

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

## **REPORT TO: Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee**

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**Date of Meeting:** 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012  
**Report of:** Strategic Director (Places and Organisational Capacity)  
**Subject/Title:** Visitor Economy Strategy Update for Cheshire East  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Jamie Macrae

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### **1.0 Report Summary**

1.1 Following a report to Environment and Prosperity Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2010, the Visitor Economy Strategy was adopted by Council as a framework to deliver services and agree policy relating to the Visitor Economy. The Visitor Economy Strategy was approved by Cabinet and published in February 2011. This report updates on the progress made since this date.

### **2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 Members are asked to note the progress in delivery of Cheshire East's Visitor Economy Strategy with particular emphasis paid to the overall increase in the economic value of the visitor economy.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendation**

3.1 Cheshire East Council's Visitor Economy Strategy provides a framework to guide the work of the Council and its visitor economy team, its partnership with Marketing Cheshire, business associations and other partner organisations. In a difficult economic climate the visitor economy continues to make a positive contribution to the wider economy of Cheshire East through economic growth, jobs, image and profile.

### **4.0 Wards Affected**

4.1 All

### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

5.1 All

### **6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate Change - Health**

6.1 The visitor economy strategy may inform the development of other strategies, particularly economic strategies. A healthy, competitive and high performing economy will contribute to the health and well being of the

population of Cheshire East. This can help shape the scale and location of employment opportunities and encourage accessibility. The nature of the economy in future will determine the extent to which Cheshire East as a whole is able to reduce its carbon emissions particularly in relation to more sustainable travel patterns.

## **7.0 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 All costs associated with the implementation of the visitor economy strategy will be constrained within existing budgets.

## **8.0 Legal implications (authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

- 8.1 The development of the visitor economy strategy is not a statutory function.

## **9.0 Risk Management**

- 9.1 The risk of not implementing the visitor economy strategy is that other related strategies are prepared in a policy vacuum without the relevant economic objectives, priorities and direction and that the Council does not have a framework to realise the opportunity to influence the economic benefits of the visitor economy through its actions.

## **10.0 Summary**

The Visitor Economy Strategy outlined Cheshire East's priorities for the next 5 years and in the appendices provides examples of how Cheshire East is achieving our goals against these priorities. The key messages of this work can be seen below, with a detailed analysis shown in the appendix section.

- On track to meet the targets set out in the strategy (**app 1**)
- Best performing part of the sub-region in the latest STEAM figures (**app 2**)
- 17% more visitors stayed overnight in Cheshire East 2010 compared to 2009.
- Cheshire East's Visitor Economy support 8693 jobs
- Very successful 'Promoting to Visitors' campaign (**app 3**)
- Acclaimed new Macclesfield Visitor Information Centre
- Cheshire East is the top performing film location in the sub-region (**app 4**)
- Links with community and partnership organisations
- Early adopters of new & social media to spread the word
- Working closely with Visit Peak District to promote Cheshire's Peak District
- Instigated staff offers of strategic events for major Cheshire East businesses
- Work with libraries to improve the provision of visitor information
- Over 200 delegates have attended our Cheshire East Welcome Courses
- More people are choosing to stay at home – Staycations (**app 5**)

## 10.2 **Ambassadorial Role for Councillors**

There is an opportunity for Councillors to utilise their connections and influence to promote Cheshire East as 'the' place to visit with individual market towns, international respected events and world renowned attractions, and to have finely tuned 'antennae' for potential inward investment opportunities.

## 10.3 **Next Steps**

We have made good progress to achieving the Visitor Economy objectives set out in the strategy; however there is a lot of work still required to build a sustainable future for the visitor economy of Cheshire East. A programme of work has been agreed between Cheshire East and our partners Marketing Cheshire for the current financial year that will assist in meeting the set objectives. This work includes a key visitor information project that will ensure that key attractions and events are promoted at places where visitors regularly visit; including gateways, attractions and coffee shops. We will also work in partnership with Visit Peak District to enhance the reputation and visibility of Cheshire's Peak District; Cheshire East's main attack brand.

A vital part of the visitor economy work is to support and enhance existing place marketing activity being undertaken by Marketing Cheshire and Cheshire East as this is vital to our objectives. We will particularly link into 'Make it Macclesfield', All Change for Crewe' and the Sustainable Towns Network ensuring visitor economy objectives are incorporated.

