

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 7 September 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Tourism Strategy for East Devon

Report summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement for the proposed Tourism Strategy for East Devon as set out at Appendix A.

The report provides a summary of the key aspects of the Tourism Strategy which seeks to support the tourism sector to achieve sustainable growth and deliver economic benefits to the district. The strategy document outlines our strategic vision and key objectives in a mid-term 5-year strategy.

As part of our Council vision, we are striving to provide a healthier, more beautiful natural environment that inspires, educates and involves residents and visitors to East Devon. Tourism plays an integral part of this vision and brings many economic and social benefits, helping support our local cultural activities within our vibrant towns, villages and hamlets.

Our ambition is to become the leading, year-round tourism destination in Devon, whose diverse ecosystem of outstanding natural environments, distinctive, high-quality businesses, set within towns and villages, all thrive and grow through a commitment to Net Zero, accessibility and collaboration.

The draft strategy has been developed in alignment with the Cultural strategy for East Devon and has informed the EDDC's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan approved by Cabinet on 13th July. A number of relevant projects will be delivered via the Sustainable Tourism Fund, one of our 12 SPF interventions.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendations:

That Cabinet

- Endorses the proposed Tourism Strategy for East Devon as set out at Appendix A

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Council delivers on its vision and key priorities outlined in the Council Plan, especially its resilient economy priority, where the ambition to deliver a tourism strategy with emphasis on the green economy is outlined.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Medium Impact. The Tourism Strategy will facilitate interventions designed to support the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy and the transition to a zero carbon economy.

Risk: Medium Risk; The report scopes out the strategic framework required for the development of the tourism sector in the district, which is reliant to funding to be released via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Links to background information

[Tourism Strategy for East Devon](#)

Cabinet Report 13th July 2022: [Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan](#)

Cabinet Report 12th May 2021: [Tourism and cultural sector offer](#)

Cabinet Report 15th June 2022: [Culture Strategy Arts Culture Forum report](#)

Growth Development & Prosperity: [Key Service Objectives for 2022-2023](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1 Background and context

1.1 Within our [Council Plan](#), EDDC makes clear that the overriding priority is to strive for a resilient economy in order to promote prosperity and reduce hardship within the district, increasing the quality of our employment, and the use of assets and planning policies to support regeneration. It recognises the economic as well as the social value of tourism, art and culture to the local economy and the wealth that is generated in those sectors.

1.2 One of the identified priority actions for a resilient economy is to deliver a tourism strategy with emphasis on the green economy.

1.3 Following on from that aspiration and commitment, the Economic Development team within our Growth, Development and Prosperity Service led on the development of a tourism

strategy for East Devon. The brief for this work set out the requirement to develop a shared 5 year vision and strategy for the district's tourism offer. The brief specification received Portfolio Holder endorsement and overwhelmingly positive feedback during a wide consultation with local tourism organisations.

1.4 The brief defined that the strategy needs to reflect the district's unique character, take advantage of its key assets, its environmental capital and any opportunities aligned with cultural tourism. It determined that the work should be built on the core principles of sustainability, resilience, innovation, accessibility and inclusivity.

1.5 It needed to align with the Council's vision for a clean and greener future, with improved accessibility, good quality employment and higher wages across the area. It had to be designed in partnership and collaboratively with our emerging District Culture Strategy.

1.6 Following a robust procurement process, a strategy specialist was appointed in May 2022 with strategy development work finalised at the end of July.

1.7 The appointed consultants have examined existing strategies, conducted extensive stakeholder engagement, examined national tourism trends, analysis and research to build an evidence based approach. The resultant mid-term strategy is aimed to be achievable but ambitious, identifying a direction, interventions and role for East Devon District Council that will create lasting impact for the area's tourism sector.

