

CABINET

14 DECEMBER 2023

VISIT WORCESTERSHIRE – DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Relevant Cabinet Member

Councillor Marc Baylis

Relevant Chief Officer

Mr J Hobbs Director Economy and Infrastructure

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills recommends that Cabinet approves the Worcestershire Destination Management Plan 2023 -2028.**

Background

2. Visit Worcestershire (VW) is the County's tourism delivery vehicle, coordinating destination marketing, tourism place management, business support and visitor experience.
3. Worcestershire County Council took responsibility for Visit Worcestershire from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce in April 2020. Since this time the services has been developed with investment from the Open for Business Board which will provide funding for the service up to March 2026.
4. Visit Worcestershire has developed an effective business engagement service which has enabled wider marketing reach, developed Worcestershire's reputation as a tourism destination brand, attracted investment, and has supported over 400 businesses in the last three years.
5. The national 'De Bois' Review, an independent review of Destination Management Organisations in England, recommended a new tourism board structure and accreditation process be implemented by Visit England. Worcestershire is currently only one of twenty-one destinations who have achieved Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) accreditation, achieving official status in July 2023.
6. Gaining LVEP accreditation gives, Visit Worcestershire access to additional training, resources, and support from a dedicated Visit England regional lead. For the first time, Worcestershire has access to promotional channels to UK markets, domestic marketing and support from other areas in the LVEP network under the umbrella of Visit England. As part of the process, each destination must produce an LVEP Growth Plan – which is unique to each destination and focusses key areas of growth and development. The accreditation also requires the publication of a new

strategic Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the County. This report outlines the new DMP for the county.

7. VW plays an important role supporting the county's £939m tourism economy, ensuring the sector is primed for investment and is supported to deliver growth, while also providing accessible content and information for visitors & residents to enjoy the attractions, hospitality and accommodation our beautiful County has to offer.

Worcestershire's Destination Management Plan

8. Obtaining views from stakeholders, partners and the tourism sector has been a significant part of the consultation process in developing the DMP. The consultation began in November 2022. Four workshops were held across the county to gain the views and perspectives of stakeholders & businesses. Participants included members of the Visit Worcestershire's Tourism Advisory Group, representatives from several departments within the District & County Councils, tourism businesses and organisations from across the county who make up key stakeholders e.g., Canal and River Trust, The Forestry Commission etc. In total 59 people engaged with the workshops from 39 different businesses and organisations, as well as the input from all six District Councils.

9. The key themes and opportunities contained within the plan were developed, not only using face to face consultation sessions but included desk-based research that created the core evidence base for the document. This included a perception study that looked at how 'Worcestershire' was perceived amongst visitors and non-visitors, a review of our market positioning, how we compared with other Destination Marketing Organisations and gathering a more detailed understanding of our key customer groups.

10. This information was presented to the Open for Business Board, the Tourism Advisory Group and to the Tourism Network for feedback during May and June 2023. The priorities drawn from this consultation which captured an overall ambition was supported by all, and the feedback given helped shape the final objectives and areas for action.

11. The document outlines a clear vision, with measurable objectives. It is focused on three clear delivery areas which the County Council (with its LVEP status) can work in partnership with local businesses and partners to invest, deliver and co-ordinate activity.

12. The Vision for Worcestershire is:

"We will work together to celebrate and champion Worcestershire's Billion Pound Visitor Economy.

We will ensure our visitor economy continues to thrive for the benefit of all those who visit, live and work here – now and for future generations.

We will make the most of our 2000-year heritage, our countryside with its hills, panoramic views and waterways and our unique food and drink offer, delivering memorable experiences to visitors from near and far.

Those experiences will be delivered by vibrant, independent businesses firmly rooted in Worcestershire and offering the warmest of welcomes.”

13. The plan is built around three delivery pillars: development, marketing and management.

14. Within each pillar there are actions for the County Council, District Councils, the tourism sector, stakeholders and partners. Actions that are ambitious but deliverable and will make a significant impact over the five years of this plan.

15. Cross cutting themes of sustainability and accessibility are contained within each pillar which link to the national priorities of Visit England, both integral to the future success of the visitor economy, to ensure that Worcestershire is a destination that is accessible to all, and that the approach to sustainable tourism is simple, practical, and engaging to ensure, higher quality products, better supplier relationships and satisfied customers.

16. The three pillars (outlined below) are clearly linked to the key objectives and highlight key priorities for Visit Worcestershire, the County Council, tourism businesses, stakeholders and partners. The details can be reviewed on pages 24-29 of the Destination Management Plan but focus primarily on the following:

- **The Worcestershire Experience (Development):** A rigorous focus on extending and enhancing the strengths of Worcestershire’s visitor economy and helping those ‘front line’ tourism businesses to deliver memorable products, services and experiences.
- **The Worcestershire Brand (Marketing):** There is a need to articulate Worcestershire’s offer and identity more clearly to build profile as a destination and to stand out against competition. As part of the development of this Plan, we have redefined the proposition and positioning statements to resonate with target markets, elevating the county’s strengths to put Worcestershire on the map. Campaigns will now be developed which can be amplified by all stakeholders to increase opportunities and market reach.
- **The Worcestershire Welcome (Management):** Successful destinations don’t just offer great experiences, they have the essential services, environments and information that meet the needs and expectations of visitors to underpin them. The third pillar is concerned with getting these basics right in Worcestershire. Ensuring that the infrastructure is ready for growth while delivering an outstanding welcome across all visitor touch points which will create a positive impression and result in positive advocacy and repeat business.

