

## **Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board**

### **Response to Shropshire's Draft Economic Growth Strategy**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board was established in 2010 to provide strategic leadership for the Visitor Economy sector in the two unitary council areas in Shropshire, after earlier models of Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) under the previous Regional Development Agency national approach had been tried. It co-ordinates and receives intelligence from four area partnerships in Shrewsbury, Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, North Shropshire and Oswestry and Telford/Ironbridge. It represents the sector by working with VisitEngland, the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and others and maintains a lobbying role on issues which affect the sector. It is recognised by VisitEngland as the lead body for the sector and as such is on the national Destination Management Forum and its overarching aims are to grow the value of tourism and contribute to the county's GVA improvement.

The Board membership consists of leading private sector tourism organisations such as Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and the National Trust, the chairs or representatives of the four Destination Partnerships and the lead Members and Officers from the two local authorities.

The Visitor Economy sector in the geographic county of Shropshire has been identified by the LEP, by both Unitary Councils and Business Boards as a key sector for growth and is capable of increasing the £0.66 billion pounds it generates in sales each year. 20,000 households in the county depend to some extent on the income generated by the sector. By a process of improving marketing, encouraging investment, satisfying visitors through excellent customer service, value and experience and supporting local suppliers the sector is well placed to drive economic growth in the county.

#### **2. Strategies for Growth in the Visitor Economy Sector**

Through a robust consultation process with the sector's stakeholders the Board can now set out with confidence the Strategic Priorities for the Visitor Economy sector to be submitted as part of the Shropshire Business Board's consultation on Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy.

The Tourism Strategy Board supports a growth strategy for the sector recognising that there is under-used capacity in the county which can be better utilised without a detrimental impact on host communities or Shropshire's natural environment.

It may be helpful here to outline the origins of the Destination Partnerships and their role in strategy development. Before the advent of the unitary Shropshire Council in 2009 the Visitor Economy sector had been organised at a local level based on the boundaries of the district council areas. In 2010 Shropshire Council consulted with interested parties and a new visitor-defined geographic shape for the sector was introduced based on the North (North Shropshire and Oswestry), Shrewsbury, the South (Shropshire Hills and Ludlow) with the Severn

Valley (former Bridgnorth District) working closely with Ironbridge and the South (the latter still in development).

These Destination Partnerships were tasked with developing Strategies and Action Plans for their areas recognising their distinctive and different 'visitor offer' and stage of development of the sector.

The visions, aims and objectives of the Destination Partnerships' Strategies and Action Plans are the building blocks for an over-arching Visitor Economy Strategy for the Shropshire Council area. They have been developed through a process of consultation with businesses and other stakeholders and written by expert advisors. It is the view of the members of the Tourism Strategy Board that these should be embedded in every Economic Strategy that seeks to stimulate business growth in Shropshire.

The following is a summary of the areas in which the sector wishes to see action over the next few years:-

a. **Key Infrastructure Provision**

- Ease of access in to and around Shropshire by road and rail, but with a particular requirement for the reinstatement of a direct rail link to/from London and high quality transport hubs e.g. railway and bus stations. Maximising/safeguarding extant rail services for development of new visitor markets and experiences
- Excellent broadband and telecommunications provision for both business and visitors
- A favourable and easy to use regulatory environment for businesses
- A beautiful, accessible and sustainable natural environment
- An imaginatively conserved built environment
- An appropriate network of Visitor Information Centres combined with information provision online and other channels
- Enhance year round, all-weather and evening facilities for visitors.

b. **Effective Collaboration through Partnerships**

The Visitor Economy relies on a range of stakeholders delivering the visitor's experience from global hotel chains, to small businesses in retail, accommodation, food and drink to major festivals to volunteer local event organisers. To ensure a quality and seamless customer journey all these partners need to work cohesively together. Partnerships and collaborations with clarity of direction are therefore essential to achieving the very highest customer experience.

Effective Destination Partnerships will continue to drive clearly articulated growth strategies and delivery of action plans, working wherever possible with existing structures and programmes in order to maximise resources.

c. **Sector Market Intelligence and Research**

Strategic research is made available to the sector to support strategic planning, investment and business decisions.

1. We need to ensure businesses are aware of the intelligence and research currently available to inform their business planning.

2. Ensure robust provision of appropriate research to support investment and growth such as:

Volume and Economic Value of the Visitor Economy

Accommodation Occupancy Data

Consumer Research

d. **Raising Awareness of Shropshire**

Deliver a county-wide public relations/media campaign, building on the successful global campaign for Much Wenlock and the Olympics and its Opening Ceremony, watched by 40million people, whose themes resonated powerfully with Shropshire's heritage.

Identify new ways of delivering effective targeted marketing campaigns at County and Destination level. Shrewsbury and Tourism BIDs (Business Improvement Districts).

Work with events and festival organisers to maintain and improve their offer as these are often the first experience of Shropshire for many visitors.

e. **Create Ambassadors**

Deliver training and equip front line staff to ensure they are knowledgeable and passionate about our county and encourage visitors to stay longer or repeat their visit, to include:

Taxi /Bus Drivers

Retail owners and staff

Hoteliers and Accommodation Providers

Pub/Catering and Food Outlets

Street Cleaners/Traffic Wardens

Attractions and museums staff

f. **Market Towns**

Ensure the very highest quality experience for visitors to our Market Towns:

All appropriate Market Towns having a clear, distinctive USP and marketing message

Tourism Action Plans which consider all aspects of the visitor experience from signage to car parking to information and orientation

Remove barriers, create incentives for market town visits e.g. introduce new car park passes for visitors.

g. **Shropshire's Countryside – A Tourism & Heritage Asset**

Maintain and promote opportunities to experience our natural environment whilst optimising visitors' opportunity for expenditure.

Provide high quality walking, cycling and equestrian routes, services and experiences and outdoor activities.

Deliver 'Walkers are Welcome' schemes for appropriate Market Towns and deliver a similar package of support to strategic walking/cycling/equestrian routes to ensure maximisation of visitor spend.

Maximise the economic impact of The Shropshire Way

Support Montgomery Canal Restoration

Consider the options for Newport and Shrewsbury Canal restoration

Consider and support tourism uses for the redundant Wenlock Edge quarries

h. **Shropshire's Heritage – A Tourism Asset**

Develop and promote Shropshire's Heritage as a key motivation for visitors to visit Shropshire, often in the countryside context above

Maintain and enhance our heritage offer of museums, heritage sites and centres, castles etc. and its interpretation and experience

Develop commercial support for heritage sector

Work with Telford and Wrekin Council, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and others to support the enhancement of the product in the Gorge.

i. **Shropshire's Food and Drink – A Tourism Asset**

Maintain strong links with food and drink producers and encourage the Visitor Economy sector to promote and use local produce, particularly the national chains

Build on successful food festival and events

Use food and drink as a marketing tool to promote Shropshire and its distinctive identity

j. **Support strategic investment in Heritage Developments where appropriate:**

Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery

Ditherington Flax Mill, Shrewsbury

Ellesmere Historic Boat Yard

Cambrian Railway development

Severn Valley Railway Bridgnorth Station Project

Consider Ironbridge Heritage Railway

Wenlock Quarry ambitions

World Heritage Sites at Ironbridge Gorge and Pontcysllte Aqueduct

### **3) Further information**

Copies of the three Visitor Economy Strategies for Shrewsbury, North Shropshire and Oswestry and The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow are available from the Visitor Economy Team at Shirehall. Tel: 01743 252257/252546

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