2 Value of Tourism and impact of the pandemic

2.1 According to Visit England, Devon was the fourth most popular visitor destination in England in 2018. Before Covid, East Devon attracted an average of 6.7m visitors a year, worth £352m to the local economy. The District has the third highest number of visitors in Devon, behind Plymouth and Exeter cities, and the second highest expenditure behind Plymouth. East Devon has a strong reputation for the quality of its natural environment, its food and drink offer with quality local producers, wide range of tourist attractions and accommodation providers. The tourism economy is based predominantly on UK tourists, with international visitors worth less than 5% in 2020.

2.2 The sector directly employs 2,479 people (1,692 FTE), indirectly 696 (expenditure by businesses in direct receipt of visitor expenditure on the purchase of goods and services for their businesses) and induced 262 (induced jobs are those that are supported by the spending of wages by employees in direct and indirect jobs). Overall, therefore, the tourism sector employs an estimated 3,438 people (2,532 FTE equivalent).¹

2.3 Though the local economy benefitted from the move to local holidays and staycation during the pandemic, it was strongly affected, like all tourism areas, by the economic shocks of the pandemic. Total tourism expenditure fell from the average £352m to just over £155.6m in 2020.

2.4 Figures for 2021 are not yet available, though anecdotally from the private sector engagement carried out as part of this strategy, most companies enjoyed a far more buoyant season in 2021. This is though tempered by people now tightening up on spend in 2022. The industry remains in an extremely challenging position, underlining the need for a strategic approach to identify how to best support recovery of the sector.

¹ Source: *The Economic Impact of the East Devon Visitor Economy 2020 - The South West Research Company Ltd*

3 Tourism Strategy – Key Elements

3.1 To leverage the strengths of the East Devon tourism offer and maximise the potential of the future opportunities identified by the strategy, the Tourism Strategy includes the following vision statement:

‘Our vision is for East Devon to be the leading, year-round tourism destination in Devon, whose diverse ecosystem of outstanding natural environments, distinctive, high-quality businesses, towns and villages, all thrive and grow through a commitment to Net Zero, accessibility and collaboration’

3.2 The vision statement is ambitious but achievable, reflecting the district’s local unique character and aligning with the Council Plan vision. It builds on the quality of the existing tourism offer and encourages growth through a commitment to quality, sustainability and inclusivity. The vision also reflects the breadth of the tourism sector, acknowledging the connectivity between direct expenditure and employment, supply chains, and induced jobs.

3.3 The statement has been set at a Devon geographical area as we believe this should be attainable in a five-year timeframe. Longer term, both the council and the private sector would like to achieve a leadership position across the South West, but further work will be needed to build the foundations before this larger goal can be achieved.

3.4 The strategy is built on the following values:

- **Sustainability and accessibility:** strong focus on sustainability, ‘green’ best practice and accessibility across the sector, linking policy, planning and support for businesses
- **Collaboration:** make it easier for customers to access our offer, build the district’s reputation, share best practice and create new opportunities for innovation by working in partnership and fostering collaboration with all partners.
- **Preserving and connecting with nature:** protect the natural capital of our outstanding environment and its biodiversity, sympathetically leveraging its assets to grow the sector and its economic contribution.
- **Inclusivity:** support tourism, from the countryside to the coast, enabling the whole district area to develop and prosper.

3.5 To achieve the vision, the strategy sets six objectives linked to growth, fostering collaboration, net zero and improving accessibility:

1. **A modest increase in the volume of visitors coming to East Devon:** increase visitor numbers to 6.7m in two years (end 2024) and grow by 1% annually to reach 6.9m visitors per year by the end of the strategy (2027).
2. **Increase value of those visitors coming to East Devon:** the strategy will target growing the value of each visitor who comes to the District. We will target average spend per head at £56 by the end of 2022 (a 5% increase), rising by 3% per year to £63/head by year 5. (**NB:** To monitor progress against these first 2 objectives, EDDC will commit to procuring annual tourism economic impact data to quantify the value and volume of visitor numbers and to track relevant growth).