## 11.0 **Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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## **Appendix 1 – Strategy Objectives**

### **Help to increase visitor numbers and improve the overall customer experience.**

- Cheshire East's Visitor Economy (2010) is currently worth over £578.4m (STEAM 2010) p/a, an increase of 6% from 2009. This is by far the biggest increase in the sub-region
- Cheshire East now attracts almost 12m visitors per year supporting 8693 jobs.
- Overnight stays in Cheshire East have increased by 17%, equating to 1.2m overnight visitors. This means visitors are staying longer; therefore spending more money locally. There are 303 accommodation providers in Cheshire East, with 9434 bed spaces.
- Cheshire East Council are aiming to develop a Visitor Economy with a value of £670m by 2015 and the latest STEAM figures show we are progressing well.
- The Visitor Economy team are working collaboratively with the sustainable towns across Cheshire East to increase jobs directly related to the Visitor Economy by around 1271 over the same period.

### **Build on our historic linkages & location, historic towns & Cheshire's Peak District to develop distinctive 'brands' & offers across Cheshire East & the sub-region, through coordinated marketing activity.**

- A joint plan has been developed with Visit Peak District to engage effectively with the Visit England brand strategy, and position Cheshire's Peak District as a key visitor destination within the Peak District offer.
- The Cheshire Peak District Website has been redeveloped to improve functionality and has new features and a new look.
- Provided PR and marketing support for the Bollington Walking Festival 2011. Evidence showed that attendees from 2010 returned to Bollington for a week long holiday throughout the duration of the 2011 festival.
- Organised the new Cheshire Peak District guide. Over 60,000 have been produced and distributed to key destinations across the North West.

**Support the development of key projects to enhance the tourism product.**

- Supported Tatton Park Vision including BeWILDerwood through promotion, planning application support and partnership development
- Supported Jodrell Bank through their planning application, partnership development and subsequent promotion of the new and improved visitor attraction.
- Supported new hotel developments, including Mere Country Club, Residence in Nantwich, Woodside Golf Club in Holmes Chapel and Alderley Edge Hotel & Spa through their planning application
- Supported Holland Nursery, Gawsworth and Wrenbury Fisheries with their planning applications to improve and add to the tourist accommodation for Cheshire East.
- Supported a Pizza Farm in High Leigh through their planning application which add's an unusual tourist attraction to Cheshire East.

**Promote and develop events throughout the year which celebrate the distinctive strengths and character of Cheshire East, contributing to its economy.**

- Given significant support to a number of high profile Cheshire East events including Cholmondeley Pageant of Power, RHS Flower Show and Nantwich Food Festival.
- Instigated staff offers for major Cheshire East businesses including Astra Zeneca, Manchester Airport, Pochins, Morning Foods and Macclesfield College; offering staff discounts off Cheshire East events.
- Ensuring we have a highly visible promotional presence at key Cheshire East events including the Cheshire Show, RHS Flower Show and the Nantwich Show.

**Make it easier for visitors to plan and book their trip, and to find the information they need to make the most of their stay, developing new approaches to visitor information provision.**

- Macclesfield Visitor Information Centre (VIC) has undergone a full refurbishment and rebrand as part of the wider economic rejuvenation of Macclesfield. With an emphasis on local events and attractions, the VIC showcases Cheshire East's visitor offer.
- Increased visitor numbers to Cheshire Market Towns website; with over 73k unique visitors since its launch in July 2010. It now receives

an average of 6k visitors per month, with a large proportion of repeat visits.

- Using social media to actively engage with audiences; gaining 2500 Twitter followers since Jan 2011, including notable followers Cheshire Life, BBC and Visit Britain.
- Improved the presence of our visitor information on relevant website's, including Trip Advisor and Wikipedia. Have also built relevant reciprocal links across the borough.

**Support the development of tourism infrastructure, an improved environment and a focus on customer service to ensure a quality visitor experience**

- VIC's were transferred from Customer Services to Visitor Economy in April 2011. Research was undertaken to determine usage, footfall and spending patterns, informing a revamp of the VICs to make them more attractive and increase profit. Sales have increased by over 30% this year, despite the national economic downturn.
- Working with library's to improve the provision of visitor information. This focused on improving the quality of information on offer, staff training and improved external signage and visual branding.
- Developed and implemented a borough wide visitor information project where numerous visitor touch points within our market towns have access to and showcase the best events and attractions in Cheshire East.

