

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## ENVIRONMENT AND PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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**Date of meeting:** 25 November 2009  
**Report of:** Head of Regeneration, Places  
**Title:** A Visitor Economy Strategic framework for Cheshire East

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### **1.0 Report Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an outline of our developing visitor economic strategy which will be shaped further with partners over the next twelve months. The paper provides a summary of the Council's emerging priorities in this area and how we will deliver a visitor economy service over the coming months.
- 1.2 The framework is prepared within a wider context, taking into account existing regional and sub-regional visitor economy strategies and the Cheshire & Warrington destination management plan. Delivery in the context of this framework will also be in partnership with business clusters, related organisations and Visit Chester and Cheshire, the sub-regional tourism board.
- 1.3 This report gives Members a framework for discussion to inform the developing strategy.

### **3.0 Strategic framework**

- 3.1 The visitor economy is an important contributor to businesses and communities in Cheshire East, generating over £600m per annum to the local economy. It contributes to improving our image, quality of life and is also a factor in why businesses locate to Cheshire East and informs individual choices over where to live & work.
- 3.2 The visitor economy will feature as a significant component of the Council's strategic economic priorities however the new Council has committed to a major focus on this area and is supporting the development of a visitor economy strategy to provide the right focus.
- 3.3 The visitor economy relates to the activity of all visitors within a destination, whether tourists or not. The visitor economy generates economic and social activity for visitors and residents alike. It not only supports jobs and economic well being, but it helps to support facilities and amenities for local communities, encourages residents to stay and spend leisure time in the local area and helps to build distinctive communities, thus increasing local pride and self-confidence. It also

enhances the image of an area, demonstrating to potential investors that the area is good to locate in. It provides a source of income for the natural and built heritage, providing an economic driver for regeneration and new uses for buildings or land.

- 3.4 The visitor economy does present an opportunity for Cheshire East to facilitate further economic growth however there are also a number of threats which need to be addressed through our strategic approach. Recent econometric modelling for Cheshire East predicts a loss of 1100 jobs in the hotel and catering industry by the end of 2012.
- 3.5 There are existing tourism strategies in place for the North West and for Cheshire and Warrington. In 2004 Cheshire & Warrington unveiled its ambitious vision for the visitor economy in 2015. A revised framework document was published in 2008 that reviewed progress, revised targets and outlined the themes and approaches that can help deliver the aspirations. This is set in the context of a Northwest Tourism Strategy that focuses its strategic objectives on attracting visitors and enhancing their experience.
- 3.6 Finally, Cheshire East has a significant role in service delivery, including culture/heritage and visitor information as well as running Tatton Park, one of the region's major strategic visitor attractions.

#### **4.0 Vision for the Cheshire East Visitor Economy**

- 4.1 The overall vision for our visitor economy is to increase the economic value to Cheshire East, through increasing visitor numbers and providing an enhanced visitor experience.
- 4.2 The strategy must be flexible enough to respond to changes in the market, including recessionary impacts. A framework for summarising some of the key issues is outlined in Appendix 1. In summary they focus on the following strategic objectives
  - Improving the quality of products and services, helping to deliver increased productivity and better performance for businesses;
  - Identifying and celebrating the distinctive offers of Cheshire East and its 'sense of place'
  - Improving the skills of the workforce and the attractiveness of our sector as an employer;
  - Improving our public realm, and the built and natural environment;
  - Supporting and encouraging signature projects
  - Supporting and encouraging a programme of sustainable events

- Making it easier for visitors to plan and book their trip, and to find the information they need to make the most of their stay.
- Considering visitor needs in decision making
- Improving customer service and the visitor experience.

## **5.0 Achievements to date**

5.1 The Visitor Economy division within Cheshire East was formed on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. The team will be very small and work closely with Visit Chester and Cheshire to deliver the priorities outlined in this report.

5.2 Achievements to date include:

5.2.1 Delivered extensive 'recession' focused programme of web-based marketing materials for key brands and supported town centre events from a visitor economy perspective.

5.2.2 Developed strong working relationship with Visit Cheshire and Chester – rebalancing the focus across the sub-region.

5.2.3 Gained agreement in principle for capital funding from NWDA to develop a Visitor Economy Hub for Cheshire East at Tatton Park.

5.2.4 Developed 2010 Tatton Biennial programme, including securing extensive funding in principle from a range of agencies.

5.2.5 Developed strong partnership links and established the Visitor Economy Forum for Cheshire East, linked to the Local Strategic Partnership.

5.2.6 Supported the development of proposals for £3m investment for Jodrell Bank

5.2.7 Developed an approach to 'visioning' for Tatton Park to realise further potential and increase visitor numbers.

5.2.8 Supported other initiatives/projects across Cheshire East including Macclesfield Silk Museum, Events review and development of sustainable towns.

## **6.0 Key Priorities 2009/11**

6.1 The following priorities have been identified for the period 2009-11:

6.1.1 Development of the Visitor Economy Strategy with full evidence base, clear targets and involving partner consultation by September 2010.