3. **Curate and develop 4 product propositions:** create 4 core themes (Natural Diversity, Food and Drink, Active Nature and Visual Arts and Festivals) aimed at developing a year-round tourism offer and growing the numbers of visitors in low season.
4. **Actively support tourism businesses to reduce carbon usage and improve accessibility:** Build on the activity of the Innovation and Resilience Fund project, led by Visit Sidmouth, which aims to establish Green Champions businesses, providing training, mentoring and support to decrease carbon footprint and other environmental goals. We will build on the learnings of this project and implement a new Sustainable Tourism Fund to support the tourism sector to commit to net zero and improve accessibility.
5. **Build a sustainable, collaborative, private sector network:** foster collaboration by supporting the development of an East Devon Tourism Network based on the shared values of quality, net zero, improving accessibility and collaboration. Facilitating partnership working will maximise the potential of the area and provide a platform for the development of the core themes as well as providing industry feedback on challenges such as skills, investment and transport.
6. **Embed the tourism strategy into the wider local policy context:** embed and link the tourism strategy across wider policy areas such as the emerging Local Plan. We will work with colleagues across the council to ensure the tourism strategy vision is supported and influences other policy areas where relevant.

4 Critical Success Factors

The strategy outlines the following success criteria, against which we can measure its successful delivery:

- **Short to medium term viability:** Does the solution work to grow and develop the tourism sector in the short to medium term? Will it help the district create a more resilient sector?
- **Clarity of roles:** Does the strategy clearly identify the role of EDDC and help provide clarity as to who does what within the tourism economy of East Devon. Is the proposed model of delivery based on partnerships and collaborations, guided by a joined-up agenda that encourages innovation and development?
- **Alignment with cultural strategy:** Does the solution build on and align with the recently approved Cultural strategy? Is there synergy between the two pieces of work?
- **Responsible and sustainable:** Is the strategy sustainable? Will it underpin EDDC's aim of achieving net zero by 2040?
- **Accessible and inclusive:** Does the strategy address how the area can improve its inclusivity and accessibility, sharing and stimulating best practice across the industry? Does it address how to leverage the growth potential within relevant markets?

- **Overcome future challenges:** Does the strategy identify the main challenges to sector growth and how EDDC can work in collaboration to address these risks, sharing innovation and best practice across the sector?
- **Achievable growth:** Does the strategy outline and provide a direction on how to achieve future growth for the sector?

5 Synergy with EDDC Culture Strategy

5.1 The tourism strategy has been developed in collaboration with the East Devon Culture Strategy. The Culture Strategy identified that the District has a strong, network of smaller cultural assets, some of which have the potential to be developed further to attract visitors, as do some of the 15 festivals identified during the process of the cultural strategy development.

5.2 The work streams of the new Culture Strategy for East Devon will establish new cultural products, partnerships and promotional activity to grow the creative and visitor economies.

5.3 There is scope for the new proposed cultural producer role and the wider ACED (Arts and Culture East Devon) network to support 'product development' in this sector so that stronger cultural offers are evolved, which serve to attract visitors to East Devon.

5.4 By investing in visual arts, via Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Killerton House and Ocean, along with a map showing the range of private sector galleries, there is potential to create an art trail, with standout exhibitions with international appeal. It is anticipated this new product could attract visitors in the shoulder and low season, growing the 'culture vulture' audience segment.

5.5 East Devon has over 15 festivals/year, including flagship summer events such the Sidmouth Folk Festival and Beautiful Days. By supporting and coordinating the promotion of events which take place in June/early July and September/October, there is potential to grow shoulder season trade.

5.6 It is anticipated that the investment and focus of the cultural core theme will need to be developed over the mid-term, with any work linked to product development and promotion being led by the cultural producer and cultural compact. The goal of this core theme is to attract a larger audience to explore the full range of cultural activity in the district.

5.7 There is clear synergy between the development of the cultural and tourist offer and a clear overlap and joined-up thinking in the creation of the two strategies.

6 The Role of EDDC

6.1 As part of the strategy development, there has been strong feedback to provide greater clarity on the future role of East Devon District Council.

