

REPORT TITLE: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY – SCOPING PLAN

TUESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Lucille Thompson, Cabinet Member for Economy & Culture

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WARD(S): ALL

## PURPOSE

The Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) identified the potential to develop a more sustainable tourism and visitor economy. The strategy recommended the need to deliver an overarching and coordinated vision to make Winchester district a national leader in this sector, improve connectivity and coordination across the district and support tourist sector businesses to become more sustainable, maximising growth potential.

The development of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy (STS) was an agreed action in the 2022/2024 GEDS Action Plan for the district.

This is a critical time for the council to develop this new strategy that clearly states its intentions to be greener faster and further the transition to a low/zero carbon visitor economy, reflecting the council's climate emergency declaration and its ambition for Winchester district to be carbon neutral by 2030.

This paper introduces the work to date and plan to draft the STS. The strategy will provide insight into the scale of the task needed along with a concise and achievable road map of practical steps and tangible outcomes that are collaboratively driven, aligned, and shared primarily to:

- influence the transition of businesses operating in the visitor economy to adopting more sustainable practices,
- encourage visitors to adopt sustainable leisure choices,
- position Winchester district to consumers and residents as a sustainable visitor destination, ensuring that the district's visitor economy is well placed

alongside its competitors and recognised as a sustainable tourism destination.

It will inform the content of a new Destination Management Plan to replace the expired plan, see other background documents. This will set out the overall direction for the visitor economy across the Winchester district over the next five years.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Policy Committee are asked to:

1. Review and comment on the approach outlined which will underpin the process to deliver a Sustainable Tourism Strategy,
2. Note the planned resources to enable development and delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy,
3. Note the timeline for delivery and opportunity for input from the Policy Committee,
4. Note the next steps.

## 1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

1.1 The strategy will be delivered from a combination of existing staff resources with additional expertise and capacity from external organisations as required. This will be funded from existing budget and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Confirmation of this fund from government remains outstanding. If this funding does not become available a combination of alternative options would need to be considered. These would include:

- securing alternative funding streams/budget,
- reallocation of existing staff resources and priorities,
- reducing the scope of the development of the strategy

1.2 Internally the Service Lead: Economy & Tourism will be responsible for this programme of work, supported by the Tourism Marketing and Development Manager. A review of resource will be undertaken in line with the findings and recommendations of the STS. Delivery of the strategy will require organisation wide support and therefore will be dependent on embedding the findings and recommendations from the strategy in the work programmes across a number of council services including Economic Development, Sustainability, Planning etc. as well as Tourism Marketing and Development.

1.3 The internal resource will be supported via contracting a sustainable tourism specialist to deliver the evidence base section of the strategy and assist in facilitating industry consultation. This will be funded from an allocation of £8,000 from UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022/23. A further £5,000 per year in the remaining two years of the fund has also been allocated to undertake visitor marketing and promotional campaigns to support the positioning of Winchester district as a sustainable tourism destination.

## 2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

2.1 Developing a STS aligns directly with Council Plan priorities including the council's intentions to be 'greener faster' and also 'pride of place', ensuring the special aspects of the district's heritage, open spaces and public realm are cared for and available for everyone to enjoy.

2.2 As the visitor economy across the district continues to recover from the pandemic and it addresses the current challenges around recruitment, increased operating costs and customers with reduced disposable income resulting from increased cost of living, it is anticipated the sector will recover and continue to grow. Negative impacts caused because of tourism will therefore also grow, indicating the need for these to be carefully managed and mitigated through sustainable tourism practices.

- 2.3 Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organisation as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”
- 2.4 The emerging STS will be considered as a “live” document being adapted to reflect the findings which become apparent through the development process.
- 2.5 The purpose of scoping the approach to the development of a STS is to encourage input from members and stakeholders in order to ensure the correct framework is developed to bring about a comprehensive, fully informed, dynamic strategy that is owned and delivered by all stakeholders in the visitor economy operating across the Winchester district and beyond.