- 6.1.2 Establish a Visitor Economy Forum for Cheshire East linked to the Local Strategic Partnership, Economic Development, Learning and Skills sub-group.
- 6.1.3 Completion of Tatton Visioning by end March 2010 leading to product development.
- 6.1.4 Continued support for Jodrell Bank redevelopment.
- 6.1.5 Develop an events strategy at sub-regional and Cheshire East levels to maximise their potential benefits to the visitor economy.
- 6.1.6 Develop approaches to transform the experience of visitors through quality visitor information, supporting the development of customer service skills and taking an integrated approach to issues such as transport, signage, planning and licensing.
- 6.1.7 Develop a specific focus on business tourism through a clustering approach, development of bespoke products and/or focus on specific business or association markets.
- 6.1.8 Continue to develop ICT and digital developments to enhance the offer and assist communication, including a coordinated and integrated approach to 'i-visitor guide' and 'Discover...' web platforms.
- 6.1.9 Ensure that visitor economy issues and opportunities are incorporated within regeneration projects such as Crewe Vision, Middlewich town wharf and Macclesfield town centre review, within targeted regeneration around a 'sustainable towns' agenda and through effective place marketing.
- 6.1.10 'Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction' brand will be supported as our gardens are already a major visitor attraction and a high proportion are within Cheshire East.
- 6.1.11 Increase the use of thematic brands such as Cheshire's Peak District to reinforce the countryside experience and coordination with strategic developments through the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 6.1.12 Promote our waterways networks as a distinctive feature of our countryside, allowing visitors to explore Cheshire East's hidden gems in a unique way.
- 6.1.13 Develop partnership working and delivery through a visitor economy forum and 'hub' offices at Tatton Park and Reaseheath.
- 6.1.14 Review the TIC model for visitor information and test new approaches

## **7.0 Partnership Approach**

- 7.1 We need to align visitor activity with economic regeneration and the quality of life of our residents in order to deliver the quality destination that is vital. It therefore requires a corporate commitment to the quality of its visitor economy offer from Cheshire East Council and working through a partnership approach that involves both public and private sector, in order to succeed.
- 7.2 Our approach will sit within the context of the NorthWest Tourism Strategy and will also influence and contribute to the further development of our sub-regional Destination Management Plan.
- 7.3 The development of the Tourism and Culture Commission at a sub-regional level will provide a further opportunity to promote the assets of Cheshire East and ensure linkages across the sub-region and with the rest of the region.
- 7.4 At a local level, the Visitor Economy forum will be the main opportunity for partnership working with key stakeholders, in addition to the ongoing relationships which will be essential to delivering all aspects of the strategy.
- 7.5 Internally within Cheshire East, the linkages with Economic Development, Health and Well-being and the Partnerships Team will continue to develop.

## **8.0 Measuring success**

- 8.1 It is essential to the success of any strategy that effective research and intelligence is available to review success and to inform future decisions. This is most effectively delivered sub-regionally, but the distinctive requirements of Cheshire East must be identified and built in to future research and monitoring plans. There also needs to be good communication between Visit Chester and Cheshire and the Local authority's own research capacity to ensure effective targeting of resources.
- 8.2 At present there are few effective measures other than STEAM data to monitor the visitor economy. Effective working will necessitate access to good market research and monitoring of key indicators. New indicators may have to be considered in order to target resources effectively.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

- 9.1 The visitor economy strategy is a strategically important component of the Council's economic development priorities. It is an important contributor to the economy of Cheshire East, contributing to local quality of life, and has a positive impact on decisions over business

location and individual choices over where to live & work. The strategic framework outlines some of the issues and priorities that the Council must consider and resource if the potential of visitor economy is to be realised.

## Appendix 1. Visitor Economy Strategic Framework: Summary of Priorities

### Create the new experience

#### Communicating the message

Incorporate tourism branding into all relevant interpretation, promotion and place marketing

Prioritise support for projects that support and reinforce key brands and themes.

Encourage businesses to celebrate their stories and adopt the relevant tourism branding.

Use web and digital media to extend the reach of brands, messages and new product offers

Develop a visitor welcome training and support programme

#### Transforming the experience

Review and develop visitor information services that match visitor needs.

Create more opportunities to spend

Exploit the potential of food, drink and local products to enhance the experience

Foster high growth, high quality businesses

Build visitor needs into decision making on public realm, access, transport, planning, town centre management and other such matters

Demonstrate commitment to taking care of a high quality environment.

### Creating the offer

#### Attracting visitors

Support a strategy to focus on specific markets making best use of geographic or thematic brands with the objective of growing visitor income

Support investment in attractions and assets, with priority development of 'jewels' and support for 'polishing' 'gems'

Develop & support key geographic / thematic brands

Identify and celebrate the distinctive visitor offer of our countryside, towns, villages harnessing potential to add value to the visitor economy

Develop and promote an events programme that supports brands/themes raises profile and quality and helps to extend the season

Focus on business tourism

Build on Cheshire East's 'sense of place'

### Working together

Work in partnership with Visit Chester and Cheshire to deliver improvements in the Visitor Economy of Cheshire East

Work with partners on advocacy, influence, insight, market growth and development and to monitor progress

Recognise the critical role of local authorities in creating quality places for residents and visitors & help to create an environment that encourages entrepreneurs and developers

Work with tourism business clusters to help make most effective use of resources and business engagement

Ensure that the delivery of the strategy is monitored and success communicated