

REPORT TITLE: APPROVAL OF THE TOURISM STRATEGY FOR WINCHESTER DISTRICT

12 MARCH 2026

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Lucille Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business & Culture

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

This report sets out the Tourism Strategy (see Appendix 1) for the Winchester district to 2031. The strategy aims to:

- guide Winchester district's visitor economy into a new era of sustainable growth
- provide a collective roadmap for the entire district, providing a clear vision and actionable plan to enhance the appeal of Winchester district.

Underpinned by a comprehensive evidence, base and an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement, the strategy sets out priorities under four themes: Market Focus; Positioning and Destination Marketing; Destination Development and Destination Management. Within each of these areas there are a series of priorities and suggested actions.

The strategy provides a robust framework that not only strengthens our local visitor economy but also positions us as a leading contributor to the delivery of tourism support across a broader geography through the Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP).

This approach aligns with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and creates opportunities to play a pivotal role in future devolution arrangements for driving regional growth and collaboration. It ensures Winchester district's expertise and assets are at the heart of shaping Hampshire's visitor economy of the future.

As the LGR arrangements are confirmed and as greater clarity emerges on the mayoral combined county authority's growth plan priorities for culture and the visitor economy, revisions to this strategy may be required. This will ensure its aims and objectives remain relevant in a wider geography.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Approve the Winchester District Tourism Strategy 2026-2031, which will be led and delivered by Winchester City Council in collaboration with partners and businesses operating within the visitor economy.
2. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director responsible for Economy and Tourism to revise the strategy, at an appropriate time, to reflect the new operating landscape as a result of LGR and the mayoral combined county authority.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

Greener Faster

- 1.1 Tourism generates significant impacts from travel and the consumption of experiences and accommodation. The Winchester visitor economy should support the ambitions of the council to be a carbon neutral district by 2030. The Green Economic Development Strategy supports this by recognising the need to reduce the carbon impacts from tourism, strengthen local supply chains, reduce the consumption of scarce resources and support biodiversity. One of the actions of the Winchester District Tourism Strategy will be to explore a sustainable destination certification. The strategy will develop a focus for local businesses to undertake individual business certification, and in doing so, monitor, plan and make changes which improve the destination's sustainability and advocate regenerative tourism practices.

Thriving Places

- 1.2 Tourism remains a vital contributor to Winchester district's economy, generating an estimated £292.2 million through visitor spending and related activities. This includes 220,000 staying trips, worth £55.1 million, and 7.86 million day visits, contributing £237.1 million. The sector supports 5,760 jobs accounting for 7% of local employment and drives an additional £78 million

through supply chain spending (Winchester District Economic Impact Report, 2022). These figures underpin the strategic importance of the district's visitor economy and the need for continued investment in infrastructure, skills, product development, visitor information, and marketing to sustain growth and competitiveness. A thriving visitor economy enhances Winchester district's appeal as somewhere people want to live, work, study and invest, delivering wider benefits for the whole community and place.

Healthy Communities

- 1.3 The visitor economy and the delivery of the actions outlined in the tourism strategy play an important role in fostering healthy communities, both physically and socially for all ages and abilities. This includes the promotion of active lifestyles through walking trails, cycling routes, and outdoor recreation spaces, and encouraging participation in cultural and nature-based activities that involve movement. By supporting events and cultural activities it will reinforce social connections bringing residents and visitors together. The strategy will encourage volunteer opportunities and community involvement in tourism initiatives. A vibrant visitor economy is one that will create local jobs and stimulate small business growth through developing and expanding the tourism markets. Economic stability contributes to improved health outcomes for residents.

The Purple Pound (spending power of disabled people) is estimated to be valued at over £14.6bn in England alone. While there are clear benefits for visitors from an accessible and inclusive destination, it also provides great benefits to local residents, communities, employees and businesses. The tourism strategy will signpost and provide training and events for the sector, look to increase the number of businesses making improvements with accessibility champions, accessibility guides, accessible facilities as well as dementia and autism friendly initiatives, and showcase examples of best practice from within district.

