

## **Economy & Growth Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	17 January 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Visitor Economy Strategy
<b>Report of:</b>	Jayne Traverse, Executive Director Place
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	EG/15/22-23
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1.** The visitor economy strategy provides the Council, as well as the tourism and hospitality sector, with a framework for growth over the period 2023-28. It builds on the pre-pandemic success of previous strategies, and the signs of recovery that are now evident. The strategy recognises the value of the sector as part of the wider Cheshire East economy and provides a strategic framework for its continued recovery and growth.
- 1.2.** The strategy sets out an approach to growing the Cheshire East visitor economy in line with the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25:
- **Open** – Through its contribution to the economy of Cheshire East, the visitor economy supports a sustainable financial future for the council.
  - **Fair** – The economy supports the wellbeing of our communities.
  - **Green** – The visitor economy helps to create and sustain a great place for people to live, work and visit, contributing to thriving urban and rural economies, the environment, and our quality of place as well as thriving and active communities.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1.** The visitor economy strategy addresses future strategic direction and priorities for the period 2023-2028, with an aspiration to grow the value of the visitor economy and contribute to the borough's wider economic growth.

While many of the priorities in the previous strategy are still relevant, the strategy has been refreshed and updated to reflect the current position and provide a strategic framework for realising opportunities over the next few years. This allows the council to consider the drivers for future growth, reflect changes in the economic landscape and include new opportunities that may have presented themselves in the intervening period.

- 2.2. The strategy identifies the issues facing the visitor economy, those aspects where Cheshire East is well positioned and the strategic priorities that can support and grow the contribution of the sector.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To approve and adopt the Visitor Economy Strategy 2023 -2028

### 4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. Cheshire East Council continues to play a leadership role in supporting our local visitor economy’s growth potential through helping to create the conditions for it to thrive and supporting the development of a strong visitor offer. The strategy builds on the success of two previous visitor economy strategies, in 2011 and 2016 as well as a Tourism Recovery Plan approved in 2021. This will provide a strategic framework for businesses to help grow the sector in Cheshire East working with the Council and its partners. A focus by the council on these priorities will strengthen the impact that the Visitor Economy has on Cheshire East, its businesses, residents, towns & villages and green spaces.

### 5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. The council could proceed without a strategic framework for the continuing development of the visitor economy sector, but the council would not have a framework to realise the opportunity to influence the economic benefits of the visitor economy through its actions.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The council would not have a strategic framework to help influence economic benefits from the visitor economy.	Potential slower growth of economic benefits and lack of strategic direction for the sector.

## **6. Background**

- 6.1.** The visitor economy delivers a direct economic output from the culture, leisure and heritage offer of Cheshire East as well as its towns, villages and rural offering. It supports employment and contributes to the delivery of high-quality places that help us stand out from our competitors. As such, it is an essential part of what sustains the quality of environment and the cultural offering that are attractors to the talent required to help attract new investment and skilled workers.
- 6.2.** Cheshire East has a strong tourism product. Jodrell Bank is a UNESCO World Heritage Site; Tatton Park is the 5th most visited paid-for attraction in the England (VisitEngland, 2021); there is accessible countryside from riverside walks to the Peak District fringe; market towns including Macclesfield, the gateway to the Peak District and the former home of Ian Curtis (Singer/song writer with Joy Division). This combines with high-quality accommodation, heritage attractions and historic gardens, world class events, farm-stays, health-club spas to provide a comprehensive offer for both day visitors and staying visitors alike.
- 6.3.** Cheshire East is also ideally positioned in relation to the cities of Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and the Midlands. It includes part of the Peak District National Park offers access to both domestic and international markets with two international airports nearby and excellent links by road and rail from other parts of the country.
- 6.4.** Our restaurants, bars, cafes, Theatres, Museums, tourist attractions and retail destinations play an important part in the life of area for residents, visitors and business. Our visitor economy brings in much-needed revenue to the borough, boosting its economy, supporting our 'Quality of Place' and helping to position the borough as part of place marketing. Cheshire East continues to work with local and national partners to develop the visitor economy to the benefit of visitors and residents.
- 6.5.** Cheshire East's visitor economy was on track to be worth over £1bn by 2020, have reached a value of £994m in 2019. However, the impacts of the pandemic badly hit the sector, The value dropped to £548m in 2020, but according to the latest available figures, has started to recover, growing 34% and reaching £735m in 2021. Apart from the direct economic impacts on the sector, the visitor economy landscape has shifted since 2019. For example, visitors are more likely to leave bookings to the last minute, and there has been an increase in 'staycations' where families are discovering new areas to visit in England. There have been real issues in recruitment for hospitality businesses, fuel prices and the cost of living are impacting on visitor choices and the importance of sustainability and accessibility are more central to visitor and business choices.

