

Cabinet

13 September 2018

Warwickshire Visitor Economy - Forward Plan: 2018-2022

Recommendation

That Cabinet endorse the Forward Plan to grow the visitor economy's contribution to economic prosperity across Warwickshire.

1.0 Context – the Value and Nature of Tourism in Warwickshire

- 1.1 Tourism makes a key contribution to the Warwickshire economy and the quality of life for local people. In 2016, the sector supported over 20,700 jobs, generating some 15 million visits and business turnover in excess of £1.15 billion for Warwickshire (+10% on 2015)¹. Tourism contributes significantly towards the attractiveness of the area, not just as a place to visit, but as a place in which to locate business, work and study.
- 1.2 The industry in Warwickshire is diverse, attracting visitors for both leisure and business purposes. Warwickshire's assets range from country parks such as Kingsbury in North Warwickshire (which attracted some 360,000 visitors in 2016)² to the internationally-renowned Shakespeare Houses to the south. As a consequence, Warwickshire is attracting a range of different markets – international visitors, domestic short breaks, day trippers, business visitors and conference delegates.

2.0 Background and Policy

- 2.1 WCC's Tourism Policy was endorsed by Cabinet in September 2015. It is underpinned by the Warwickshire Visitor Economy Framework, a strategy to drive growth in the sector. The focus of the policy and work programme is to ensure that the **whole of Warwickshire** benefits from the growth of tourism. The policy seeks to grow the visitor economy's contribution to economic prosperity, employment and quality of life across the County. There are three key priorities:
 - Creating compelling places to visit
 - Building private sector marketing capacity
 - Extending the benefits of tourism

¹ "Warwickshire Tourism Economic Impact Assessment, 2016", TRS

² Visit England: Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions, 2016

2.2 It has been WCC's policy to encourage **all** parts of the County (covering all five districts & boroughs) to prepare detailed Destination Management Plans (DMPs)³. With our funding and support, Warwickshire now boasts complementary plans for Shakespeare's England (Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick Districts), North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, and Rugby. This would not have happened without our influence and proactive involvement.

3.0 Achievements 2015-18

3.1 **"Gateways to the countryside"**: The programme aims to support and coordinate projects to develop rural tourism infrastructure in the Warwickshire countryside. The focus is on developing facilities and events so they become gateways to wider countryside exploration, longer dwell time, greater spend and repeat visits. Examples of projects delivered include:

- **Tourism event funding scheme** (*grants for events & festivals, 2015/16. The programme pledged a total of £135,362 to 17 projects across Warwickshire. WCC funding helped to lever in over £240k of match funding and bring in over 88,000 visitors to the events that were delivered.*)
- **Support for EAFRD⁴ rural tourism bids** (*successful applications funded the development and implementation of a DMP for North Warwickshire, a new "Explorer Pass" by Shakespeare's England, and a variety of tourism infrastructure projects*)

3.2 **"Visitor welcome and information"**: This programme aims to improve the welcome provided to visitors, the information they receive, and the quality of the visitor experience. Projects include:

- Visitor welcome audits (*undertaken in Leamington, Warwick, Polesworth, Kenilworth, Atherstone*)
- Visitor welcome training (*e.g. World Host Rugby World Cup volunteers*)
- Signage and wayfinding (*e.g. Stratford digital information kiosk*)
- Digital tourism (*to modernise and extend traditional visitor information services*)
- Quality award schemes (*we have co-sponsored the Coventry and Warwickshire Tourism & Culture Awards*)

3.3 **"Partnership support"**: This programme aims to ensure all partners and decision makers in the County have access to a coordinated research programme tracking the sector's performance and value to the economy, and to inform future marketing and development work. Work delivered includes:

- Destination organisations: Core funding and advice (*Shakespeare's England and Northern Warwickshire Tourism*)

³ A Destination Management Plan (DMP) is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over an agreed time period articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and the actions they will take

⁴ European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

- DMPs/tourism plans for all areas of the County (*Shakespeare’s England, North Warwickshire, Rugby, and Nuneaton & Bedworth*)
- Visitor research (*annual economic impact studies, visitor profiling study in partnership with the Coventry 2021 bid team*)

3.4 **Outcomes:** The above programme shows how WCC is working together with its five District and Borough Councils and private sector partners to support the development of tourism across the County. The latest figures for the 3 years 2014-16 (2017 figures are not yet available) show strong growth, as illustrated in the table below.