Good Homes for All

- 1.4 The strategy is primarily an economic and place-shaping strategy, however it indirectly supports the priority of Good Homes for All through strengthening the local economy which helps address the issue of the district's housing affordability. Development of the sector will provide growth in the local workforce through increased local employment opportunities in hospitality, culture, leisure, retail and tourism services.

Efficient and Effective

- 1.5 The strategy is built on a detailed baseline review which aligns with the Council Plan goal of improving the way the council uses data and insight to design services more efficiently. This in turn enables the targeting of tourism investment where it delivers the greatest return and analysing data to improve forecasting, budget prioritisation and evaluation of tourism services. The baseline review also included an assessment of marketing performance and

digital channels to inform recommendations in the strategy which align with the Council Plan's ambition to make better use of technology and digital tools.

Listening and Learning

- 1.6 In developing the baseline review, a comprehensive engagement programme with businesses, stakeholders, residents, visitors and non-visitors was undertaken (see section 6). This was strengthened by analysis of previous surveys including responses from over 450 residents to the Culture and Creative Activity Survey in 2023 (part of the Winchester District Cultural Strategy evidence base) and Winchester City Council Resident Survey in 2024.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The Economy and Tourism team will have responsibility for managing the overall implementation of the strategy and already takes a lead role in promoting and engaging with the sector and key stakeholders, through the Visit Winchester brand. This work is funded from the team's annual baseline budget which includes Fees and Charges generated via the Visit Winchester Partnership & Marketing Programme. When grant programmes or investment opportunities become available, the team will bid for funding to further support the delivery of the strategy.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct implications for legal and procurement arising from approval of the strategy. The Economy & Tourism team will take advice from Legal and Procurement teams should any need arise.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The strategy and its implementation do not create any direct workforce implications. The strategy provides focus, priorities and a road map for existing staff resources, including the Winchester Visitor Information Centre and the Tourism Marketing team, who will lead on the strategy delivery, monitoring and reporting, destination marketing, culture and creative sector development and strategic destination development. The teams, with the support of the wider existing Economy and Tourism team, will continue to support and advocate for the sector, alongside facilitating and enabling the outputs of this strategy. In addition, the team will engage internally to encourage alignment with other key council strategies, where appropriate and externally to support businesses and sector collaboration in delivering the strategy.
- 4.2 This strategy aims to share the responsibilities, its success, and be realistic about the resources it will require and that are available. The council will continue to work alongside a range of stakeholders supporting, facilitating, and enabling partnership activity.

- 4.3 In addition, the council has set up a cross-sector advisory group comprised of strategic partners (see 6.2) to provide advocacy at the highest level and help drive forward the strategy, working with the council to continue to shape, monitor and review its direction.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The strategy does not create any property implications.
- 5.2 The council owns the building in which the Winchester Visitor Information Service is provided. Whilst the strategy does not impose any obligations on the centre, the centre is a valuable asset, providing a vital physical touchpoint for the brand, visitors and stakeholders. Continued provision will support delivery of the outcomes around the priority areas of marketing and positioning, destination development and management.
- 5.3 The Visit Winchester brand is a valuable asset and must be retained and managed by the council.
- 5.4 The council own, and in some cases contracts organisations to operate properties, which are used for cultural and creative activities. Whilst the strategy does not impose any obligations on these properties and organisations, as active partners in the delivery of the strategy, some changes may be suggested in the future.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 As part of the work to develop the strategy, one-to-one consultations were held with 15 key stakeholders to discuss the destination, visitor markets, challenges and opportunities in greater detail. These were facilitated by Blue Sail Consultancy and those attending included Winchester Cathedral, Winchester College, Marwell, The Science Centre, Hampshire Cultural Trust, The Hat Fair (Play to the Crowd), Winchester BID, Hampshire Fare, South Downs National Park, Lainston House, Wallops Wood, Long Barn, The Grange Wine and Vineyards of Hampshire.
- 6.2 Two stakeholder workshops were held in July 2025 attended by over 60 businesses and stakeholders across both dates. Emerging themes and priorities were tested at Visit Winchester Attractions Partnership and Meet in Winchester meetings in September 2025. An Advisory Group of key sector representative was also set up in October 2025 to review and comment on the vision, objectives, emerging themes and priorities.
- 6.3 A visitor panel survey was conducted online between 30 May and 22 June 2025, gathering 1,015 interviews from recent visitors (visited in the last two years), past visitors (visited over two years ago), and non-visitors, as well as local (Hampshire residents) and non-local respondents
- 6.4 In addition to the consultation with the tourism sector, council officers and relevant Cabinet Members were also able to provide feedback and a draft

