



Staffordshire Leaders Board

Staffordshire Visitor Economy Action Plan

Thursday 1st December 2022

1. Summary

- 1.1 Staffordshire has a visitor economy that performs well in many areas but has unrealised potential. It's worth £1.87bn, supports 33,000 jobs, and is growing at around 3% per year, just behind the projected national growth rate.
- 1.2 Success is based on strong attractions that draw visitors principally from regional population centres well-connected to Staffordshire by road and rail. This is boosted by business visitors who choose Staffordshire as a place to meet, plus a significant student cohort studying at Keele and Staffordshire Universities, who help drive the visiting friends-and-relations market.
- 1.3 While there's an appreciation of the visitor economy as a driver of income and employment, and a contributor to the quality of life for local communities, there is a consensus among stakeholders that it's not yet reaching it's full potential.
- 1.4 Elsewhere, individuals and organisations are working undeniably hard in the sector, but efforts have tended to be directed towards specific and tactical local, or organisational priorities, rather than as part of a strategic approach to development and promotion that will aid growth of all areas of Staffordshire. Without working collectively to amplify efforts there is a risk of more piecemeal success, slower-than-average growth, and the fragmentation of our product and offer.
- 1.5 In partnership with our borough/districts and private sector operators, we have recognised the challenge, and building on the recommendations of the Destination Management Partnership (DMP) Board have brought forward a nationally recognised Staffordshire wide Visitor Economy Action Plan (VEAP). DMPs are encouraged to have such plans in place to benefit from regional and national funding opportunities and partnerships as well as articulating the wider plans for their areas.
- 1.6 The development of the VEAP builds on our wider 'We Are Staffordshire' Place Branding work to strengthen the profile of Staffordshire on the





national and international scale, with the Visitor Economy providing a key customer facing opportunity to do this. It also builds on and reflects the content and style of the Staffordshire Investment Prospectus endorsed earlier in 2022 by the Leaders Board.

- 1.7 The plan is intended to add value to existing activity and highlight where collaboration can reap greater rewards, and has been informed by a review of over 50 distinct plans and strategies that relate directly to Staffordshire's visitor economy, and indirectly to wider perspectives of culture, place, skills, towns and landscapes.
- 1.8 The plan focuses on where collective Staffordshire wide efforts can add the greatest value for the destination, bringing together the locally distinctive offer of our multiple attractions, rural and urban locations and other visitor destinations. By acting together with a united Staffordshire voice there is a greater opportunity to increase the dwell time and spend of prospective visitors and further highlight the area to our own residents.
- 1.9 Although pandemic-related challenges have undoubtedly changed the shape of the sector, the team has built on existing on-the-ground guidance and intelligence conducting consultation with over 100 participants to develop the plan. The result is a series of tightly focused, practical, and high-level actions which look ahead to how partners can best use their collective resources to lay strong foundations for the Visitor Economy sector.
- 1.10 Everything the DMP prioritises in the delivery of the VEAP is about stimulating future economic growth as a collective. A successful visitor economy can sustain businesses, safeguard jobs, and positively impact the lives of local residents and communities through opportunities for employment and enjoyment. Ultimately it can help shape a place that offers those who live, work, and study here a healthier work-life balance and unrivalled quality of life.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The recommendations to the Staffordshire Leaders Board are;

- a. Note and support the draft Visitor Economy Action Plan.
- b. Note the emerging priority themes, including that accommodation will be a focus of future product development to support future growth.
- c. Note the vision and list of priorities within the plan and provide associated feedback.





- d. To support a longer-term commitment to collaboration and funding for the DMP with a view to securing national accreditation with VisitEngland and DCMS working as a collective through our DMP.
- e. Request the Economic Growth Directors group prioritise the sharing of information relating to Destination Management projects, to support the success of the partnership.

3. Background

3.1 The Plan

3.2 Areas with the strongest reputation and product offer are the most likely to have their own dedicated visitor economy plans. Elsewhere, visitor economy is mentioned frequently in town, district, and landscape management plans which can focus on creating and promoting a distinctive identity and image for a locality but not for the area as a whole.

3.3 For the Staffordshire VEAP, we've focused our actions under several core areas that add value to and compliment localised strategies and will help us to grow the sector and allow it to succeed in the future:

1. **Partnership development**, where we'll look at funding opportunities and the potential for increased investment, as well as Covid recovery and post pandemic opportunities. And we'll focus on areas of untapped potential, with a view to local benefit. Our work will see new research commissioned, and the interrogation of existing data. Success here will be measured through more investment, more support, a strong and inclusive partnership, increased marketing spend, an improved visitor experience, and increased visitor spend
2. **Product development**, meaning the development of a broader range of facilities and services to support our strongest destinations and attractions, to help us build up our lesser-known offers and better packaging of existing product and building an accommodation base that can support more overnight stays. The existing offer benefits from aspects of local identity but does needs to be specific and targeted to Staffordshire. Sectors like hospitality, food and drink, and retail also need to become more distinctive, have a stronger Staffordshire character, and cater to a broader range of visitor types. For this





plan, the most pressing product development focus over the next three years will be on accommodation where we will look to concentrate on increasing the quantity of and choice of accommodation types.

3. **Marketing** to date has been less effective than it could be. Recent work led by Enjoy Staffordshire has started to build on the wider Staffordshire Place narrative positioning the county as *Britain's biggest and best playground* to attract new visitor markets. The intention is to continue developing this narrative for businesses and other organisations to draw on and tell their own stories, and incorporate key messages into their own marketing, promoting their assets, while amplifying the collective effort of the DMP and to enhance perceptions of Staffordshire as a whole. Efforts of the DMP will look to strengthen messaging and avoid duplication. Alongside all of this we'll be working on further customer targeting and segmentation, as well as marketing activity, packaging, and PR to attract more visits.
4. **Inclusivity and Connectivity** is core as many of our rural areas are continuing to strive for improved broadband connectivity, and businesses in those areas may be less likely to have a fully developed online presence or access to digital distribution channels. We're focused on breaking those barriers to entry, accessing product information and booking services, and to ensuring that our offer is fully accessible and inclusive. Our Plan looks to utilise and embrace digital marketing and distribution, including the creation of digital assets, distribution of digital content, and proactive management of online image and reputation
5. **Business Support, Skills and Training** all share a common challenge, the lack of awareness about the current provision, business needs, or demand. We'll initiate an overarching study to audit the current provision, gather data, and elicit information directly from businesses around their needs. Once complete, the study will inform the interventions that are required and where greatest benefit can be achieved.
6. **Sustainability**, including how best we can make a strong contribution to achieving net zero by 2050, keeping the needs of the environment, communities, businesses and visitors in balance, is core to the Plan. We will map provision and identify needs through auditing and surveying. Once we've



clarified the most relevant sustainability interventions with the industry, we'll design and deliver an environmental efficiency programme for visitor economy businesses, and create a Business-to-Business campaign highlighting the benefits of sustainable business practices.

4. The Aims and Deliverables of the Plan are:

- **To make a strong contribution to economic growth** and prosperity, supporting businesses, improving the product, and increasing the impact of marketing
- **To make a strong contribution to achieving net zero by 2050**, keeping the needs of the environment, communities, businesses and visitors in balance
- **To improve the quality of life for Staffordshire's communities** and provide more opportunities for employment and enjoyment.
- The plan also includes hard objectives that would see a return of the value of the visitor economy to £1.87bn by 2025 (its pre-pandemic level), and a greater economic value of £2bn by 2027.

However, given feedback received to date, we intend to review this target on receipt of newly commissioned economic impact analysis and intend to refresh the target accordingly. Although inflationary pressures are likely to have some impact on the overall value of the sector, we will need to be mindful of wider cost of living pressures and potential reduced discretionary spending. However, initial indications are that Staffordshire's visitor economy is recovering well following the challenges of the pandemic.

5. Measures of success

5.1 The success of this Plan will be evaluated against the following outcomes:

- Succeeding in securing more investment from regional partners, investors and national government
- Securing a recognised Local Visitor Economy Partnership accreditation for the County to benefit from the national Destination Management Organisation Review, influencing regional and national investment to the sector.
- More support for the sector locally, regionally and nationally



- Recovery and growth across all key sectors and business types including SMEs and micro businesses
- Marketing that's more targeted and has greater impact
- Businesses that are more resilient, profitable, and sustainable
- The formation and continuation of a strong and inclusive partnership to champion and lead Staffordshire's visitor economy
- A higher proportion of visitors that stay overnight
- An improved visitor experience and perception of Staffordshire.

6. Proposed Timescales and Next Steps

6.1 The first 12-months of delivery will be critical in laying the foundations for a stronger and more effective partnership that can drive progress and champion the sector. This will require goodwill, imagination, and positivity from all those who stand to benefit, and it will require open and honest dialogue, a positive attitude, sharing of knowledge and resources and a willingness to adapt and compromise to arrive at the best solutions for Staffordshire as a whole.

6.2 The Visitor Economy Action Plan (VEAP) will be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals, and the next significant progress report will be due in December 2024.

Contact details

Sponsor(s):	Alan White – Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Report author:	Charlotte Cain
Job title:	Visitor Economy Partnership Development Manager
Organisation:	Staffordshire County Council
Telephone:	01785 895306
E-mail:	charlotte.cain@staffordhsire.gov.uk