### **Scope of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy**

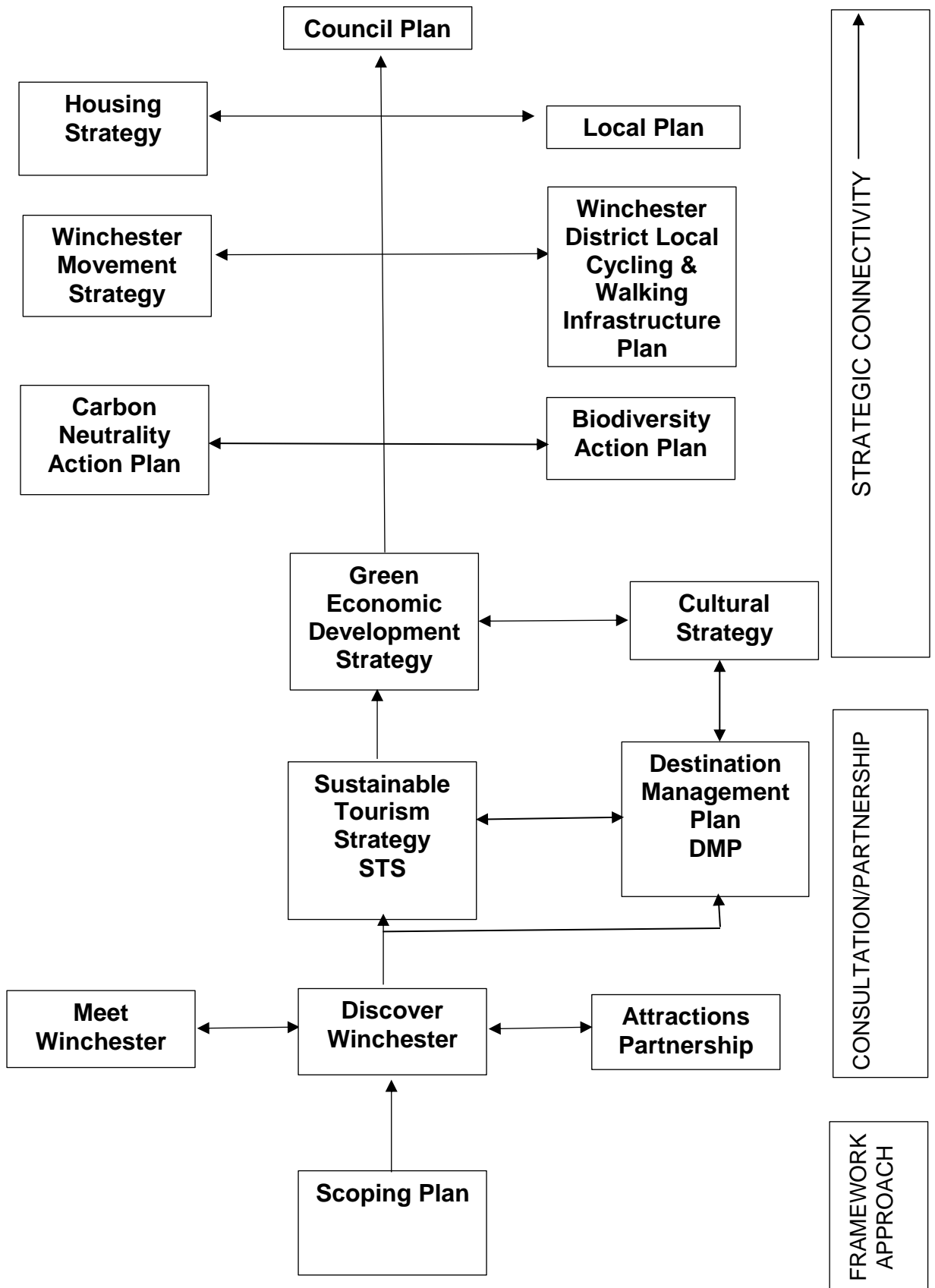
- 2.6 The STS will seek to:
- Mitigate the negative impacts to the Winchester district, including economic leakage, damage to the natural environment, and honey pot locations, through marketing and promotional activity creating reasons to visit across the whole district and all year around. In doing so, this will spread the economic benefits whilst limiting the environmental impacts in specific locations,
  - Leverage the positive impacts to the Winchester district including job retention and creation, cultural heritage preservation and interpretation, wildlife preservation, landscape restoration etc.
- 2.7 The STS will be underpinned by:
- the case for a sustainable visitor economy,
  - collaboratively driven development of a vision, strategic aims and objectives and deliverable actions,
  - a set of realistic indicators to measure and monitor progress,
  - the collaborative development and delivery of a Destination Management Plan (DMP) incorporating the actions outlined in the STS.
- 2.8 The purpose of the strategy will:
- adopt sustainability in a social, economic and environmental context,
  - build on what is already a well-established and recognised visitor economy, delivering for both visitors and residents,
  - act as a lever to attract investment,

- encourage existing businesses operating within the visitor economy to adopt more sustainable business practices,
- attract new sustainable businesses who are seeking to be part of the story to set up operation within the district's visitor economy,
- to encourage further development and adoption of local sustainable produce,
- influence the nature of the district's infrastructure, particularly around the provision of public transport to facilitate visitors in making sustainable travel options, reducing dependency upon the car when visiting the area,
- address training and skills solutions to better enable the adoption of sustainable tourism practices across the visitor economy,
- position Winchester district to consumers and residents as a sustainable visitor destination and in doing so differentiate itself from others to improve its competitive advantage whilst positively influencing seasonal fluctuations and overall influencing the volume and value of the visitor economy across the district.

2.9 An evidence base will be produced initially which will inform the roadmap and examples include:

- the current profile of the visitor economy,
- an overview of available sustainable tourism product and infrastructure,
- best practice from destinations and tourism products who are leaders in the field,
- detailed gap and investment analyses with associated overview of challenges, barriers and interventions including investment needs.

2.10 The diagram below illustrates the connectivity between with STS and other council strategies and its flow of production from scoping via consultation groups to delivery.