6.2 Based on analysis of possible roles and the extensive stakeholder engagement, the strategy proposes that EDDC takes on the role of **Enabler**; filling gaps in the market and leading policy to facilitate change. To fulfil this role existing Economic Development Officer resource from within the Growth, Prosperity and Development service will be dedicated to work with partners to help to fulfil the tourism strategy's vision. At this stage, we are not recommending new staff resource recruitment since EDDC will not be taking a leading role in

terms of driving sector development. This is an important element of the work and to be understood by all parties if expectations are to be effectively managed.

6.3 As an Enabler, the council could facilitate growth, drive policy and change by working with third parties/external partners. Resources and funding could be targeted to areas currently not supported by other parties (for example, product development within the proposed key themes) and they could deliver strategic change via policy commitments, but this model is reliant on other parties working in collaboration.

6.4 As part of the new framework, it is proposed that EDDC will act as facilitator, engaging with tourism businesses to ensure their challenges inform delivery of the County Deal skills commitments. If East Devon can evidence a strong, collaborative private/public sector working relationship, then they will be well positioned to make representations, test and inform any pilot programmes. As per Objective 5 of the Tourism Strategy, EDDC will be commissioning an organisation to develop and deliver a new tourism network as part of our enabling role. EDDC will also be able to use the network to share new funding opportunities and any future skills programmes to ensure the sector is up to date with the latest initiatives to resolve the current skills shortages.

7 Next steps

7.1 In order to fund the delivery of the proposed strategy, several funding streams have already been identified:

- Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) – Sustainable Tourism Fund £210k allocation over 3 years and £95k East Devon Culture Programme
- Innovation Funds (both as part of SPF and any forthcoming national funding streams) – to support Zero carbon schemes and other schemes that may arise through greater partnership working
- Arts Council England – support cultural development
- County Deal – recommendations currently include pilot to improve tourism recruitment within the County, new initiatives to improve skills provision and improved transport links.

7.2 Subject to Cabinet approval of the Tourism Strategy, our first quarter implementation will cover the following elements:

- Establish partnership working between the new Cultural Producer role and existing Economic Development Officer resource
- Procure 2021 tourism impact data as baseline
- Communicate final strategy to all stakeholders who supported its development
- Seek to include tourism strategy in the emerging Local Plan
- Employ SPF funds to procure local partner to establish and operate a new East Devon Tourism Network
- Network Partner to commission proposed 'What's On' Cultural Hub
- Host first event of the network

8 Conclusion

8.1 Having commissioned and developed the Tourism Strategy for East Devon, developed through extensive consultation with the tourism sector and internal stakeholders, endorsement is now sought for this strategy presented in Appendix A.

8.2 If approved, implementation of the strategy will leverage and build on existing strengths in both the tourism sector and the wider economy to reposition the district, attracting visitors and investment.

8.3 By focusing our resources on the strategy's key objectives, the district will have four pillars on which we can raise our profile, increase investment, attract both national and international visitors and maintain our reputation for quality whilst also supporting the sector to be more accessible to both visitors and residents and working collaboratively towards achieving net zero.

Financial implications:

At this stage and within the recommendations of the report there is no additional financial implications identified.

Legal implications:

There is no direct comment to be made in relation to this report, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises.

Appendix A: East Devon Tourism Strategy

Appendix B: List of stakeholders

EDDC

DCC

Exeter Airport

Higher Wiscombe Cottages

Crealy Theme Park

Darts Farm

Ladram Bay Holiday Park

The Pig at Combe

Two Drifters Distillery

The Donkey Sanctuary

Otter Brewery

Dalwood Vineyard

Killerton House

Edge Watersports

Alpine Park Cottages

Andrewshayes Holiday Park

Heron Farm

Glebe House

Sidmouth Hotels

Deer Park

Mazzard Farm

Seaton Tramway

Lympstone Manor

River Cottage HQ

LED Leisure - Ocean

Visit Devon

Visit Sidmouth

Visit South Devon

Food and Drink Devon

Jurassic Coast Trust

East Devon AONB

Blackdown Hills AONB

Hollie Smith-Charles – FEI (lead for Cultural Strategy)

Visit England

Services 4 Tourism