Tourism output measures for Warwickshire, 2014-2016				
Year	2014	2015	2016	3 year trend
Jobs	18,516	18,937	20,711	+12%
Value	£1.0426bn	£1.0512bn	£1.147bn	+10%

Tourism Economic Impact Assessment

4.0 Key Issues & Opportunities Influencing Future Work

- 4.1 The structure of tourism support, nationally and regionally, continues to undergo change. Currently, we await developments from Visit Britain (VB)’s bid for a Tourism “Sector Deal”, and the emerging plans of the new West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Tourism is increasingly being seen as a priority sector and unique strength in driving future economic growth. CWLEP now recognises Culture and Tourism as a priority industry within its Strategic Economic Plan.
- 4.2 Within the region, there are huge opportunities for further growth over the next four years. The announcement that Coventry will be the next UK “City of Culture” in 2021 presents enormous benefits and opportunities to attract new investment. There is a strong momentum behind the City’s tourism aspirations, fuelled by a new 10-year Cultural Strategy and national “Cultural Destinations” funding. This offers scope for future joint Coventry and Warwickshire cultural tourism partnership work.
- 4.3 At District level, the extent of involvement in tourism and business participation in tourism groups across Warwickshire continues to grow. For example, membership of Shakespeare’s England stood at 128 businesses in 2017 (+20% year on year) and Northern Warwickshire Tourism boasted 69 members. There are now comprehensive tourism plans or DMPs in place across the County. At County level, the emphasis has thus shifted from plan development towards plan coordination and implementation.
- 4.4 The above promises greater scope for partnership work, pooling resources where appropriate and tapping into external funding. The availability of the latter is in constant flux. Currently, we await news of what money may be available through national and regional sources such as VisitBritain, the Arts Council, Lottery, WMCA, and CWLEP in the run up to Coventry 2021 and the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022. Support from EU sources for

Rural Tourism via LEADER (North Warwickshire only) and EAFRD is winding down. WCC has a key role to play in publicising what external resources exist, supporting and coordinating bids where appropriate. Having a clear tourism policy underpins this role.

4.5 Support for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). The success of DMOs is almost universally underpinned by the balance of public and private sector financial investment.

- (i) Shakespeare's England (SE), the county's largest and most influential DMO, is responsible for promoting the region to tour operators and visitors across the globe. SE relies on contributions from WCC and its two district councils to help draw in an almost equal amount of private sector funding through membership.
- (ii) Over the last three years WCC has contributed £25,000 p.a. to SE; reduced this financial year to £5,000.
- (iii) The second largest DMO in Warwickshire is Northern Warwickshire Tourism; a not-for profit membership organisation, which is run entirely by volunteers. It provides advice, support and networking for its members and offers limited marketing and promotion of the area and its members businesses via website and leaflets. WCC does not currently provide any revenue funding for NWT, but has contributed financially through grant funding schemes.

5.0 Forward Plan: 2018-2022

5.1 The Forward Plan aims to specify an achievable set of priorities for WCC's work programme, given existing budgetary constraints, and taking account of the changing landscape illustrated in 4 above. There are three key areas, viz:

5.2 Partnership support

- (i) **Support the role of the Destination Organisations.** This work is central to our strategic aim of building private sector marketing capacity. As a local authority, WCC does not directly get involved with tourism promotion. Our role is to enable others to do this more effectively, through targeted funding and advice. Organisations such as Shakespeare's England and Northern Warwickshire Tourism are key in this respect.
- (ii) **Support the implementation of the DMPs.** WCC's role is to encourage local roll-out, coordinating and linking projects where there are areas of overlap. WCC is well placed to identify common challenges and solutions. An ongoing priority is to consult with District/Borough tourism colleagues on how best we can add value to their DMP work. A lack of resources has hampered implementation of DMPs but now that there are DMPs in place across the whole of the County this work demands greater focus.
- (iii) **Build a new partnership with Coventry.** There has probably never been a more apt time to strengthen our links with the City, recognising their

commitment to implementing the cultural strategy and City of Culture programme. This is about identifying and delivering joint work which will benefit the whole sub-region, working with our District/Borough partners and through the CWLEP tourism and culture group/WMCA as appropriate. A “County of Culture” programme is currently in preparation.