- 6.6.** As a Local authority, Cheshire East has an important role in developing the visitor economy's local growth potential through playing a strong leadership role and catalyst for growth, creating the conditions for it to thrive, setting the planning context, investing in infrastructure, improving skills and incentivising inward investment. Cheshire East can also ensure there is an attractive environment and a rich cultural offer to attract visitors, pulling in visitors through the area's events, arts and heritage and helping to support both vibrant towns and the rural setting. The Council also has an important role in partnership with Marketing Cheshire, our Destination Management Organisation (DMO), in helping coordinate the activities of stakeholders across the destination and working with partners to achieve growth.
- 6.7.** The DMO is akin to a local or regional tourist board for a visitor destination and provides a link between local businesses or stakeholders and Visit England as the national tourism board. It produces a Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the sub-region. This is supported and informed by Cheshire East's visitor economy strategy. Destination marketing also supports 'place marketing' as the destination image helps communicate 'quality of place', raises profile and positions the area among wider audiences including prospective residents and investors.
- 6.8.** A visitor generally takes account of natural geographies and destination attributes rather than administrative boundaries. However, as a council, Cheshire East can use its Visitor Economy Strategy to guide its plans and strategies, helping to inform its decisions on an important economic sector. The council can also communicate with its residents to reflect a pride in place, support the local market and influence visiting friends and relatives. The strategy is intended to reflect the Council's aspirations and help others to engage with it in addressing the strategic priorities. The strategy helps to articulate the aspirations and priorities of local tourism clusters, sector groups and local plans – economic, rural, cultural, transport, environmental and spatial – to make the most of available capacity and resources.
- 6.9.** Despite the impact of both the pandemic and the cost of living, there are opportunities to drive further growth through increasing productivity, getting visitors to spend more when they visit, turning day visits into overnight stays, and working in partnership to improve the conditions for the visitor economy to grow.
- 6.10.** The focus of the strategy is aimed at achieving a strong and resilient visitor economy that delivers for the borough's wider economy, its residents and its visitors. The strategy identifies that the area is well positioned to exploit key themes such as:
- Outdoor experiences
  - Friends and family

- Wellness
- Treats & Celebrations
- Lifestyle and culture
- Sustainable and green

**6.11.** The visitor economy strategy identifies a number of thematic priorities for the next period. These are strategic priorities that should be considered by the council, Destination Management Organisation and businesses to address current issues and help to position the Cheshire East visitor economy for recovery and future growth. They include:

- Positioning Cheshire East as a destination of choice for staycations – both day visits & staying visits.
- Consideration of new, emerging and changing trends in the Cheshire visitor economy
- Developing initiatives focused on sustainability & the green agenda to support business growth & extend options for consumers
- Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity are prioritised in tourism development in Cheshire East.
- Working together with business to address staff shortage, recruitment, and retention in the sector
- Evolving the Business visits and events market in Cheshire East as part of a wider place-based strategy across Cheshire and Warrington

**6.12.** The visitor economy is a significant contributor to the economy, communities and profile of Cheshire East. As markets recover and develop post-pandemic, there will be a continuing need to monitor, evaluate and adapt our approach to the visitor economy to maintain growth. The strategy sets out a target for the borough's visitor economy value of £1.088bn by 2028.

**6.13.** The council cannot deliver the growth aspirations on its own. Working in partnership with Marketing Cheshire, our Destination Management Organisation (DMO), we can build on the activities of businesses and stakeholders across the destination. Business networks can help to share, intelligence and best practice, coordinate effort and build a strong offer for visitors. The common goal is to continue to develop a successful and distinctive offer for visitors that translates into growth in our visitor economy.

## **7. Consultation and Engagement**

**7.1.** The strategy and the priorities for 2023 – 2028 have been developed through consultation with hospitality & tourism business in Cheshire East as well as drawing on evidence from local, regional & national tourism bodies.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Legal**

8.1.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report and its recommendation.

### **8.2. Finance**

8.2.1. All costs associated with the development of the visitor economy strategy will be contained within existing budgets.

### **8.3. Policy**

8.3.1. The visitor economy plays an important role in Cheshire East, contributing to economic well-being and quality of place. It provides a framework for consideration of future policy and strategic direction, set alongside a number of Council strategies and plans that can help to deliver the priorities identified, so providing a thriving and sustainable place that is a great place for people to live, work and visit.

### **8.4. Equality**

8.4.1. Given that the proposal does not represent any change of policy an EIA has not been conducted. There are no direct implications for equalities.

### **8.5. Human Resources**

8.5.1. There are no direct human resource implications arising from the report and its recommendation.

### **8.6. Risk Management**

8.6.1. The risk of not developing a visitor economy strategy is that other related strategies and plans are prepared without the relevant economic objectives, priorities and direction and that the Council does not have a framework to realise the opportunity to influence.

### **8.7. Rural Communities**

8.7.1. Many of the borough's main tourism assets are in the rural area, providing employment and wider benefits to rural communities. The strategy positively addresses the rural aspects, identifying the opportunity to develop a distinctive rural offer that will generate growth in the rural economy and benefit the prosperity of Cheshire East and its Rural Communities.

### **8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

8.8.1. There are no direct implications for Children and Young People/Cared for Children arising from the report and its recommendation.

## 8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. There are no direct implications for Public Health arising from the report and its recommendation.

## 8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. The visitor economy strategy provides opportunities to help the Council in promoting actions related to environmental sustainability, reducing energy consumption and promoting healthy lifestyles, to both businesses and visitors.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix 1: Visitor Economy Strategy 2023-28
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Visitory-Economy-Strategy-2016-2020 (contensis.com)</a> Tourism recovery plan. <a href="#">Report.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>