**Work with partners to encourage and facilitate business sector development in areas such as food, equestrian, accommodation, attractions development, skills training & visitor welcome.**

- Organised a number of Welcome Courses aimed at local businesses and service providers that regularly come into contact with visitors. The courses seek to improve local tourism knowledge and ensure that people are promoting Cheshire East with pride, passion and enthusiasm. Over 200 delegates have now attended, with courses developed for taxi drivers, hoteliers, library staff and Cheshire East staff.

**Ensure Visitor Economy needs & opportunities are taken into account as part of regeneration projects & decisions relating to planning, transport, public realm, events, culture and countryside/greenspace.**

- Visitor Economy has a strong presence within the Sustainable Towns Agenda; Make it Macclesfield, All Change for Crewe, Local transport Plan, Public Rights of Way and events throughout Cheshire East. An example of how this is working is the new VIC in Macclesfield that was integral to the development of the town and incorporates the values of the Make it Macclesfield brand along with close ties to local producers

## Appendix 2

### Changes in STEAM Data Explained

STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) is recognised, nationally and internationally, as a research programme which aims to measure the impact of tourism from both staying, and day visitors in terms of the following:

- Tourist expenditure
- Employment
- Tourist numbers and days
- Traffic generated by tourists

There was a report for 2009 using the new tourist northwest visitor survey data - this report included 2008 figures using the same information. For comparison, the original £653.076m Total Economic Impact figure for 2008 became £552.281m using the northwest visitor survey data. This data has been implemented nationally.

Tourist days were adjusted from 18.214m (old) downward to 13.282m (new). This was largely due to revised estimates of tourist day visitor numbers (arising from the visitor survey) (accounting for a change of -4.7m tourist days) but better data on accommodation stock led to a further change of -211k tourist days in the staying visitor estimates.

#### ***Projecting forward from the revised 2008 total of £552m by 2.8% a year:***

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
<b>Base</b>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
<b>Total Economic Impact</b>	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	
<i>New Data - Following North West Visitor Survey</i>	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
<b>Total in millions (£m)</b>	552	567	583	599	616	634	651	670	688

## Appendix 3

### Promoting to Visitors

The Visitor Economy team set up a project to support small marketing campaigns, promotional projects or tourism infrastructure, where it could be demonstrated that there will be a net benefit to the local area's visitor

economy. The projects were to be delivered by a promotional or tourism partnership/organisation related to a town or local area.

The objectives of the projects were to encourage people to spend locally; raise the tourism profile of the area; support the visitor economy strategy for Cheshire East and boost business confidence. Applicants would demonstrate their ability to take advantage of an area's tourism potential, aid local economic recovery and support Cheshire East's visitor economy strategy priorities.

There were a total of 7 different projects included in the umbrella of Promoting to Visitors Project. These were:

- All About Alsager
- Audlem
- Bearmania
- Disley Well Dressing
- Historic Macclesfield
- Visit Knutsford
- Taste of Middlewich

Cheshire East Council made an investment of £18,000 into these projects. For a relatively small investment the projects collectively resulted in:

- A significant promotional and marketing campaign which reached millions of people, including coverage in the national media
- Substantial increases in visitor footfall in each town
- Some local businesses reported huge increases in trade and footfall
- Excellent positive social impact through the development and continuation of community groups engaging with each other for the benefit of the local community – all contributing to the Big Society agenda

Some key facts and figures to illustrate this are:

- Over 40,000 different pieces of print produced and distributed across all projects – a positive force in raising brand awareness of the towns and Cheshire East in general to a wider audience
- Combined visitor and/or user footfall figures of 65,000 with some venues reporting huge increases in footfall (e.g. Congleton Museum reported a 700% increase in footfall)
- The Ford Dealership manager from Congleton stated in the Financial Times that the Bear by their showroom was his best salesman
- Over 76,000 were reached via digital marketing (websites, e-newsletters, social media etc)
- The Historic Macclesfield Project alone had an audience reach of over 13.1 million with a total media value of £89,675. The true reach is likely to be far in excess of this for the project at a macro-level
- Although it cannot be directly attributed to the success of each individual project there has been positive data reported across



participating towns in the Cheshire East Market Town Benchmarking Report 2012 (e.g. across many of the participating towns there are less vacant units in 2011 than there were in 2010)

The real figure for media reach is likely to be significantly higher than this but data has not been captured

If you would like the full copy of the evaluation report; this can be supplied by the Visitor Economy department.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Visitor Economy Fact Sheet – ‘Did you know’**

**Film locations** – We are now actively marketing Cheshire East as a Film Friendly location and in the past 18 months we have welcomed a number of film and TV productions including The Body Farm (BBC) – 6 part BBC1 Crime drama following Dr Eve Lockhart, one of the UK’s leading forensic pathologists and her team of scientists at their state of the art forensic research facility. The production located their state of the art research facility at High Lees Farm in Macclesfield and also shot key scenes at Arley Hall, Handforth Dean Retail Park (Wilmslow), Brook Farm (Macclesfield) and Club AZ (Alderley Park).

Recently, we welcomed Mrs Biggs (ITV Studios) - The drama is based around the life of Charmian, the ex-wife of the Great Train Robber, Ronald Biggs. The drama shot scenes at Golden Cross Farm (Macclesfield), Sandbach Farm (Henbury) and at Lower Peover.

We have also agreed to a new 6 part comedy drama for BBC entitled “Hebburn”, starring Vic Reeves. This will bring a payment of £5k into the Council as we will be charging for use of a redundant council building in Handforth.

In September BBC 2 will be filming Michael Portillo in his ‘Great British Railway Journey’s’ series. The filming will take place in and around Crewe and Congleton.

**Partnership working** - Visitor Economy input was given to the Economic Development Strategy, Rights of Way improvement plan and the developing Sustainable Tourism strategy of Peak District National Park. We have also developed strong and successful partnerships with a range of groups including Marketing Cheshire, Cheshire Peaks & Plains Tourist Association, South Cheshire Tourist Cluster, a number of Local Area Partnerships and a large number of market towns.

**Twitter** - Twitter connects Cheshire East’s Visitor Economy to potential visitors in real time to quickly share information with those interested in what is happening in and around Cheshire East. Twitter is a free service offering us easy and cost effective way to reach our audience. Currently we have over 2500 followers and growing of our Cheshire Market Towns Twitter account.

**Coronation Street** – Through building relationships with location directors, Visitor Economy managed to persuade Coronation Street to film a major wedding at Tatton Park; effectively showcasing Tatton to an audience of almost 20 million.

**Brown Signs** – The Visitor Economy is playing a vital part in delivering an up-to-date brown sign strategy for Nantwich.

**Best performing part of the sub-region** – With the latest STEAM figures in for the sub-region, Cheshire East is leading the way in boosting the economic value of the visitor economy to the region. Cheshire East's Visitor Economy increased by 6%, with Warrington increasing by 2% and Cheshire West staying stable.

## Appendix 5

### Current trends

Trip volumes increased in the UK in December 2011 compared to December 2010, particularly for holidays and visits to friends and relatives (VFR).

In 2011, trips, bed nights and expenditure increased for all trip purposes. Business trips saw the greatest increase, while expenditure on these trips increased by 21%. VFR trips increased by 10% and holidays increased by 7%, while expenditure for both increased by 13%.

During the year, trip volumes in Great Britain increased for all age groups, social grades and household types. However, they increased particularly among higher age groups (35+), the higher social grades (AB and C1) and among those without children

Most types of accommodation benefited from the increase in trip volumes; this was particularly the case for hotels/guest houses and self-catering accommodation.

All English regions saw an increase in trip volumes in 2011 except London.

'Switchers' took at least one holiday in England that directly replaced a holiday they would have taken abroad. Extras' took more domestic holidays than they had done previously. Together, these groups ('Staycationers') drove the uplift in domestic holidays and saw 5% more domestic holidays in England than in 2010. 2012 holidays to England and abroad are likely to be similar to 2011 (although predictions indicate a 4% rise for England holidays vs 2011) Once through the recession, half feel likely to take more UK holiday than they used to, particularly those who took Staycations in 2011.