



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

11 April 2024

Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan 2024 - 2029

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Eileen Callear - Cabinet Member: Education, Employment and Visitor Economy
Lead Director:	Fliss Mercer – Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services
Service Area:	Culture & Wellbeing Service
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Wards Affected:	All wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	13/02/2024
Report considered by:	SMT - 12 March 2024 Business Briefing - 21 March 2024 Cabinet - 11 April 2024

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Notes the contribution that the Council is making to supporting the local visitor economy.
- 1.2 Approves the Destination Management Plan 2024 – 2029 (Appendix A).
- 1.3 Approves the setting up of a Local Visitor Economy Partnership.
- 1.4 Delegates authority to the Director of Communities, Customer and Commercial

Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Visitor Economy to:

- a. Implement changes to the DMP as required.
- b. Apply to VisitEngland to establish a Local Visitor Economy Partnership.
- c. Agree governance arrangements as set out in the DMP.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report highlights the Council's current approach to supporting the borough's visitor economy, and recent progress in raising awareness of Telford & Wrekin as a visitor destination.
- 2.2 The report also provides a summary of a 5 year Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Telford & Wrekin (Appendix A), underpinned by a detailed action plan (Appendix B).
- 2.3 If approved, this will be a guiding document to further grow the visitor economy and provide a framework for how we work in partnership with our key stakeholders, our membership, and visitors, over the next 5 years.
- 2.4 The report also sets out proposals to establish a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership, which should result in collaborative working with Shropshire Council and other key partners.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The visitor economy in England is worth £97 billion and it is England's third largest employer supporting 2.2 million jobs.¹ It creates and supports employment at all skill levels and age groups and offers a range of employment opportunities including flexible and part time work. Tourism provides social benefits as well as economic ones. Well managed tourism can help to create better places to live, work and invest. Tourism assists in building a strong sense of place and creating an attractive environment for businesses to locate. It has the ability to enhance civic pride and the quality of life within a community, as visitor spending supports local facilities and infrastructure.
- 3.2 Headline numbers from our research show the very significant contribution our visitor economy makes to the prosperity of Telford and Wrekin, with 3.2m visitors driving £220m of economic impact.²
- 3.3 Business tourism is strong in Telford and Wrekin accounting for 14% of domestic trips³. Telford is home to one of the UK's top 10 Convention Centres, positioned as a national centre for business events, while its academic and heritage venues

¹ Deloitte (2010); „The Economic Contribution of the Visitor Economy: UK and the Nations”

² Data sources: 2022 Telford and Wrekin STEAM; 2022 England data via Great Britain Tourism Survey & Great Britain Day Visits Survey. Monetary values at 2022 prices.

³ *Ibid*

attract industry leading events in key sectors including food and drink, agriculture, design and innovation, digital technologies and sport.

3.4 Telford & Wrekin Council recognise the importance of the visitor economy to the borough and are committed to enabling the visitor economy to thrive. That is why the Council established Visit Telford in June 2022 with the purpose of establishing Telford & Wrekin as an attractive and distinctive destination in its own right, to drive economic growth, support jobs, and increase the value and productivity of the visitor economy through a diverse year-round visitor market.

3.5 Visit Telford's progress to date includes:

- More than 250+ members of Visit Telford, benefitting from local, regional and national promotion.
- 12,000 unique visitors per month to Visit Telford's Website (www.visittelford.co.uk).
- 83,000 reach on social media platform via Visit Telford channels.
- 1million impressions on Visit Telford as a result of advertising campaigns.
- Business support for the sector to support growth, employment and resilience.
- National press coverage for the destination, including in The Guardian Travel Guide and National Geographic Traveller.
- Engaged and growing database of over 12,000 national consumers.
- More international trade missions coming to our destination including the Canadian and Indian travel trade.

3.6 The key next step for Visit Telford is to establish a longer-term Destination Management Plan (DMP). Further details of the proposed Telford & Wrekin DMP are set out in **Section 4.1**.

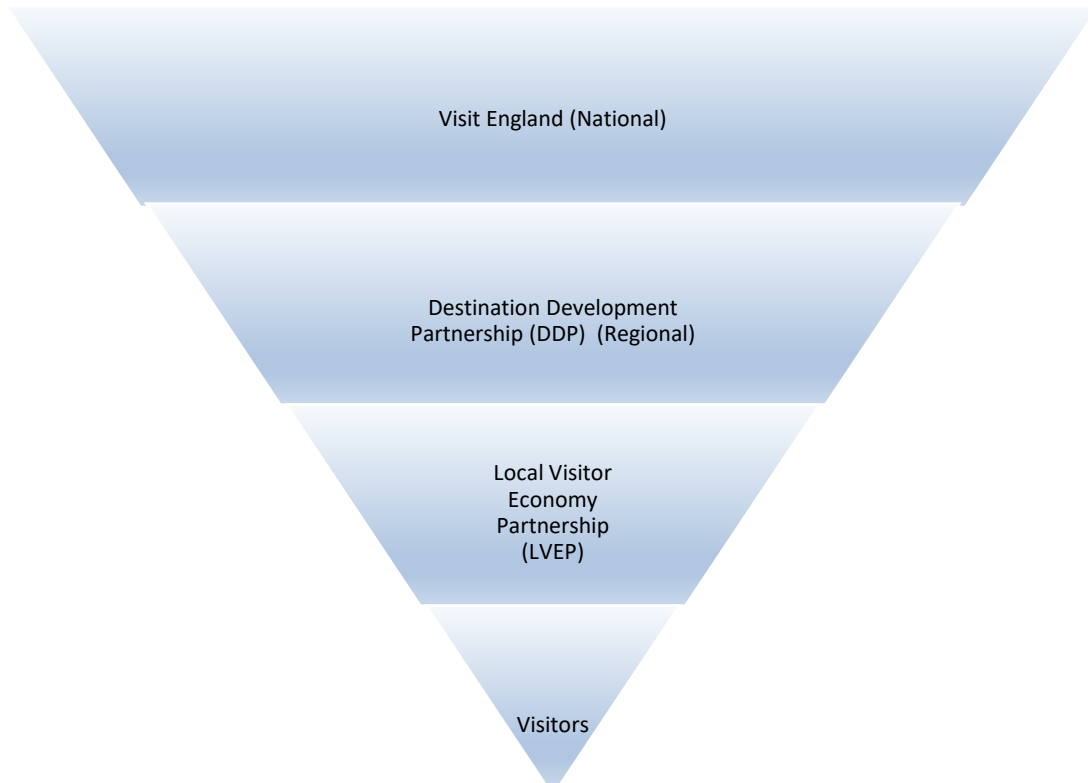
3.7 VisitEngland state that the DMP should recognise and set out the basic principles for tourism in the destination and the relative importance of different aims, such as:

- Increasing economic prosperity and creating new jobs.
- Strengthening and improving the quality of existing jobs.
- Generating interest and support for the conservation of the area's natural and cultural heritage.
- Increasing income for local services and improving their availability and quality.
- Minimising environmental impacts – local (e.g. congestion, overuse of natural resources) and global (e.g. low carbon).
- Providing a fulfilling and rewarding experience for visitors and residents.
- Ensuring social inclusion – maximising opportunities and access for all.

3.8 In terms of governance, Visit Telford is what is known as a Destination Management Organisation (DMO). DMOs, like Visit Telford, have traditionally been a recognised vehicle in the VisitEngland structure. However, the 2021 DeBois Review of Destination Management Organisations commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) looked at efficiencies in the way destinations could be supported in the future. The review has recommended that England's DMO landscape should be restructured into a tiering formation (**see Figure 1**).

3.9 VisitEngland have been clear that they want to see the establishment of a Local Visitor Economy Partnership that covers the geographical county of Shropshire, encompassing the areas covered by both Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council. Further details of the proposed LVEP are set out in **Section 5**.

Diagram of VisitEngland’s new Destination Framework (Figure 1)



4.0 Summary of main proposals

4.1 Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan

The Destination Management Plan was developed between August 2023 and March 2024. Over this period, extensive research and analysis was carried out, including an audit of the destination, analysis of market data, review of relevant policies and strategies, primary consumer research, and stakeholder consultation. Nearly 900 people, including visitors, prospective visitors and residents, took part in an online survey, with a further 110 stakeholders and businesses giving their views through workshops, 1-1 discussions and a business survey.

4.1.1 Some key findings included:

- 67% of residents are taking frequent leisure day trips within the borough at least once a month, and so retention of local spend is very high.

- 70% of our visits are from day trips, although just over a third think visiting overnight would be 'very appealing'.
- People are most likely to visit as a family, with visits as a couple being the second most popular.
- Telford Town Centre and Ironbridge Gorge are the most visited locations.
- Outdoors, heritage, and shopping, are the biggest current drivers.
- 58% of prospective visitors do not know the destination beyond recognising the name.
- Key associations for prospective visitors are history, family-friendly attractions and beautiful outdoors – all strengths we can leverage.