strategy was considered by the Economy and Housing Policy Committee (EHP57) at its September meeting.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Environmental responsibility is a key cross-cutting theme of the strategy and is also embedded as a priority under the theme 'destination management'. The strategy recognises the role of the visitor economy in inspiring people to explore the great outdoors and promoting the closeness to countryside, nature, walks and trails.

7.2 The strategy will seek to achieve the balancing of economic impact with environmental sustainability through exploring destination certification, both for the district and supporting businesses to undertake certification. Tourism experiences can also be used to engage people in considering, addressing and seeking local solutions to climate issues, leaving minimal impact on the area they visit and contributing to regenerative tourism practices. The sector commits to reviewing its practices and policies to ensure appropriate measures are taking place to reduce the sectors impact on climate change.

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

8.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires public bodies, including the council to have due regard to the aims of the general equality duty when making decisions and when setting policies.

8.2 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves considering the need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.

8.3 The strategy recognises the importance to equality, diversity and inclusion and embeds this under the 'destination management' priority. It recognises that whilst there are clear benefits for visitors, an accessible and inclusive destination also provides great benefits to local communities, employees and businesses. The strategy will support this through signposting to resources, toolkits and training, and showcasing best practice examples from across the Winchester district via visitor platforms.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 All personal information collected as part of the process to develop the strategy will be held in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy and comply with the six Data Protection Principles set out in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and sections 35 to 40 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 The council's current overall risk appetite is defined as MODERATE. This means the council remains open to innovative ways of working and to pursue options that offer potentially substantial rewards, despite also having greater level of risks. However, the council's preference is for safe delivery options which have a lower degree of risk, especially for those services required by statute. This Strategy aligns with the Council's risk appetite.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<p>Financial Exposure External investment and funding cannot be secured to enable implementation of the action plan.</p>	<p>A review of the action plan and timeline will ensure resources are directed to the main priorities.</p> <p>Development of strong partnerships and collaborations for projects supported by robustly developed business cases to stand the best chance of attracting external funding and investment.</p>	<p>The strategy is built on a comprehensive baseline review and is closely aligned with new national and regional structures such as the Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester LVEP. This creates strong foundations for attracting public, private, and partnership-led investment in several ways.</p> <p>The strategy recognises and a strengthens Winchester district's assets, creating a compelling narrative for potential inward investment.</p>
<p>Exposure to challenge There are no legal and procurement implications arising from this report.</p>	<p>Extensive engagement with the sector to ensure proposed actions are achievable and realistic for the sector to deliver.</p>	<p>Agile approach allows sector to be responsive to new or emerging challenges.</p>
<p>Innovation The strategy stifles or limits the ability of the sector to innovate.</p>	<p>Working in collaboration reduces the risk on individual partners (including the council) to enable innovative ways of working.</p>	<p>Working with a variety of stakeholders with diverse skills, and businesses of varying sizes, across the visitor economy, will enable innovative responses to challenges and implementation.</p>

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<p>Reputation The delivery of the strategy and action plan fails to build consensus amongst the stakeholders and damages the perception of the council's role in supporting visitor economy.</p>	<p>The development and delivery of the action plans will be closely monitored and measured through robust management and corporate reporting processes.</p> <p>Consensus and engagement from stakeholders on developing a shared destination narrative.</p>	<p>Successful delivery of the strategy will recognise and build a reputation for the district's visitor offer. The council's role as a partner will enhance the reputation of the council in its leadership role and supports its values of empowerment and collaboration.</p>
<p>Achievement of outcome The strategy priorities and actions are not achieved within timescales.</p>	<p>Scenario planning with regular reviews via the industry networking groups will allow for different levels of effort both by the council and the other strategy stakeholders to be directed at those outcomes that most need addressing.</p>	
<p>Property None</p>		
<p>Community Support The sector does not participate in working collaboratively to deliver the strategy and its actions.</p>	<p>An active group of stakeholders have already been engaged via the Visit Winchester Partnership and Marketing Programme for many years already. This will continue, with networking meetings providing the opportunity for stakeholders to continue to take an active role in the delivery of the strategy which will include influencing and mobilising the sector.</p>	<p>Reinforcement of brand and stronger coalition of partners working together on destination development priorities.</p>

