

Joint Special Meeting of Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



4 March 2024

Overview of County Durham's Visitor Economy

Report of Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report presents the second draft of the County Durham Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2023-2030 and seeks feedback and endorsement following a meeting to review the first draft of the DMP at a Joint Special Meeting of the Economy and Enterprise and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees on Friday 3 November 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 County Durham has had a Destination Management Plan (DMP) since 2006, it is compiled by Visit County Durham in collaboration with the county's tourism industry and a broad range of stakeholders and partners. The destination management plan is the blueprint for the growth and development of the visitor economy in the county.
- 3 This Destination Management Plan is equivalent to a strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism development in a destination. It is a shared statement of intent to manage the visitor economy in the county over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take and the apportionment of resources.
- 4 The DMP clearly identifies challenges, gaps and opportunities for a successful, sustainable visitor economy, setting a strategic direction for County Durham with prioritised actions within an annual rolling programme.

- 5 The objective of the plan is to ensure that the tourism sector and broader visitor economy performs to its maximum capacity and brings sustainable benefits to the county and its' residents in the form of opportunity and job creation. It identifies how challenges can be overcome, product gaps and future opportunities for growth, enabling us to set out an evidence based approach for development and investment in the visitor economy product.
- 6 Working with key partners and stakeholders the plan will be refreshed annually to reflect new developments and intelligence including visitor surveys, annual economic impact surveys, benchmarking reports and major one-off studies such as perception research or visitor accommodation studies.
- 7 Final sign-off and adoption of the Destination Management Plan 2023-2030 will be by the board of Visit County Durham and the Durham County Council.
- 8 Monitoring progress and the impacts of the plan will be assessed annually by the Visit County Durham board, results will be reported to Durham County Council and to partners and stakeholders.

Recommendation(s)

- 9 Members of the committee are asked to consider the report and provide feedback on the draft Destination Management Plan in Appendix 2.

Background

- 10 In March 2020 Visit County Durham embarked on a programme of work designed to refresh and track progress against the Destination Management Plan 2016–2020. The process would test the existing objectives and the approach to each to see if they were still valid and to discover if any new priorities had emerged since the plan was first developed. The aim was to produce the next iteration of the management plan covering the period 2021 to 2025.
- 11 The initial consultation took the form of an industry conference workshop in early March 2020 that was attended by more than 120 delegates representing businesses and organisations from across the county. In summary, attendees were asked to comment on current priorities and identify future priorities.
- 12 However, three weeks later the Prime Minister announced the first UK lockdown ordering people to stay at home, this was followed by further lockdowns and the restricted movement of people, meaning limited or no travel for leisure and for work, which had serious repercussions for the global visitor economy.

- 13 Work to update the DMP was paused, until the UK reached a position of relative stability, entering in to the 'living with Covid' phase. This was followed by a period of recovery, the VCD team focus was on supporting the industry to get back to business. Work to produce a new destination management plan restarted in early 2023.
- 14 As part of Visit County Durham's national recognition and accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, annual Growth Plans are produced in collaboration with the national tourist authority Visit England and a Destination management Plan is an essential requirement for all destinations hoping to achieve accreditation.
- 15 This new programme and national structure have been designed to enable and deliver closer collaboration between Visit England and destinations that are well integrated and delivering in partnership with all key public and private sector partners, and who clearly provide strong local leadership and governance in their destination.
- 16 A copy of the draft plan has been shared with the Visit England team.

Destination Management Plan Development

- 17 The Destination Management Plan is developed using the principles of a sustainable development model known as VERB (**V**isitor, **E**nvironment, **R**esident, **B**usiness) a simple but effective framework around which to consider the long-term sustainability and impacts of the visitor economy and destination planning. The needs of each element of the VERB model are taken in to account during the decision-making process for priority setting, development, and promotion.
- 18 The DCC Visit County Durham team and the VCD advisory board lead the development of the plan. The Visit County Durham executive team are part of the Regeneration Economy & Growth directorate.
- 19 The Visit County Durham board is led by a private sector Chair, who also represents visitor economy interests on the County Durham Economic Partnership board. Durham County Council has a right of two places on the VCD board – these are held by the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and the Corporate Director for Regeneration Economy & Growth. Remaining board places are drawn from the private sector.

