

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING
COMMITTEE

AGENDA
ITEM NO

6b

6 DECEMBER 2018

Report Title	REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP: TOURISM
Purpose of Report	To consider recommendations by the Task and Finish Group regarding the districts approach to supporting tourism.
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Note the findings set out in this report. b) Agree to share the findings with Gfirst LEP. c) Nominate a Member from this Task & Finish group for Gfirst LEP to appoint to their Visitor Economy/Tourism Business Group.
Consultation and Feedback	Meetings were held with tourism staff, tourism support organisations and companies, major and minor attractions, tourist information centres and parish clusters and Gfirst LEP over an extended period. Key points were recorded and shared as the process progressed.
Financial Implications and Risk Assessment	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Adele Rudkin, Accountant 01453 754109, adele.rudkin@stroud.gov.uk
Legal Implications	The work of the Task & Finish Group is concluded by this report. The nomination to GFirst LEP to appoint a member to their Visitor Economy/Tourism Business Group of their Board would need to be confirmed by GFirst LEP and is not an appointment by SDC. Nicola Swan Interim Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer 01453 754369, nicola.swan@stroud.gov.uk
Report Author	Councillor Gordon Craig (Chair) on behalf of the Task and Finish Group
Options	a) Note the findings set out in this report b) Agree to share the findings with Gfirst LEP c) Nominate a Member from this Task & Finish group for Gfirst LEP to appoint to their Visitor Economy/Tourism Business Group.
Performance Management Follow Up	None required

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 In 31 May 2018 it was decided that a Task & Finish Group should be set up to review the effectiveness of the District's tourism provision. This followed concerns that large areas of the District were not receiving sufficient focus. It was agreed and understood that the objective of this group was to examine and if necessary recommend a no additional cost reset in the direction of the SDC tourism operation in order to make it more effective.
- 1.2 The Task and Finish Group was made up of 7 Members – Cllr Gordon Craig, Cllr Nigel Studdert–Kennedy, Cllr Ken Tucker, Cllr George Butcher, Cllr Nigel Prenter, Cllr Sue Reed, Cllr Darren Loftus and Canal Project Manager Dave Marshall.
- 1.3 The Group was chaired by Cllr Gordon Craig and met regularly over the review period with consultees.
- 1.4 Notes were completed for each meeting and shared with the consultees.

2. Initial Issues

- 2.1 Reports from tourism operators indicated an increasing lack of understanding and support for tourism away from Stroud and the Cotswold villages.
- 2.2 Reports from tourism operators voiced concerns about the cost v benefits of advertising through Cotswold Tourism.
- 2.3 Available data, although professionally presented was found to have been extrapolated from countrywide figures rather than relate to the actual district performance, rendering it unreliable as a management tool.
- 2.4 Although attempts had been made by Cotswold Tourism to obtain sound data, collecting it had proved difficult and so the output had little value.
- 2.5 Concern from tourism operators about an over reliance on Cotswold Tourism for strategic vision, allied to concerns that in turn, Cotswold Tourism's focus was being pulled ever eastwards through a service alliance between Cotswold and West Oxfordshire District Council who together are the main players of this Public / Private partnership.

3. Feedback from meetings with tourism support organisations

- 3.1 Cotswold Tourism is based at the offices of West Oxfordshire District Council and is staffed by officers of both Cotswold and West Oxfordshire District Council. There is an advisory element of the operation but essentially work is carried out by council officers. There is a real lack of resource and effectively only one person interacting with the industry at large. Most of the focus has been on signing members up to drive income

and most of the output has been marketing led through publications and exhibitions. The customer base is mainly made up of large attractions with smaller members being concentrated in the more central Cotswold areas. Attempts to obtain reliable data from their customer base had proved difficult with only a small number of customers making regular returns.

- 3.2 Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism was set up out of frustration that Cotswold Tourism and Stroud District Council were not giving support to the area it covers. It has been established to act as a forum for its area. It is an area that contains many of the largest tourist attractions in the county so must have strong tourism appeal and yet because it is not easily marketable and has no AONBs (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) etc. to boast of. It feels neglected of the support it needs to realise its growth potential.
- 3.3 Stroud District Council had a total resource of 2 staff members sharing a single full time job. The fringes of the district are on the edge of the Cotswolds but the largest land mass and biggest attractions are in the vale. SDC relied heavily on Cotswold Tourism for strategic direction while the two part time officers tried to put a local twist on it. For example the recognised unique selling point of Stroud District was deemed to be industrial heritage. The officers concentrated their efforts on marketing. Since this task and finish group was commissioned, the SDC central tourism resource has been removed completely.
- 3.4 The overall impression was that there was no viable strategic plan in place to support the unique characteristics of the district and the recent establishment of Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism supported this impression. In addition there was very limited resource to effect change.