- (iv) **Coordinate research work** to inform decision-making and monitor success. Specifically, there remain some big gaps to fill in our understanding of accommodation supply and occupancy to encourage the right type of serviced and non-serviced development. Work is progressing this year with our Districts and Boroughs to address this.

5.3 Rural tourism (“Gateways to the Countryside”)

- (i) **Support funding bids** to develop tourism infrastructure in the countryside. In the short term, EU funding through schemes such as EAFRD and Leader, will remain priorities but, post-Brexit, we will need to take stock of what new rural tourism funding support may become available.
- (ii) **Implement the “Visit Local” scheme** to enhance the capacity of rural destinations to work in partnership to grow tourism locally. The emphasis is on improving visitor welcome and marketing, using new digital technology. Phase one of this work prioritises marketing. We have created an online toolkit and website template to make it easier for communities to market themselves to visitors and “get on the map”.
- (iii) **Nurture the development of the Food and Drink sector.** Last year’s Showcase event was widely lauded. We are now reviewing options for targeted support, including a potential further showcase event.
- (iv) **Identify support for local culture, heritage, events and festivals**, so that rural partners are engaged and enabled to take full advantage of the opportunities created by Coventry 2021 and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022. Further consideration will be given to coordinating online visibility, perhaps via a dedicated portal.

5.4 Visitor Experience

- (i) **Exploit Warwickshire’s USPs⁵ to develop unique visitor experiences.** The emphasis will be on encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more and explore more widely by enhancing local attractions and developing themed trails (e.g. cycling, walking, food and drink, heritage and culture trails etc), both within and outside our towns. The George Eliot 2019 bicentenary celebrations present an immediate opportunity to raise the profile and quality of Nuneaton’s key tourism asset.

⁵ Unique Selling Propositions: features that make a place distinctive and present a unique visitor offer

- (ii) **Encourage greater use of digital techniques** to enhance visitor information and enable visitors to share their experiences via social media.
- (iii) **Support visitor welcome schemes**, including local ambassador training, signage and wayfinding (linking to our Spacehive civic crowdfunding projects) based on visitor welcome audits.
- (iv) **Promote quality and customer service excellence**, through WCC skills support programmes. In recent years, we have promoted excellence through targeted support for projects such as the Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism and Culture Awards.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 Over the 3 year period 2015-18 WCC allocated a one-off contribution of £300k to support the growth of the tourism economy. This additional £300k has now been spent and, currently, the base budget for Tourism is £110k.

6.2 Medium Term Financial Plan

Subject to any future decisions as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, it is assumed that the Tourism budget will remain at a similar level over the next 3 years. Given the ambitious scope of work in the Forward Plan for 2018-2022, the priorities for financial support will need careful consideration.

6.3 The Forward Plan

The Forward Plan is spread over a 4 year period and there will need to be a clear prioritisation of work; recognising that some elements will be ongoing, some will have a specific time line and some will be longer term. It will also be important to utilise some of the budget to leverage external funding, as funding levels will have a direct impact on how far each element of the plan can be taken. Therefore, the scaling of the Forward Plan will very much follow the available budget year on year.

6.4 In 2018/19 the main focus is:

The implementation of the 'Visit Local' scheme; the development of the Food and Drink showcase; Warwickshire's USPs and accommodation study research work. There is also a commitment to support the Destination Organisations on an ongoing basis e.g. Shakespeare's England, which is essential in building private sector marketing capacity.

6.5 In 2019/20

it is planned to build on or start the preparatory work in respect of the Coventry City of Culture and Birmingham Commonwealth Games events as well as continuing to support and develop Warwickshire's USPs and tourism products e.g. The George Eliot 2019 bicentenary celebrations.

6.6 In 2020/21 and beyond

This will be a key period for maximising on major regional events such as Coventry City of Culture, including further development and delivery of work that will aim to bring legacy to Warwickshire and offer our own 'County of

Culture' as a means of attracting investment and visitors to Warwickshire. As the sole organisation supporting the tourism industry on a county-wide basis, WCC is in a unique position to be able to nurture growth across the county. We can offer support to locations where there are opportunities but lack of external backing to deliver. The opportunities offered by a Warwickshire County of Culture will be brought forward for consideration as part of the development of the Strategic Plan 2020-25.

7.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

7.1 As shown above, work is ongoing on several programmes working with a range of stakeholders across the County. Updates will be made available to the Portfolio Holder and local members, and further reports can be brought back to Cabinet as required.

8.0 Background papers

None

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