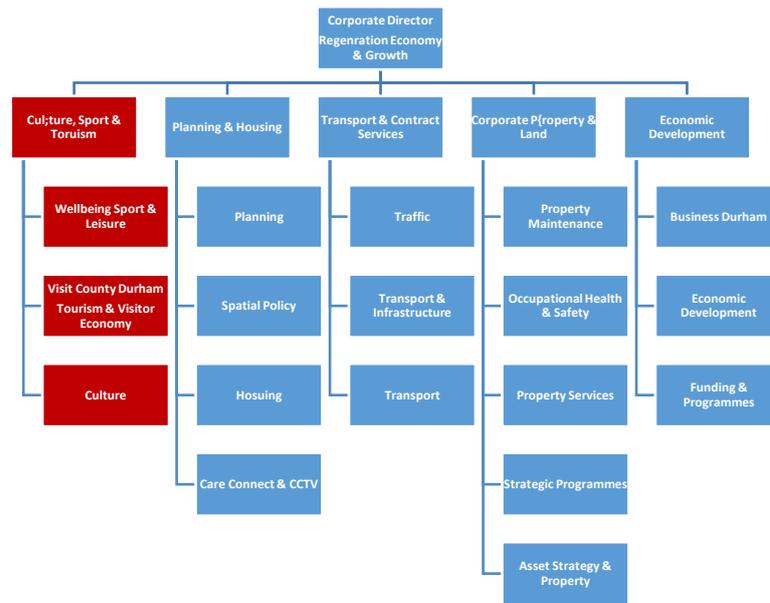


Figure 1 Regeneration Economy & Growth Structure

- 20 Figure 1. Regeneration Economy & Growth Structure shows Visit County Durham’s position within the Culture, Sport & Tourism service and gives a visual representation of how multidisciplinary teams work together across the directorate.
- 21 The process to refresh the plan has consulted and engaged DCC and a broad range of partners representing businesses, education providers, and third sector organisations, which has resulted in a plan that is coordinated, connected with an agreed approach, and set of priorities. The process also included an extensive strategic document review and an analysis of current and future trends affecting the visitor economy.
- 22 The strategy has been informed by DCC resident consultations for the development of the County Durham Plan and Inclusive Economic Strategy gathered during the Big Econ-versation, we have used feedback to inform the DMP development from a resident perspective, ensuring that the voice of our communities will be reflected in the final plan.
- 23 As part of the consultation on 3rd November 2023 a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration Economy and Growth and presentation which set out the purpose and process of the draft Destination Management Plan 2023-2030 (DMP), sought feedback and endorsement from Economy and Enterprise, and Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Response from Economy and Enterprise, and Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees

- 24 Comments from the members in attendance from both the Economy and Enterprise and the Environment and Sustainable Communities OSCs at the Special Joint Meeting held on the 3 November 2023 together with comments made by the Chairs and Vice-chairs at the briefing meeting held on the 26 October were formulated into a draft response and shared with VCD to inform the development of future plans.
- 25 Comments were made in relation to:
- The draft Destination Management Plan format
 - The draft Destination Management Plan content
 - Developing the tourism offer
 - Sustainability and the Sustainability Plan
- 26 Request from the members of both committees that the second draft of the Destination Management Plan and the draft Sustainability Plan, when available, are brought to a future Special Joint Meeting of both committees for consideration and comment.
- 27 At the meetings of the E&E OSC and the ESC OSC held in July 2023, members of both committees considered the respective work programme for each committee for 2023/24. It was agreed by members in attendance at both the E&E OSC and the ESC OSC, that a workshop, looking at the promotion of County Durham's tourism offer would be included in the work programme of both committees.
- 28 The workshop was held on Friday 3rd November at 11am in No.1A Committee Room, County Hall, Durham with all Overview and Scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members invited to attend.
- 29 The format for the workshop consisted of a welcome by the Chair and a short presentation by Michelle Gorman, Strategic Manager Tourism and Visitor Economy followed by facilitated group work with colleagues from Visit County Durham.
- 30 Members considered two questions at the Workshop:
- How can we sustainably enhance the overall visitor experience in our area, including accommodation, attractions, and amenities?
 - What are the key strengths and unique selling points of our destination that can be leveraged to attract more visitors?

- 31 The comments made by members during the workshop were captured and collated into a formal Overview and Scrutiny response to Visit County Durham.
- 32 The draft Destination Management Plan has been updated following the response received from the Special Joint meeting of the E&E OSC and the ESC OSC and the workshop, having been incorporated into the draft presented today.

Monitoring and evaluation

- 33 VCD has an established system to monitor tourism performance indicators, including visitor numbers, satisfaction levels, economic impacts, and environmental sustainability. But alongside high-level performance and economic data we will monitor and report the outcomes of projects and will work to find solutions for more closely integrating data from national and local sources.
- 34 An annual evaluation of the plan will be undertaken to assess the effectiveness and review progress against objectives. Necessary adjustments will be made based on feedback and data. Progress and achievements will be shared with stakeholders and partners to maintain transparency and accountability.
- 35 As part of Visit County Durham's national recognition and accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, progress will be monitored through Visit England's Growth Plan process.

Governance and Publication

- 36 The Visit County Durham Board will continue to approve and oversee the Destination Management Plan and VCD partners will be encouraged to use the plan. To support partners in the delivery consideration will be given to creating focused sub-groups under each of priorities within the plan. Individual working groups or task groups will also be set-up to develop ideas into projects, which have well-defined resources, timescales, and outcomes.
- 37 E&SC/E&EOSC's will continue to be integrated into the process for the implementation and review of the DMP in the future. Scrutiny Committee's play an important role in representing the voices of local residents and organisations alongside other local consultation and partnership working. Regeneration Economy and Growth (REG) and Economic Development management team and Tourism Internal Working group will also continue to assess and review progress, making recommendations.

- 38 Visit England will continue to be integrated into the process for the implementation and review of the DMP in future, ensuring alignment with Government policy and national strategic objectives.

Conclusion

- 39 Members of the committee are asked to consider the report and provide feedback on the draft Destination Management Plan in Appendix 2.

Background papers:

- [Durham Tourism Management Plan 2016-2020](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

None.

Consultation

The Destination Management Plan has been developed in partnership with Visit County Durham partners and DCC colleagues using evidence from tourism performance indicators, including visitor numbers, satisfaction levels, economic impacts, and an environmental sustainability appraisal. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee's provide a local voice for the development of the Delivery Plan. Feedback from resident surveys and consultation for the County Durham Plan and Inclusive Economic Strategy has been used.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None .

Human Rights

None.

Climate Change

As part of our commitment and approach to regenerative tourism Visit County Durham is a member of the Global Destinations Sustainability Index to monitor and improve performance of the visitor economy. A sustainability appraisal will be undertaken by the DCC Climate Change team.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.