17. The three core objectives linked to each of the delivery pillars are:

- **Objective one (Development Pillar):** Developing the ‘Worcestershire Experience’ with increasing the range of products within the attraction, hospitality and accommodation sectors. We will have a focus on business support which encourages businesses to improve their sustainability and provide access for all. This will improve the business environment to create opportunities for sector growth and investment.

- **Objective two (Marketing Pillar):** Raising awareness through marketing campaigns that explain about what is unique and distinctive about tourism in Worcestershire encouraging visits from our target markets and attracting higher value staying visitors.
- **Objective three (Management Pillar):** Ensuring the county's infrastructure supports growth and investment, which supports the delivery of an outstanding welcome when arriving, travelling around and experiencing the county with the aim to create a positive impression and result in positive advocacy for Worcestershire.

18. Ambitious targets have been set with a clear measure attached to each, to ensure we are achieving the growth expected over the next five years:

- Target One: Awareness:** This target is linked to brand awareness and how people perceive Worcestershire as a destination of choice. It will be measured by an annual omnibus survey with targeted questions. The aim is to be 5% over the baseline set in 2024 on measures linked to 'positive perceptions and propensity to visit'.
- Target Two: Visitor Satisfaction:** This target is linked to visitor experience and satisfaction levels among visitors to Worcestershire. It will be measured by an annual omnibus. The target is 5% over the baseline set in 2024.
- Target Three: Increase in Spend:** This target is linked to an increase in visitor spend from all markets and types of visit, increasing spend is key to driving economic growth, especially with independent local businesses. The target is an ambitious 10% above inflation increase and is measured by the annual Economic Impact Assessment.
- Target Four: Over Night Stays:** This target is linked to our ambition to become an 'overnight' stay destination, increasing overnight stays also increases the value of tourism within the County. The measure is based on data in the annual Economic Impact Assessment and our target is 10% above baseline.
- Target Five: Growing the Sector:** This target is linked to our continued business support offer, ensuring the sector is ready for growth. The measure is to support 400 businesses with 25 new tourism products delivered to market.

19. A key part of the new Destination Management Plan is the identification of the primary and secondary target markets. The primary target markets shown below are those visitors who are seeking activities that clearly resonate with Worcestershire's visitor offer. The growth opportunity here is a short to medium term one. It is about increasing the visitor numbers from each of the target markets, increasing spend, by encouraging them to do and see more of the county either as part of a day visit or, preferably, by converting them into overnight visitors.

- Country Loving Traditionalist** – Profile: 50+, travelling without children, mid affluence, rural breaks, heritage, culture, and good food & drink.
- Aspirational Family Fund** – Profile – School aged children, affluent, city breaks and rural family fun, repeat business for seasonal events.

- c) **Visiting Family and Friends** – this makes up a large part of our visitor profile and its important we reach this market via our residents who can act as ambassadors for us.

20. Two secondary target markets have been identified, which we will aim to grow in the medium to longer term, as we place more emphasis on developing our destination. Whilst there are elements of the current proposition that will appeal to these markets, we are not yet competitive against those destinations for which these are the core audiences. It will therefore be important for us to build on our existing products and develop quality new experiences over the lifetime of this plan which will appeal to these markets.

- **Young Actives** – Profile – Younger, pre family couples, rural and social media worthy experiences, strong day and night offering.
- **International Explorers** – Profile – Much like the UK based Country Loving Traditionalists, the profile is 45+ travelling without children, rural, heritage and a slower pace of travel. With a focus on food and drink.

21. The Destination Management Plan advocates strong collaboration and the responsibility for delivering the plan therefore does not lie with any one organisation - it is a road map to guide and inspire tourism businesses, public agencies and communities. All have a part to play and there are clear benefits of aligning investment, development and marketing. The County Council's Visit Worcestershire team, as the accredited LVEP, does have a key leadership and enabling role; making the right connections, influencing, refining activity and reporting progress to Visit England.

22. This report and the associated Destination Management Plan is recommended for approval by the Cabinet on behalf of Worcestershire County Council.

Overview and Scrutiny

23. The work of Visit Worcestershire was last considered in October 2022.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

24. Visit Worcestershire is funded through the Council's Open for Business Programme via a £1.7 million one-off specific reserve until the end of 2025/26, as previously approved by Cabinet. £0.3 million has been spent to date with a forecast of £0.4 million within 2023/24, £0.5 million in 2024/25 and £0.5 million in 2025/26.

25. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Implications

26. Risk to delivery and consequences.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

27. A full Equality and Public Health, Data Protection & Sustainability Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the recommendations (linked to the work that will flow from the strategy being adopted).

28. No further negative impact was indicated for Data Protection or Equality.

29. The following mitigating action has been identified for Sustainability – linked to the possible increase in travel and waste across the County if the Strategy was successful. But, with sustainability being so ingrained within the document e.g. the business support available to help tourism businesses become more carbon efficient and the drive for sustainable, high income visits as opposed to day trips. As well as the sustainable travel partnerships already in place with GWR and WM Trains. It is deemed that the strategy will have a neutral overall impact.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1: The Destination Management Plan for Worcestershire.
- Appendix 2: JIA Screening (Available online)
- Appendix 3: JIA Equality and Public Health Assessment (Available online)
- Appendix 4: JIA Sustainability Assessment (Available online)
- Appendix 5: JIA Data Protection Assessment (Available online)

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

Name, Lorna Robinson - Visitor Economy Manager

Tel: 07525061203

Email: lrobinson1@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Economy and Infrastructure) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report: