

Cherwell District Council

Executive

2 October 2023

OxLEP's Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2028.

Report of Assistant Director – Growth and Economy

This report is public

Purpose of report

To consider Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership's (OxLEP's) Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2028.

1.0 Recommendation

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note OxLEP's Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2028.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Earlier this year OxLEP commissioned consultants Blue Sail to develop and deliver a Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Oxfordshire (the Vision and DMP are provided at Appendix One). The DMP has been developed alongside OxLEP's new Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Oxfordshire and it aligns to the approaches articulated in that Plan. The SEP is being considered through a separate report at this meeting of the Executive.
- 2.2 OxLEP will seek to get sign off for the Visitor Economy Vision and DMP from the OxLEP Board via their written procedures format, at a point subsequent to the Board's September 2023 meeting. The Visitor Economy Vision and DMP will also be presented to a Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) meeting for information this autumn.
- 2.3 It should be noted that at this stage the DMP sets out a strategic direction and defines priority areas for action. OxLEP has commissioned a supporting Funding Strategy and has yet to work through operational delivery responsibilities with its lead partners, including the Future Oxfordshire Partnership; the two Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) working in Oxfordshire; and the local authorities. In particular, the status and relationship between the two LVEPs working in Oxfordshire needs further clarification because, at the moment, the DMP is giving

equal emphasis to both, whereas Experience Oxfordshire has hitherto operated throughout the whole county, whilst, by comparison, in Oxfordshire, Cotswolds Plus only covers West Oxfordshire.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 The visitor economy is a vital component of Oxfordshire's economy, with a key role to play in supporting well-being for residents, as well as for visitors. In 2019, the year preceding the pandemic, Oxfordshire attracted over 30 million visitors, generating £2.5 billion for the local economy and supporting 42,000 jobs. For Cherwell district in 2019, visitor numbers were 8.2 million visitors, generating £495 million for the local economy and supporting 8,789 jobs.
- 3.2 The equivalent 2021 figures, whilst improved from 2020, demonstrate that the sector was still recovering from the impact of COVID-19. Visitors to Oxfordshire were 23.3 million, generating £1.6 billion for the local economy and supporting 28,830 jobs. Visitors to Cherwell were 6.2 million, generating £352 million and supporting 6,714 jobs. *The sources for the figures quoted in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 are "The Economic Impact Report for Tourism in Oxfordshire (2021); and "The Economic Impact Report for Tourism in Cherwell (2021)" – <https://www.experienceoxfordshire.org/partner/partner-benefits/research-and-insights>*
- 3.3 The development of a Visitor Economy Vision and DMP for the county comes at a time, therefore, when the visitor economy sector is not only still recovering from the impact of the pandemic but also when economic challenges are adversely affecting both businesses and visitors. Furthermore, the climate crisis and environmental issues are critical and the tourism sector must help address these.
- 3.4 In addition, the DMP's development coincides with the recent roll-out by Visit England (the Government-sponsored national tourist board) of a national network of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) called Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). Both Experience Oxfordshire and Cotswolds Plus, the two DMOs currently operating within Oxfordshire, received LVEP accreditation.. Cherwell District Council has been an Ambassador Partner of Experience Oxfordshire since 2016, working closely with the organisation to promote the district's tourism offer. Members will recall that as part of the budget proposals approved at Council on 27 February 2023, it was decided that there would be a tapered reduction of funding to the organisation over the next three financial years.
- 3.5 The DMP's Vision is to achieve sustainable growth through encouraging longer stays, year-round tourism and generating more value from visitors coming to Oxfordshire. The focus on economic impact, rather than footfall, is central to the ambition of driving sustainable tourism through an emphasis on longer visits which create more opportunities to spend, while minimising carbon impacts from visitor travel.
- 3.6 In order to support this Vision, the proposed market development for Oxfordshire is not about reaching new audiences, but instead about maintaining and consolidating its existing domestic and international markets, aiming to grow the economic value of each visit.

- 3.7 The three key targets identified by the DMP for 2028 are as follows:
- i. Greater Economic Benefit – the annual impact of tourism to grow to £3.2 billion;
 - ii. High Value Visitors – the proportion of staying visits to rise from 9% to 12% of the total; and
 - iii. Improved Sentiment – perceptions of Oxfordshire and propensity to visit to increase significantly among key visitor segments, as well as support for tourism among local communities.
- 3.8 The DMP acknowledges that tourism generates significant impacts from travel and the consumption of experiences and accommodation and proposes the establishment of a public/private sector Sustainable Destination Task Force to make tourism in Oxfordshire more sustainable and support initiatives to reduce waste, conserve energy, support biodiversity and local supply chains.
- 3.9 In order to support delivery of the DMP and maximise opportunities for the county, OxLEP advocates a renewed partnership approach to managing, marketing and developing the destination, with the LVEPs, private businesses, public sector partners and others all playing their part. A new role is proposed for the FOP in convening the different partners, with the DMP being nested within the Partnership's Strategic Vision. It is also suggested that the FOP provides overall insight and monitoring of the DMP within Oxfordshire, helping to identify funding and resources to support implementation, with OxLEP supporting the FOP in this role.
- 3.10 A detailed baseline and technical report accompanies the DMP and contains background information including tourism data, policies, consultation and engagement findings, market data, trends and forecasts, and marketing analysis (the baseline report is provided at Appendix Two).