4.2 Destination Management Plan Overview

Having gathered a comprehensive set of evidence about the destination, how it is performing and the local and wider context, the Destination Management Plan has been developed to support and enable the local visitor economy to thrive. The DMP includes a vision and priority themes for the next 5 years, and the actions required to achieve them.

4.2.1 Our Vision - 'Telford, where world heritage that sparks the imagination meets landscapes made for great adventures'.

4.2.2 Our Priority Themes are:

- Distinctive identity, visibility & appeal.
- Great products, places & experiences.
- Market focused and customer driven.
- A great place for business and events.
- Building strong foundations.

4.2.3 The Action Plan (Appendix B) provides the detail of how we will achieve these priority themes. The DMP also includes targets that will enable us to measure success. By identifying clear actions and targets, we can agree resources and responsibilities and review progress annually.

4.3 The Destination Management Plan, including the objectives and actions it contains, will provide a direction for all tourism stakeholders working together. The Destination Management Plan has been developed in partnership with the sector and key stakeholders and we will work with them to deliver the shared action plan.

4.4 To support this, the DMP proposes that new mechanisms for collaboration are established. This includes 2 new partnership groups, one within Telford & Wrekin, and a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) covering the wider geographical county of Shropshire. Within the Borough, it is proposed to establish a Tourism Advisory Group comprising private and public sector representatives, with a role to oversee the delivery of the Telford & Wrekin DMP. Further details of the proposed LVEP are set out in **Section 5** below.

5.0 Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

5.1 Following the DeBois Review, VisitEngland have been engaging with Destination Management Organisations across England to create new Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). By the end of 2023, 26 LVEPs had been established across England, including Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country, and Stoke and Staffordshire.

5.2 The benefits of being part of a LVEP include:

- Access to funding via VisitEngland and regional Destination Development Partnerships.
- Strong links to national policy making bodies and initiatives (Government, Visit Britain/VisitEngland, other national bodies).
- Access to the VisitEngland training and development platform and data hub.
- Assistance with marketing and destination profile from both VisitEngland and VisitBritain.
- Ability to network and collaborate via a national portfolio of LVEPs.

5.3 The risk of not being part of a LVEP is that VisitEngland's engagement with Visit Telford in future could be limited, which could result in Telford & Wrekin missing out on external funding and other opportunities.

5.4 VisitEngland's clear expectation is that there will be one LVEP for the geographical county of Shropshire, covering both Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC) and Shropshire Council areas. However, VisitEngland do not have a 'one size fits all' model for LVEPs and recognise that different approaches are needed for different areas.

5.5 In parallel with developing the Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan, TWC has been discussing options for a new LVEP with Shropshire Council, VisitEngland and Visit Shropshire, a private sector DMO. The preferred model is a partnership LVEP. The LVEP would deliver an agreed growth action plan of joint projects and activities, based on the DMPs for both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, and reflecting the overall destination priorities for the wider LVEP area. Whilst the LVEP would require regular close partnership working set out in a memorandum of understanding, it would not involve a formal shared service.

5.6 There is also a requirement to establish joint governance arrangements to oversee the delivery of the growth action plan. The proposal is to establish a new partnership board for the LVEP. In order to ensure the make-up of the board is representative of the whole LVEP area, it is proposed to have two co-chairs, one from Shropshire and one from Telford & Wrekin. Co-chairs would be independent of either council. However, it is suggested that the lead Cabinet member and a senior officer from both councils also sit on the board, along with representation from Visit Shropshire. Other board members will be drawn from across the LVEP area and will represent specific parts of the visitor economy sector to involve a wide cross-section of stakeholders.

- 5.7 The growth action plan will be co-produced with the LVEP board. However, it will need to set out how the LVEP will support VisitEngland's 5 national priorities: accessibility/social inclusion, sustainability, levelling up, business events, and innovation and skills. The plan would also need to set out the LVEP's business support offer, its commercial strategy, and how it will use data to track visitor economy growth. There is also flexibility to include other local priorities that are important to our destination in the growth action plan.
- 5.8 Subject to Cabinet approval of both TWC and Shropshire Council, it is proposed to submit a LVEP application by the end of May 2024, for consideration by VisitEngland at their July panel.

6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 Adopting the Telford & Wrekin DMP and establishing the Local Visitor Economy Partnership will together provide a strategic approach to supporting a thriving and growing economy and will form a vital part of Telford and Wrekin's offer as a place to live, work and play.
- 6.2 There are two alternative options:
- a. To adopt the Telford & Wrekin DMP only, and to continue to operate as a standalone DMO, Visit Telford. However, if we didn't also establish and join a Local Visitor Economy Partnership there is a risk of limited future engagement from VisitEngland and other national bodies, leading to Telford & Wrekin missing out on external funding opportunities and other benefits as set out in Section 5.
 - b. To not adopt the Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan and narrowing Visit Telford's focus to one or two specific areas. However, a lack of long-term tourism planning and proper destination management could result in damage to physical and historic sites due to overuse, failure to capitalise on marketing opportunities, lack of suitable or sufficient visitor attractions and facilities, together with reputational damage.

7.0 Key Risks and Opportunities

- 7.1 The DMP establishes a strong foundation and goals for the future, with a clear focus on the needs of residents, businesses and visitors. The risk of not adopting this plan is that Telford & Wrekin Council will not have a strategic approach for the sustainable growth of the visitor economy and will miss opportunities to develop, grow or improve our offer. We risk the marginalisation of the sector, a reduction in visitors, leading to the loss of visitor attractions and hospitality and accommodation businesses, as well as failing to attract jobs and investment.
- 7.2 There is a potential risk that the formation of the LVEP may detract from the promotion of Telford & Wrekin as a destination in its own right, or that LVEP may focus more on Shropshire than Telford & Wrekin. This should be mitigated by ensuring that the board is representative of both areas, and the proposal for a

partnership LVEP, which enables TWC to retain its own identity and to deliver its own DMP in parallel with the LVEP growth action plan.

8.0 Council Priorities

8.1 The adoption and implementation of the Destination Management Plan will support the following priorities:

- All neighbourhoods a great place to live.
- A community focused innovative council providing efficient effective and quality services.
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy.
- Our natural environment is protected, and the Council has a leading role in addressing the climate emergency.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 The development of the Destination Management Plan has been funded from existing resources in 2023/24.

9.2 The actions and measures outlined in the Destination Management Plan and Action Plan will be funded through a combination of existing base budget, income generation and partnership funding. Opportunities to secure external grant funding will be supported as they arise.

9.3 Any future partnership arrangements or grant agreements will need to be considered as appropriate, and any further financial implications considered as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

10.1 A DMP is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination and is essential for developing, managing and promoting a destination over specific periods of time. It also helps identify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, setting clear plans of action and allocating resources. VisitEngland have produced Principles for Developing Destination Management Plans and within that state that they encourage and support the development of DMPs as an essential tool in the delivery of a successful visitor economy. VisitEngland go on to say that National Government policy encourages destination organisations to become focused and efficient bodies that are increasingly led by the private sector. DMPs are one mechanism to achieve this.

10.2 Moving forward, advice will be sought from Legal Services on any activities, matters or partnerships arising out of the DMP where there may be legal implications.

10.3 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report and the proposals contained in this report can be delivered using existing resources.

11.0 Ward Implications

11.1 The Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan is borough wide.

12.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

12.1 The health of the local economy has a direct impact on the social and economic wellbeing of residents across the borough. There remain significant inequalities within and between our communities. The Council's approach to economic growth seeks to ensure the benefits are felt across all parts of the borough and the Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan will underpin and support the growth of a large and important sector for our economy.

13.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

13.1 The Council's approach to economic growth seeks to provide opportunities for all businesses and residents to benefit from growth. Improving accessibility and social inclusion is a key national visitor economy priority, and the LVEP growth action plan will need to set out what activity will be delivered to support this priority.

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

14.1 The Council's approach to economic growth is supporting our aspiration to become carbon neutral across the borough by 2030. A range of advice and specific grant support is assisting our businesses to increase energy efficiency and explore energy generation opportunities that will reduce costs, build resilience into their operations and reduce emissions. The Telford & Wrekin DMP includes specific actions to promote greener tourism as part of the priority to 'build strong foundations'. The DMP makes sustainability a key priority for the sector and will provide a focus for the Council to guide and facilitate businesses in developing a zero carbon approach. There is a strong emphasis in the DMP to encouraging more sustainable travel, including the promotion and development of trails and cycling/walking routes. In addition, sustainability is a key national visitor economy priority, and the LVEP growth action plan will need to set out what additional activity will be delivered to support this priority.

15.0 Background Papers

None

16.0 Appendices

- A Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan 2024 -2029
- B Telford & Wrekin Destination Management Plan - Action Plan

17.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	28/02/2024	01/03/2024	SH
Finance	28/02/2024	06/03/2024	PT
Director	28/02/2024	06/03/2024	FM