gold award for the self-catering category – which is a huge accolade for the businesses but also puts Worcestershire on the map nationally.
29. Following previous success, the Tourism Awards re-opened for 2022/23 with the addition of a new category 'Business Events Venue of the Year'. A thorough two round judging process has taken place with the experience of 22 judges providing tailored constructive feedback. Winners will be announced on 24 March 2023 at the Awards event held at the West Midland Safari Park. The backing of 15 sponsors reinforces the desire to support the sector and competition itself.
30. Tourism Network – the bi-monthly meeting of the visitor economy has grown from around 20 businesses to over 50 attending the last event. Moving around the County and being hosted by local businesses, the topics vary from sustainability to marketing and diversification.
31. Regular communication via a dedicated LinkedIn page, tourism Facebook private group and a bi-monthly business newsletter allows for valuable engagement to currently just over 2,500 businesses.
32. The Here2Help business consultancy support scheme has also underpinned the programme, with the sector benefitting from bespoke one to one consultancy and grants helping them to strengthen and grow.
33. Account managing Worcestershire's key assets has also helped the Council develop a deeper relationship and understanding of the sector and it is now often the first port of call for good news or requests for support.

### **The Forward Plan**

34. The Open for Businesses Board, with sign off from Cabinet have approved an investment of £1.4m for Visit Worcestershire until March 2026. This illustrates the Council's commitment to tourism and the wider ambition to put Worcestershire on the map as a tourism destination.
35. Tourism is also a key part of the Government's Covid response with funding being made available via UK Shared Prosperity Fund as well as large programmes of investment with Visit England/Visit Britain promoting the UK to international visitors.

36. The Government has recently responded to the independent De Bois Review of Destination Management Partnerships announcing a new accreditation system via Visit Britain for Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (formally Destination Management Organisations DMOs) and the full criteria is expected to be launched very soon.

37. It is anticipated that the accreditation will provide access to future funding, business support delivery and a greater voice at a national level. This is a significant opportunity for Worcestershire to position the County for the new accreditation system.

38. Visit Worcestershire is developing a Worcestershire Tourism Growth Strategy and is currently undertaking consultation with stakeholders, businesses and partners to understand their priorities for the sector, opportunities and barriers that exist and issues related to technology, sustainability and accessibility.

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

39. The Panel is asked to consider the latest information provided on tourism in Worcestershire, and:

- consider whether any further information or scrutiny is required at this time
- determine any comments or recommendations to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

### **Contact Points**

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### **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and Minutes of:

- Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 29 July 2022

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.