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Council has been engaged as a consultee in the development of OxLEP's Visitor Economy Vision and DMP and, together with the FOP; the LVEPs; and the other Oxfordshire local authorities, the Council has been identified as a lead partner within it.
- 4.2 It is recommended that Executive notes OxLEP's Visitor Economy Vision and DMP, with the understanding that at this stage the document sets out a strategic direction and defines priority areas for action, without identifying clear operational delivery responsibilities and funding resources.

5.0 Consultation

The consultants appointed by OxLEP undertook an engagement programme in order to tease out the ambitions and requirements of a pan-Oxfordshire Vision and DMP. Their programme included meetings and workshops with partners and stakeholders from both the public sector and private businesses. An online workshop was held with teams from each of the local authorities, with officers from Growth and Economy; Planning and Development (Planning Policy); and Wellbeing

and Housing Services attending the workshop held for Cherwell District Council. The Council's officers were also given the subsequent opportunity to comment on a draft version of the Vision, DMP and Baseline Report.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative option has been identified and rejected for the reason as set out below.

Option 1: Not to note OxLEP's Visitor Economy Vision and DMP. This is rejected because it would contradict the Council's objective to "work with partners to promote the district as a visitor destination and attract investment in our town centres". (Cherwell District Council Business Plan 2023 – 2024).

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, although local authorities are identified as partners for some of the DMP's proposed Development Actions. At this stage no indication is given as to what funding might be requested from local authorities, however, there is "no default assumption that partners can absorb the actions and priorities identified in this plan" meaning and it is noted that OxLEP has commissioned a supporting Funding Strategy.

Comments checked by:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director – Finance
01295 221845 michael.furness@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Comments checked by:

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law and Governance
01295 221651 shiraz.sheikh@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk Implications

- 7.3 The DMP's proposed Development Actions are ambitious in their reach and there is a risk that they may fail to be fulfilled if it transpires that funding is unavailable, or if lead partners do not provide the collaborative support identified as being required. This risk will be managed within the service area and escalated to the Leadership Risk Register as and when deemed appropriate.

Comments checked by:

Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team leader
Tel: 01295 221556 celia.prado-teeling@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Equalities and Inclusion Implications

- 7.4 There are no equalities and inclusion issues arising directly from this report at this stage. If operational delivery responsibilities are subsequently allocated to the Council, it will be necessary to screen the projects involved against the Council's statutory duties to promote equality and the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion framework.

Comments checked by:

Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team leader

Tel: 01295 221556 celia.prado-teeling@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Sustainability Implications

- 7.5 The DMP's focus on sustainability, with its particular emphasis on economic impact and the ambition to promote longer visits which create more opportunities to spend, as opposed to concentrating on footfall, is welcomed. If operational delivery responsibilities are subsequently allocated to the Council, it may be necessary to complete Climate Impact Assessments for the projects involved.

Comments checked by:

Jo Miskin, Climate Action Manager

Tel: 07900 227103 jo.miskin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

OxLEP's Visitor Economy Vision and DMP align with the priorities identified within the Council's Business Plan 2023 – 2024, particularly the priority "An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres" and the objective to "work with partners to promote the district as a visitor destination and attract investment in our town centres".

The DMP also aligns with the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan, 2011 – 2031, notably Policy SLE 3: Supporting Tourism Growth, which states: "The Council will support proposals for new or improved tourist facilities in sustainable locations, where they accord with other policies in the plan, to increase overnight stays and visitor numbers within the District"; and Objective SO5: "To encourage sustainable tourism".

Lead Councillor

Councillor Donna Ford - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Appendix One – OxLEP's Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2028.
- Appendix Two – OxLEP's Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan Baseline Report.

Background papers

None.

Report Authors and contact details

Robert Jolley, Assistant Director – Growth and Economy

Tel: 01295 221688 robert.jolley@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Philippa Tatham, Economic Growth Officer

Tel: 01295 221780 philippa.tatham@cherwell-dc.gov.uk