4. Feedback from tourism operators

- 4.1 Large attractions such as Berkeley Castle were members of Cotswold Tourism and other similar organisations and in addition carried out their Independent advertising operations. Generally they complied with requests to complete tourist number data but were under the impression that this did not apply to outdoor events, numbers were therefore generally, greatly understated.
- 4.2 Slightly smaller but still significant attractions tended not to be members of Cotswold Tourism, their reason was that they felt it offered poor value for money, they mainly relied on their own marketing organisation and used organisations such as Glide, Pear Communications and Wessex Media to distribute their leaflets.
- 4.3 Small attractions tended to have no dedicated marketing function and operated largely independently using the internet and recommendation.
- 4.4 All felt there was a distinct lack of a regional strategy and there was no central point they could turn to for advice or support to secure funding. The Jenner Museum in Berkeley felt that it might qualify as a Unesco site of

special interest because of the impact Dr Jenner had on the human race but needed support and guidance with an application.

- 4.5 We noticed a common trend for businesses to operate in total isolation, mainly because they had not considered the benefits of working together to support one another or recognised recommendation as a low cost and highly effective form of advertising.

5. Feedback from independent Tourist Information Centres

- 5.1 Meetings were held with the independent tourist information centres to establish why they were set up how they are funded and operated and what they achieve. Key points are noted below:-

- a) Space, heat /light/ telephone are provided by the town council
- b) In the case of Nailsworth, the salary of a part time organiser is paid by the town council. All other staffing is provided on a voluntary basis.
- c) Display stands and general leaflets are provided by GLIDE media free of charge. Additional local leaflets are enthusiastically provided by local organisations free of charge.
- d) In the case of Nailsworth a need was identified for a town information centre and tourism was a natural bolt on to that. In Wotton the tourist information centre has been bolted on to the Historical Society.
- e) In every case the TICs were set up to support the towns and their local area by making it easy for tourists to use local businesses and to support local attractions and events.

- 5.2 The task and finish group was very impressed by the pride these Market Town TICs took in their local area, serving as a focal point to identify and bring forward packages of things to do and places to stay that ensures tourists get a lot out of their visit and supply a boost to the local economy.

6.0 Feedback from meetings with town & parish clusters.

- 6.1 We created parish clusters inviting each to a meeting at the principal town or parish hall for each cluster. The Stroud parishes met at SDC offices. We wanted to understand the level of importance parishes attributed to Tourism and how they felt about how it was being delivered. Key points are noted below:-

- a) Parishes surprised us by the importance they attributed to tourism.
- b) Tourist footfall was seen as a way of keeping local facilities open and available for the use of local people as well as having a positive effect on the local economy.
- c) Although recognising the benefit of tourism, parishes had not previously been engaged with and had little or no idea of what they could do to encourage tourism.
- d) A number of market towns indicated that they would like to set up tourist information centres.

- e) A number of parishes recognised that they had a lot in common with their neighbours and together they provided a real tourism offering while individually they didn't.
 - f) Many parishes realised that they needed a unique selling point to attract tourism but couldn't identify one, amazingly with just a little help they invariably could.
- 6.2 We were left with a definite impression that the towns and parishes could be the providers of a wonderfully strong base level of tourism in the district if encouraged and supported.

7.0 Feedback from Gfirst LEP

- 7.1 Gfirst LEP indicated that their attention had been drawn to the need for a County wide tourism strategy that fully recognises the potential. A new group has been formed; the "Visitor Economy /Tourism Business Group." Early thinking is that the "Cotswold Tourism" brand appeals mainly to older people and that the county has much more to offer. The group includes representatives from Cotswold Tourism and consultants as well as representatives from the tourism sector. Given the work carried out by the SDC task & finish group which mirrored the LEP's concerns we have been requested to supply a delegate to the LEPs Visitor Economy /Tourism Business Group.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 A lack of overall strategic direction was evident.
- 8.2 Tourism organisations were operating in a "Silo" fashion with little or no support for one another. They saw other attractions as competitors rather than partners.
- 8.3 The Cotswold Tourism Brand is a strong one and should be exploited but new brands that better describe attractions other than rolling hills and charming villages need to be developed and there was no evidence of this.
- 8.4 Stroud District Councils attempt to build on "Industrial Heritage" as a unique selling point for the district was badly judged in light of the obvious abundance of such features around the country and the many really unique features available to them, such as The River Severn with its mud flats, tidal range, the world famous Severn Bore and the Viking and Roman history that is attached to it.
- 8.5 Parish and Town Councils recognise the value of tourism to them and want to exploit it, they could provide a focused low cost base level tourism but no one has engaged with them and they need direction.
- 8.6 Local tourist information services were providing a good service at minimum cost to the town councils. The Nailsworth Model where the TIC is bolted on to a Town Information Centre worked really well and efficiently. It was noted

that a number of additional towns were considering setting up similar schemes and we believe that should be encouraged.

9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 Following the findings, and given the divestment by SDC of a central tourism operations, the recommendations of this report are as follows:-
- a) Note the findings set out in this report
 - b) Agree to share the findings with Gfirst LEP
 - c) Nominate a Member from this Task & Finish group for Gfirst LEP to appoint to their Visitor Economy / Tourism Business Group.