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<p>Timescales This is a five-year plan however there is expectation that change and action can be demonstrated early, which may not be possible due to the long-term nature of some of the projects to design, resource and deliver.</p>	<p>The Action Plan identifies projects that need to be implemented early, and have the greatest impact, or large transformational projects are planned and commenced as they will take time to complete.</p>	<p>A clear timeline will maintain focus and ensure resources are directed to the main priorities.</p>
<p>Project capacity Key internal personnel monitoring delivery of the strategy or involved in delivering actions become unavailable</p>	<p>An organisation-wide approach to creating and delivering the action plan will be adopted. This will include several Senior Officers and service teams, offering resilience in the event of reduced capacity in any one area. The strategy has been developed collaboratively with the sector and strategy stakeholders, one of which is the council, who will be responsible for leading delivery. This offers resilience in event of reduced capacity from within the council.</p>	<p>Empowering the sector to lead themselves.</p>
<p>Local Government Reorganisation Reduced influence over tourism priorities tailored to Winchester district's unique heritage, culture, and visitor economy. Potential dilution of the district's identity within a broader geographic area with competing priorities.</p>	<p>Maintain the formalised Visit Winchester Partnership & Marketing Programme to give Winchester a collective voice that persists regardless of future structures.</p> <p>Front-load deliver of high-impact, time-sensitive projects and prioritise projects that require</p>	<p>The strategy documents the district's tourism priorities to influence future unitary plans and protect brand integrity.</p> <p>Secure the Winchester brand within the LVEP framework.</p> <p>Winchester is the strongest destination brand compared to nearest neighbour</p>

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
	district-level decision-making before 2027/28.	<p>authorities and is one of Hampshire’s anchor brands, alongside Portsmouth, Southampton and New Forest. The other brands have a different offer.</p> <p>LGR, and a unitary authority will extend boundaries further, offering product development opportunities and an increased tourism offer that is an attractive proposition to a visitor looking to stay longer.</p>
Other		

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Background

11.1 As highlighted, the visitor economy is important to Winchester district, it contributes to the image, profile and reputation as a place to do business, live, relocate and study, with Winchester district recognised for its:

- rich history and heritage
- unique city, market town, and countryside blend
- location within the South Downs National Park
- strong cultural offer and vibrant food and drink scene

11.2 The district’s location means it acts as centre for people wishing to visit the places, attractions and experiences in Hampshire, from the south coast to the rural landscapes of the South Downs. Visitors are able to move around and between areas and places of interest positioning us as central hub from which to access the whole county. This is recognised in our relationship with the LVEP and our work to help the Destination Management Plan for Hampshire.

11.3 This strategy is the culmination of a comprehensive project undertaken by Winchester City Council with support from Blue Sail. Our approach was to

create a robust evidence base, including extensive data analysis, stakeholder consultations, and a review of the district's visitor economy, to inform and shape a new tourism strategy for the entire district. The full baseline report has been published on our website.

Strategic approach and objectives

- 11.4 The vision is for Winchester district to lead as a distinctive, trailblazing destination, where heritage and originality come together to create memorable experiences. The strategy aims to drive sustainable growth, enhancing the visitor experience, and strengthening a culture of partnership across all organisations involved in supporting the visitor economy.
- 11.5 The objectives to achieve this vision are ambitious yet practical:
- 11.6 Objective 1: Increase the economic value of tourism by growing the overnight visitor market and further unlocking spend.
- 11.7 Objective 2: Develop a more dynamic and contemporary brand identity. Adopt a "Heritage Plus" approach that complements the district's historic strengths with themes like food and drink, events, and nature to attract new and younger audiences.
- 11.8 Objective 3: Enhance and expand the visitor offer and product. This includes joining up existing experiences and creating new ones that go beyond the district boundary, especially in food and drink, events, and nature. It also aims to support high-quality, family-friendly accommodation to address current gaps and to support longer visitor stays.
- 11.9 Objective 4: Strengthen collaboration and management within the tourism sector by positioning the local authority as a convenor, bringing the sector together to improve marketing, share data, and provide training and support to businesses.
- 11.10 Objective 5: Improve connectivity and infrastructure, making it easier for visitors to access the wider district's attractions and to promote sustainable travel.