- 2.11 To date a review of a range of Sustainable Tourism Strategies developed by leading destinations in this field has been undertaken, contributing to the scoping plan for the development of the STS. Examples include South Downs National Park, Cumbria Tourism Strategy, Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Brecon Beacons Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Peak District Sustainable Tourism Strategy and key competitor cities including Oxford, Bath and Canterbury.
- 2.12 The STS scoping plan has been tested in principle and has been positively received by stakeholders across the district's visitor economy. This has been undertaken via established industry groups and forums, facilitated by the city council, including the Attractions Forum, Discover Winchester Stakeholder Group as well as industry-wide communications via the regular tourism e-news and economy business bulletins. In addition, feedback from Marwell Zoo, local leaders in sustainability, and Hampshire Fare, champions for local produce have been undertaken.

Focussed engagement with these key groups, along with the reforming Meet Winchester consortium, Festivals Group, Cultural Network, market towns, local Chambers of Trade, amongst others, supported by dedicated dialogue in industry newsletters, will ensure that the development of the STS is supported and owned by the visitor economy across the district.

- 2.13 The STS and developing Cultural Strategy are both closely connected and embrace the wider retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Each will establish links and dependencies between each other. An example of this is the findings of the Festivals Review, undertaken this year and funded from the Welcome Back/Return to the High Street fund.

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of the economic impact of festivals in the Winchester district and their potential for future development. Response rates within the review were limited but it clearly established the growth of the festivals and events programme in the past twelve years, going from six to more than thirty festivals across the district. Despite this growth challenges around funding and financial sustainability, sourcing and retention of suitable volunteers were highlighted along with the risk of an over-crowded calendar, the latter to be resolved through the development and adoption of a Festivals Programming Policy. The research showed that, in general, businesses recognised the benefit that festivals and events offer but equally reported a limited financial impact and very few engaged in any focussed marketing or promotions to capitalise on planned festivals and events. See full report in Other Background Documents below.

2.14 The STS will be developed and delivered in four distinct stages:

<b>Workstream one: The case for a Sustainable Tourism Economy Winter/Spring 2022/23</b>
<p>Evidence base, examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Current Performance of the visitor economy</li> <li>2. Visitor profile</li> <li>3. Audit of tourism product</li> <li>4. Local issues assessment</li> <li>5. Trends</li> <li>6. Competitor analysis</li> <li>7. Gap and demand analysis</li> </ol>
<b>Workstream two: Establishing strategy and direction – consultation/partnership led Spring 2023</b>
<p>WCC in partnership with established industry groups will consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The case for sustainable tourism</li> <li>2. Brainstorming: SWOT/PEST/USPs/Sustainable Tourism – Winchester district’s definition/challenges and barriers</li> <li>3. Identifying the principles and aims of the district’s sustainable visitor economy</li> <li>4. Shaping the strategic direction and priorities</li> <li>5. Alignment and mapping to existing strategies and policies</li> </ol>
<b>Workstream three: Vision &amp; Strategy development – consultation/partnership led Spring/Summer 2023</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing the vision statement</li> <li>2. Identifying strategic objectives and targets</li> <li>3. Establishing the actions and prioritisation</li> <li>4. Roles &amp; Responsibilities</li> <li>5. Draft STS to be considered at June 2023 meeting of the Business &amp; Housing Policy Committee</li> </ol>
<b>Workstream four: Measuring Progress &amp; Maintaining Direction Consultation/partnership led Summer 2023 onwards</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embed the findings and recommendations of the STS in the development and delivery of a Destination Management Plan created in partnership with stakeholders across the visitor economy</li> <li>2. Deliver STS actions through existing groups and forums and develop new ones as required</li> <li>3. Set indicators and undertake monitoring</li> </ol>



### 3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3.1 The following options were considered:

3.2 Do nothing: The production of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, whilst an action in the Green Economic Development Strategy, is a discretionary function and the council could adopt not to publish a new strategy or replace the previous Destination Management Plan. This option has been rejected given:

- a) the need to continue the transition to a green sustainable economy in which the visitor economy plays a significant part,
- b) the risk the lack of a strategy might have in retaining and developing the volume and value the visitor economy represents as part of the wider district's economy,
- c) the risk that the lack of a strategy might have in corralling the visitor economy to work together in delivering a co-ordinated compelling offer to the visitor.

3.3 Develop a short-term visitor economy management and recovery plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and current economic conditions including the cost of living crisis: This option was rejected. The recovery from the pandemic and the challenges emerging from the current economic conditions need to be embedded in a longer term strategy which will bring about a more effective transition to a green sustainable visitor economy.

3.4 Contract the complete development of the strategy out to a consultant: This option was rejected. The city council currently has robust relationships with stakeholders and businesses operating in the visitor economy locally and it also works in partnership with regional and national tourism bodies already. The Tourism Marketing and Development team are well positioned to carry out this work and in doing so use it as a platform to further strengthen existing and increase relationships in the visitor economy.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

##### Previous Committee Reports:-

None

##### Other Background Documents:-

Festivals Review

Visit Winchester Destination Management Plan 2015 - 2020

#### APPENDICES:

None

# **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**