Stakeholder landscape

- 11.11 To make the most of the opportunities identified in this strategy, greater coherence and stronger partnerships with key stakeholders will be key to managing the visitor economy across the Winchester district. This includes but is not limited to:

National: VisitEngland, VisitBritain, UKInbound, Trade Associations

Regional/county: Tourism South East, LVEP, Hampshire Cultural Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Hampshire Fare

Local: Visit Winchester, Winchester City Council, Chambers of Commerce, Parish and town councils, businesses.

Priority themes, related action plans and performance monitoring

11.8 The following priority themes and actions have been identified:

11.9 Market focus:

- Domestic visitors are the priority, maintaining appeal to the established Country Loving Traditionalists, whilst introducing a sharp focus on growing visits from Curious Families and Cultural Foodie Explorers. Longer term, there is scope to attract Global Experience Seekers.

11.10 Positioning and destination marketing:

- Develop and embed a compelling, brand-led destination narrative for Winchester, supported by a focused marketing plan, a practical toolkit for partners, and a 'test and learn' campaign approach.
- Strengthen Visit Winchester's channels with targeted content for growth markets; maintain baseline promotion that encourages overnight stays.
- Facilitate stronger industry collaboration through an active Winchester Attractions Group, while disseminating data, insights, and marketing opportunities through the toolkit and ongoing networking events. Support tourism businesses by responding to training needs in customer service, marketing, and digital skills.

11.11 Destination management:

- Create themed city and district itineraries that promote both daytime and overnight experiences and help link attractions and other businesses across the area.
- Improve visitor navigation through a coordinated physical and digital wayfinding plan, while actively encouraging sustainable travel by promoting public transport.
- Assess current accommodation provision and develop an investment prospectus to guide new development and support businesses with planning and diversification.
- Establish a clear event typology and criteria to inform strategic investment in outdoor events.
- Strengthen Winchester's food and drink offer by supporting producers to diversify and promoting distinctive experiences.

- Provide training to help tourism businesses create and enhance bookable visitor experiences.

11.12 Destination development

- Regularly measure and share destination performance through annual economic impact studies, accommodation data, and a trade data hub.
- Create an online business advice portal offering insights, toolkits, funding information, training, and resources.
- Improve the quality and welcome at all gateways and expand visitor information through a strengthened VIC network and volunteer ambassadors.
- Enhance city dressing for major events and explore destination-wide sustainability certification while supporting local businesses to adopt accredited practices.
- Deliver a programme of networking events aligned to strategic priorities, continue using the attractions group to support shared marketing and itinerary development.
- Provide training to improve accessibility and showcase best-practice examples across the district.

11.13 The key measures for monitoring progress over the five years of this strategy are also included in the strategy. In some cases, they will require baseline data to be able to monitor progress.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 Do nothing: The council's production and delivery of a Winchester District Tourism Strategy, whilst an action in the Green Economic Development Strategy, is a discretionary function and the council could opt to not initiate but allow the sector to take total responsibility for. This option was rejected due to the important role such a strategy plays in demonstrating the council's leadership to the sector in sustaining and growing the visitor economy across the district.

12.2 To ensure that Winchester district as a destination is managed, developed and promoted in a way that will deliver greatest economic impact, organisations across the visitor economy must work collaboratively. Winchester City Council has an important role as 'enabler', driving the actions in this strategy forward with the support, investment and participation of others.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

- [EHP57 – Winchester District Tourism Strategy, 16 September 2025](#)
- [EHP58 – Local Visitor Economy Partnership, 25 November 2025](#)

Other Background Documents:-

- [Baseline Report](#)
- [Audience Insight Report](#)
- [Winchester District Economic Impact Report 2022](#)

APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1 – Winchester District Tourism Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment